

A year later, gay marriage 'still one step ahead'

BY RUKMINI CALLIMACHI
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PORTLAND — Every morning before she headed out into the world, Evelyn Hall took off her gold ring and placed it on the kitchen counter. At night when she returned, she slipped it back on.

Last year, she put it on for good when she married the woman who relatives assumed was her roommate, cracking open the secret life the two had hidden for 46 years.

A total of 2,958 couples wed in Oregon when the state's most populous county began issuing same-sex marriage licenses a year ago today. Every one of those marriages is now in legal limbo — but one year on, gay couples say their legally hazy unions are nonetheless a giant leap forward.

"It was like an out-of-slavery experience. I know it sounds crazy, but we were so closeted," said Mary Beth Brindley, 65, who ran away from home to be with Hall, now 66, when she was 19. "It's a total relief not to have to lie anymore."

Gay weddings swept the country from coast to coast starting in San Francisco on Feb. 12, when Mayor Gavin Newsom flung open the city's wedding registry to gay couples. The movement jumped to Oregon in March, then New Mexico and New Paltz, N.Y.

By May, throngs of gay and lesbian couples were tying the knot in Massachusetts, following a ruling by the state's highest court.

While more than 13,000 gay couples married in all, only the 5,000 vows exchanged in the Bay State are still considered legal in the eyes of state authorities. Yet even in Massachusetts, the legislature is considering passing a constitutional amendment banning such marriages.

In November, voters in Oregon and 10 other states passed ballot measures banning gay marriage. Voters in two other states — Missouri and Louisiana — banned gay marriages earlier in 2004.

In Oregon and in California, lawsuits are winding their way through the state's legal machinery to

determine the legal status of the approximately 7,000 certificates issued to gay couples in the two states. And while an effort to pass a federal ban on gay marriage failed in the U.S. Senate last year, supporters say they will try again in the new Congress.

Opponents of gay marriage point to these and other successes to say they are winning the battle over the definition of marriage.

They say gay couples are living in a fantasy world, pretending to be married when neither state nor federal law has sanctioned their unions.

"They're basically lying to themselves," said Tim Nashif, political director of the Oregon-based Defense of Marriage Coalition, which backed the Portland ballot measure banning gay marriage.

"I think they're trying to spin this into something positive, but how do you spin something like this into something positive when you're 0-for-13?" he said, referring to last year's gay marriage ban in 13 states.

Gay advocates contend that time is on their side.

"It's a case of two steps forward for every one step back, which means we're still one step ahead," said Rebekah Kassell, spokeswoman for Basic Rights Oregon, the state's leading gay rights group.

While the marriages are obscured by legal and legislative challenges, gay couples who married say they discovered a feeling of validation, a sense of equality which made it all worthwhile.

"You don't have to keep proving that you're a family," said Kelly Burke, 35, who married Dolores Doyle, 39, her college sweetheart, last March 3.

Soon after, Burke — a stay-at-home mom who has been caring for the couple's 3 1/2-year-old son — stopped paying out-of-pocket health insurance, after Doyle's employer agreed to add her to Doyle's health plan as a "spouse."

And her relationship with relatives subtly shifted. One day last summer, Doyle's 19-year-old niece called Burke to ask for help with a project for her women's studies class. She had been instructed to interview a woman who was "not a family member" — and

Burke had to tell her that she no longer fit the bill.

"How do you describe your aunt's life partner?" Burke said. "Because we had become married she suddenly had the language to identify this person who had been in her life for so long. And it changed for me as well. I began to introduce her as 'my niece.'"

Like other gay married couples, Brindley and Hall cherish their marriage certificate. They ended a half-century of hiding by publicly marrying, and later appearing in a TV ad urging voters to vote "no" on November's ballot measure.

They met in 1959 in Memphis, Tenn., Elvis' hometown, where Hall had attended high school with Presley. When family became suspicious, Hall and Brindley ran off to Texas where for 37 years they lived as "roommates," hiding their rings.

