

# in the news...

## Dangerous cocktail

LOS ANGELES — Health officials are warning of a dangerous new cocktail combination. Combining the new anti-impotence drug Viagra with "poppers" could prove to be deadly, doctors warn.

Poppers are inhaled stimulants that heighten sensation by dilating blood vessels. The impotence pill Viagra also dilates blood vessels, and combining the two drugs can result in a dangerous drop in blood pressure.

Three men reportedly died after using Viagra, poppers and crystal methamphetamine earlier this month, said Kathy Watt, executive director of a drug treatment center.

"As Viagra becomes more available through the party circuit, the combination is just going to turn deadly," said Steve Martin, mayor of West Hollywood, where about a third of the city is gay. "You're just going to see people dropping like flies."

Many take crystal methamphetamine for the high. They swallow Viagra pills to restore the sexual potency that the meth takes away. They snort poppers to enhance their sexual experience.

## Mayor Diversity

NEW YORK — Just call him the mayor of diversity.

New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani says promoting diversity in his town has made it a better place and has helped to its revitalization.

"Our society has to be better off as we go through sometimes the pain of opening society up, so that everyone gets a chance to make their maximum contribution," the mayor said during a ceremony recognizing homosexuals working in city government.

"When you think back to 100 years ago, when lots of people were excluded from government, some based on race, some based on gender, some based on sexual orientation, we were working with half or less than half of the potential talent that was available," Giuliani said.

"Maybe that's one of the reasons why the city does so much better now than it did 20 and 30 and 40 years ago," the mayor added.

## British consent

LONDON — Here's another step toward equality in Britain: The House of Commons has voted to lower the age of consent for homosexual sex to 16.

That would make it the

same for heterosexuals.

The measure pitted Prime Minister Tony Blair, who favored the measure, against the Church of England leadership. Opinion polls indicate that most Britons opposed the measure. The House of Commons approved the proposal 333-129.

There have been some efforts to block the measure in the House of Lords.

Gay rights groups expressed delight and the Commons rang with cheers when the bill passed.

"It cannot be the role of the state to work out people's sexuality for them ... nor to coerce gay men to be heterosexual," said Labor lawmaker Ann Keen, who initiated Monday's move, opening the parliamentary debate.

Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey personally appealed to Blair to stop the change, and Cardinal Basil Hume, leader of Catholics in England and Wales, said all homosexual acts are morally wrong.

## BC benefits

VICTORIA, British Columbia — Lawmakers in British Columbia would appear to be a forward-thinking lot.

The province has introduced a bill that would make it the first province in Canada to voluntarily grant pension benefits to same-sex couples who are public employees.

Some other provinces have moved that way, but under pressure from legal action.

The new legislation affects British Columbia's 235,000 public employees, including government workers, municipal employees and public school teachers.

## Lesbian custody

NEWARK, N.J. — A child custody case in New Jersey appears likely to set precedents for lesbian and gay parents.

A lesbian couple who broke up in New Jersey are facing off in court over visitation and custody of the twins they helped raise until they split up.

The biological mother of the twins and the woman's ex-partner are asking a court to determine their parental rights.

"Meema," the ex-partner identified in court papers only as V.C., is suing "Mommy," or M.B., for joint custody of the twins, a boy and a girl. Superior Court Judge Philip Cummis gave V.C. visitation rights last fall, a year after the couple broke up.

V.C. said she did everything a parent would for a child and planned to adopt the twins when they got older. M.B. likened V.C.'s connection to the children as that of a nanny.

Cumis is likely to issue a decision in the case in August. A ruling for V.C. would be one of the first in the country to give custodial rights to the former partners of lesbian mothers, said Kate Kendell, executive director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights in San Francisco.

"It will be a decision of some historic proportion," she said.

## Vaccine pioneers

PHILADELPHIA — Dr. Mark Watkins is a pioneer.

He was the very first volunteer to be injected in the first broad human test of what researchers hope will be an AIDS vaccine.

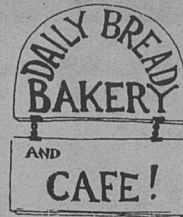
Watkins, and the other 5,000 volunteers who will follow him, have no way of knowing whether the needle stuck in their arms was pumping a placebo into their bodies or copies of a protein envelope that covers the AIDS virus.

The three-year trial of VaxGen Inc.'s AIDSvax is designed to show whether it can protect people from infection. The testing that began in July is the final step before the U.S. Food and Drug Administration makes a decision on whether to approve the drug.

Volunteers like the 150 in Philadelphia are injected with either a placebo or AIDSvax, which scientists say isn't dangerous because it is not a live strain of the AIDS virus. Trials begin later this year in more than 30 U.S. cities, including New York, San Francisco, Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles and St. Louis.

The tests are open to people considered to be at high risk of contracting the virus, such as gay men and women whose sexual partners are infected.

"In treating HIV patients, I realize the devastation this disease causes, and I thought this was a worthwhile trial," said Watkins, a gay 38-year-old physician who specializes in patients with AIDS.



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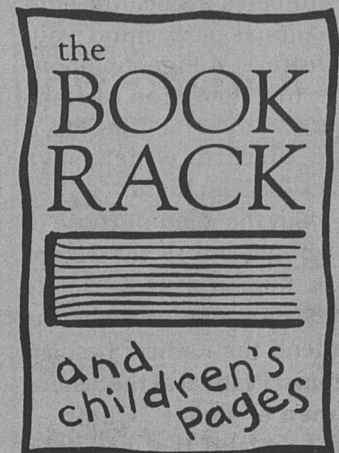
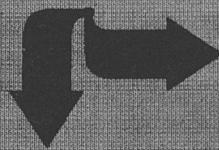
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