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## national news

### Mississippi community tries to oust lesbians

An agency from the U.S. Department of Justice has responded to a call from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force to intervene in a volatile case occurring in Overt, Miss. The Community Relations Service received a call from NGLTF Executive Director Peri Jude Radecic requesting its help with the case of two lesbians, Wanda and Brenda Henson. The women were condemned for their sexual orientation at a public community meeting and have been the subjects of harassment and violence from the surrounding community. The NGLTF reports that among the items discussed at the meeting were possible strategies that may be used to oust the women from their 120-acre farm in the small Jones County community. Both private citizens and public officials were reported to have vowed to research county and state laws, including the state sodomy law, to find a way to force the lesbians out. Residents fear the lesbians will approach straight women in the community and "pick up little girls." The Hensons have received threatening phone calls, armed strangers have trespassed on their property and a dead dog was hung from their mailbox within the past two months.

An official of the CRS agreed that the situation warranted immediate action and assured NGLTF that she would contact the local sheriff and the FBI to let them know a federal agency was monitoring the situation. However, the CRS is mandated to mediate disputes related only to race, color and ethnicity—not sexual orientation. The CRS cannot directly intervene unless Attorney General Janet Reno directs them to do so.

Radecic has sent an urgent letter to Reno asking her to support the civil rights of the Hensons by directing the following: the intervention of the CRS; monitoring of the situation by the FBI; an investigation by the Department of Justice Civil Rights Division into the attempts to violate the civil rights of the Hensons; and the attendance of a representative of her office at the next Overt community meeting.

Information about the case has also been delivered to the offices of the congressional committee chairs who oversee the Department of Justice.

### Rural Idaho columnist comes out

Readers of Susan Baumgartner's weekly column in the *Moscow-Pullman Daily News* got more than the average column the week when Baumgartner used it to come out as a lesbian. She is believed to be the first openly lesbian weekly columnist for a rural daily newspaper. Ever since the column was published, Baumgartner has been overwhelmed with supportive cards and phone calls from gay, lesbian and heterosexual readers and friends.

Before writing the column, Baumgartner approached the paper's publisher, Randy Frish, and asked if the paper would run it. Says Frish, "There was no doubt in my mind we were going to run the column." He added, "She's a good local columnist and whether she's gay or not is as immaterial as whether she speaks French or not."

Baumgartner, 41, came out to herself only two and a half years ago, after living for many years in denial of her sexuality. Coming out in her column was both a significant personal decision and a political one. The accelerated homophobic activities of the Idaho Citizens Alliance compelled her to include more gay and lesbian issues in her column. In seeking something to do about the proposed homophobic initiatives she said, "Coming out seems to help most."

Still, Baumgartner didn't stop with telling just the two communities totaling 43,000 people that she writes for—she also came out to her English

class at the University of Idaho. Students' reaction there have been positive overall and the classroom atmosphere is generally comfortable. "Apparently their fear of flunking is much stronger than their fear of me," she commented.

### Gay Games 1994: lots of good news

The Federation of Gay Games has announced the involvement of two major corporate sponsors for the games in New York City this June. Miller Brewing Company and Continental Airlines have signed on in what is being hailed as a new level of corporate support for the lesbian and gay events. Miller, a division of Philip Morris Companies, will be the exclusive beer sponsor for the games which, according to a Miller spokesperson, will be its "largest sponsorship...ever for a lesbian and gay event." Continental will be the official Gay Games airline. Athletes and spectators will receive a reduced rate when they fly Continental and the games will receive flight coupons that will be used for people on scholarship and promotional, media and staff travel. Securing Continental as the official airline is significant say games officials, because of the airline's weak history in the gay and lesbian market. Corporate sponsorship is said to constitute about \$1.2 million of the projected \$5.5 million cost of the games. Other corporate sponsors include: Nora Beverages, which markets Naya spring water; the American Preferred Plan, a mail order pharmaceutical company; Mayer Laboratories, maker of the "official condom of the Gay Games"; and *Out*, a gay and lesbian magazine.

The Federation has also announced its endorsement of "The Rainbow Roll for the End of AIDS." This cross-country, in-line skating relay from San Francisco to New York City will culminate as part of the games' opening ceremonies. A multi-racial, co-gendered team of skaters will carry a rainbow flag as an AIDS memorial and symbolic "torch" representing all lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people around the world.

The deadline for accepting nominations for the Tom Waddell Award has been extended to April 1, 1994. The three finalists will be announced in New York City in early May at the premiere book signing and reception for *Gay Olympian, The Biography of the Founder of the Gay Games*, Dr. Tom Waddell, by ABC Sports correspondent Dick Schaap. Nominees should be people who have dedicated themselves to service in the arts, athletics or volunteerism that captures the spirit of the Gay Games. Forms can be obtained from: The Federation Awards Committee, 584 Castro St., Suite 343, San Francisco, CA 94114.

Amsterdam, The Netherlands, has been selected as the site for Gay Games V in 1998. Federation officials affirmed, "Amsterdam is a very open society with a strong history of tolerance and acceptance, so it's only fitting that Amsterdam's theme for Gay Games V is Friendship."

The Gay Games were first held in 1982, in San Francisco, attracting 1,300 athletes in 13 sports. Gay Games II, in 1986, was also held in San Francisco with 3,500 athletes in 17 sports. Gay Games III, in 1990, held in Vancouver, Canada, attracted 7,500 athletes and 1,500 cultural participants. Gay Games IV, to be held in New York City, June 18 to 25, 1994, is expected to draw 15,000 athletes, a 200-booth merchandise fair, an extensive product licensing program and cultural participants from more than 50 countries around the world. Applications for participation in the Gay Games IV Cultural Festival are due Jan. 31. Call (212) 633-9494 for more information.

Compiled by Lee Norwood

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