"I don't care what 'pending' box they put our marriage in," Brindley said. The marriage certificate, she said, "means our relationship has a validation that it didn't have before."

Donations to colleges up for first time in two years

BY JUSTIN POPE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

After two years without growth, charitable contributions to U.S. colleges and universities rose 3.4 percent last year to a record \$24.4 billion, according to a report released Wednesday.

The increase was driven by a 9.7 percent increase in giving from individual donors, including a 21.5 percent surge in giving by non-alumni individuals. That offset a 6.1 percent decline in donations from foundations.

Among alumni, total giving rose slightly, but the percentage of alumni donating fell, as it has every year since 2001.

Harvard University led the list, raising \$540 million, according to the latest annual survey by the Council for Aid to Education, a unit of the RAND Corporation. UCLA, 10th overall, raised the most of any public university — \$262 million.

Overall, alumni donations last year accounted for 28 percent of university giving, non-alumni individuals 21 percent, corporations 18 percent and foundations 25 percent. Foundations

generally ramp up giving more slowly than individuals when the economy recovers, as it has in the past two years.

The remaining 8 percent was contributed by religious and other organizations.

Though the increase in overall contributions barely outpaced inflation, survey director Ann Kaplan of CAE called the results "not too bad," considering the decline in foundation grants, which she expects to turn around.

The overall increase followed zero growth in 2003, and a decline in 2002 — the first since 1988.

Kaplan credited a stronger economy and more effective fund-raising.

"Fund-raising behavior has a strong effect," she said. "The number one reason people make gifts is being asked. Without that, the economy's not going to have much of an effect on giving."

Perhaps the best news for colleges and universities was the 21.5 percent increase in gifts from non-alumni donors — often parents of alumni, community members or

donors who want to back specific research. The increase suggests schools are succeeding in expanding their donor pools.

But while total alumni giving rose 2 percent to \$6.7 billion, the percentage of alumni donating fell to 12.8 percent, which has steadily dropped since it was 13.8 percent in 2001.

Kaplan said that may be because colleges are keeping better records and now simply have more alumni to target who figure into the calculation. But she said they may also be focused on securing larger donations from major donors rather than on getting a broad base of alumni in the habit of giving, even small amounts. If that's the case, the strategy could negatively affect future fund-raising.

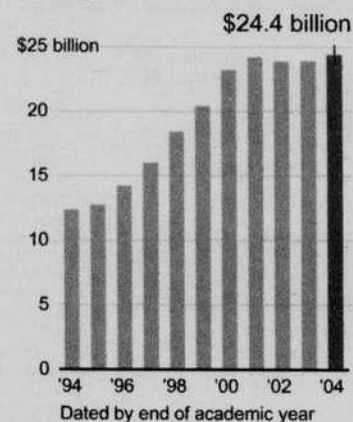
"Alumni who make small gifts tend to be the people who end up making large gifts," she said.

The Voluntary Support of Education Survey was based on replies from 971 institutions, a group that accounts for about 85 percent of voluntary support raised by colleges and universities.

Donations to colleges increase

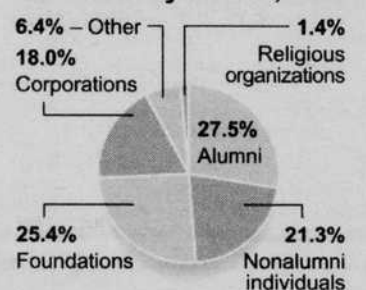
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Annual charitable giving to higher education

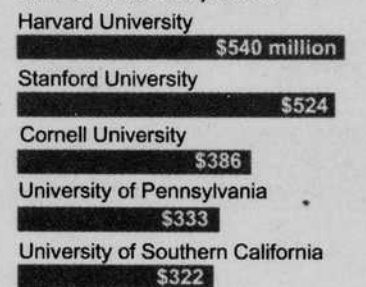


SOURCE: Rand Corp.

Private donations to higher education by source, 2004



Top universities by amount raised, 2004



AP

Number of Oregon West Nile cases may increase by hundreds

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PORTLAND — Oregon's brush with the West Nile virus last summer might have been merely a primer for what the state will face this year, a health official said.

The mosquito-borne virus, which has been detected in eight counties, sickened birds, horses and five people last year. This year, hundreds of human cases could be diagnosed if the virus follows the pattern seen in other states, said Emilio DeBess, a public health veterinarian and epidemiologist with the Oregon Department of Human Services.

DeBess will convene a summit March 8 in Portland for public health and hospital officials from across the state to plan how to deal with a major outbreak.

The virus, which peaks during the summer when mosquitoes are most active, entered the United

States in New York in 1999 and has moved clear across the country. It killed 88 people in 2004, according to the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

DeBess and other epidemiologists theorize that the disease can enter an area in three stages. In the beginning stage, infected birds fly into a state and are bitten by mosquitoes, which in turn become infected with the virus.

During the second stage, the virus spreads widely among mosquitoes. The mosquitoes bite a large number of people who become infected. DeBess said it is likely that Oregon is entering the second stage and will see substantial numbers of human infections this year.

In the third stage and beyond, the number of human cases typically declines rapidly because those who were previously exposed to the virus acquire an immunity to it.

Colorado, for example, reported 14 human cases in 2002. That ballooned to 2,947 in 2003 and then dwindled to 276 last year.

It's impossible for the disease to transfer from an animal to a human or a human to a human, state health officials said. Cattle, sheep, swine, cats and dogs appear to be immune.

In humans, most people infected with the virus exhibit no illness or only mild symptoms such as fever, headache and body aches.

DeBess said that although the number of human cases goes down in subsequent years, the amount of virus circulating among mosquitoes is still high.

"The thing to remember is that the virus circulates between birds and mosquitoes," DeBess said. "Human beings are dead-end hosts. They're just innocent bystanders in this."

IN BRIEF

Pilot continues world flight despite fuel problems

SALINA, Kan. — Millionaire adventurer Steve Fossett decided Wednesday to press ahead with his attempt to fly solo around the world without refueling, despite a serious problem with the plane's fuel system.

Fossett and his flight crew agreed Wednesday afternoon to keep the GlobalFlyer in the air rather than abandoning the record-setting attempt and turning back for a landing in Japan. He is now heading east over the Pacific Ocean, and the team expects to decide Wednesday night after reaching Hawaii whether to press on to the U.S. mainland.

Fossett discovered the problem with the fuel system of the custom-built plane early Wednesday.

Project manager Paul Moore said fuel sensors in the 13 tanks differ from readings of how quickly the plane's single jet engine was burning fuel. Moore said the crew had been forced to assume that 2,600 pounds of fuel of the original 18,100 pounds of fuel "disappeared" early in the flight.

It was not clear whether the problem was with the instruments that track how much fuel remains or if some fuel had been lost because of a leak, Fossett's team said.

"This is a huge setback," Fossett said from the plane, according to a statement issued by his staff. "I have not that high a level of confidence at this point."

Fossett might still be able to finish the flight on his original path if a tail wind in the jet stream remains strong enough to push him across the Pacific.

Before the fuel problem was discovered, Fossett had estimated he would complete the 23,000-mile journey at midday Thursday. He took off Monday from Salina.

Fossett already holds the record for flying solo around the globe in a balloon, as well as dozens of other aviation and sailing records.

The project is being financed by Virgin Atlantic founder Sir Richard Branson, a longtime friend and fellow adventurer.

The first nonstop global flight without refueling was made in 1986 by Jeana Yeager and Dick Rutan, brother of GlobalFlyer designer Burt Rutan.

— The Associated Press