

# national news

## Out lesbian appointed federal judge

In what is surely a landmark appointment, Deborah Batts, 47, was sworn in June 23 as a federal district judge in Manhattan. She won Senate Judiciary Committee approval in May and confirmation the following day by the full Senate, according to *The Washington Blade*.

Batts is a graduate of Radcliffe College and Harvard Law School. She has worked for a New York law firm and as an assistant U.S. Attorney in Manhattan. She was the first African American person to become a faculty member at Fordham University School of Law, 10 years ago, where she was an associate professor until being sworn in.

"We think it's extremely important that this...barrier has been broken," Beatrice Dohrn, legal director of Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, told *The Washington Blade*. "Nobody openly gay has ever been proposed, much less confirmed, to the federal bench."

In a telephone interview, Batts told *The Blade* she did not want to be known as "the gay judge." She said "being a lesbian is definitely part of my life.... I am also a very devoted mother, I'm an attorney, a former professor, and I'm an African American.... It seems to me that my experience as a lesbian, as an African American, as a mother, as a woman, form me as a person."

## Homophobic shirts spur New Jersey protest

July 24, the New Jersey Chapter of the Lesbian Avengers staged a protest rally at the Second Avenue Beach in Belmar, in response to sales of T-shirts bearing anti-queer slogans such as "Silly faggot, dicks are for chicks."

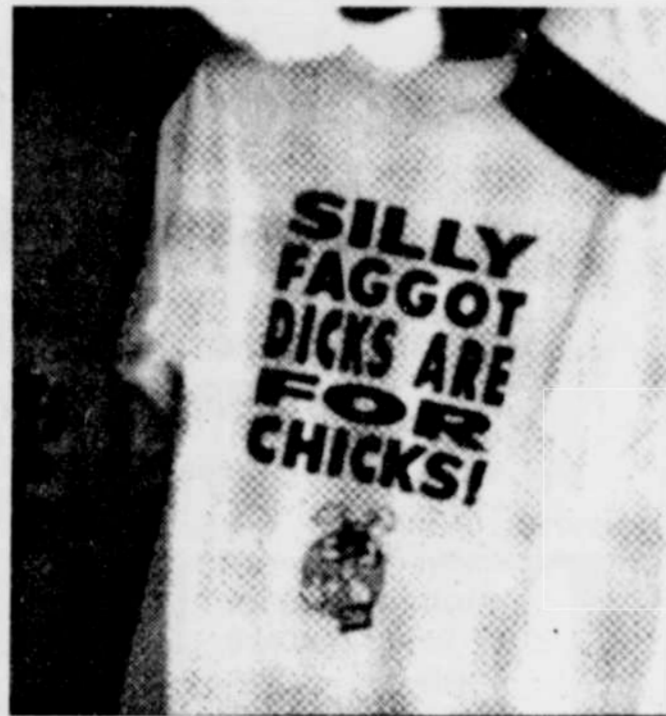
The T-shirts were first noticed by Lisa Albrecht and Kelly McFadden of Bethlehem while visiting Ocean City, Md. They expressed their outrage to the store clerk, who admitted they had received some complaints but also said the shirts were selling well.

The two women also contacted General Mills, the company that holds the copyright on the Trix rabbit logo, which is pictured on one of the T-shirts. Barry Wegener, a spokesman for General Mills, told the *Inquirer* that the company's legal department had asked the shops to pull the T-shirts and destroy them or send them to the company.

"We really see it as damaging the image of our cereal," Wegener said. "The whole thing is just offensive and we want to get rid of it and get it off the market."

New Jersey Gov. Christie Whitman appealed to merchants not to sell the shirts.

"We're not saying ban the T-shirt," Diana McCague, spokeswoman for the Lesbian Aveng-



ers told the Philadelphia paper *Au Courant*. "We certainly don't want to attack the First Amendment. We want people to understand that the T-shirt is offensive."

## Rainbow flag raises funds for AIDS

Thousands of the nearly 1 million parade-watchers threw coins and dollar bills on the mile-long rainbow flag, probably the world's largest, as it moved through New York City during the Stonewall 25 International March on the United Nations this past June. Over 2,000 marchers contributed a donation for the privilege of carrying the flag.

Some \$115,000 has been collected thus far in the Raise the Rainbow Project, to support AIDS services in the U.S. The Stadtländers Foundation, organizers of the project, announced that grant guidelines for the funds will be issued Aug. 15 and grant applications will be due by Sept. 30. All money raised will be disbursed through the HIV/AIDS Community Grant Fund of the foundation.

Costs for the flag were underwritten by Stadtländers Pharmacy, a nationwide mail-service pharmacy specializing in the needs of people with chronic conditions.

## Right wing leaders meet secretly to plan agenda

According to the Boston newspaper *Bay Windows*, 40 conservative and religious leaders of 35 right wing organizations met secretly in Colorado Springs, Colo., this May to plan their campaigns against lesbian and gay civil rights. Following indications that many of their petition drives would fall short of the necessary number of signatures and that others would be closely examined by the courts, the purpose of the meeting was to make the

elimination of rights for gay men and lesbians the top priority of the decade.

Although the meeting was secret, and security guards were posted at the Glen Eyrie Conference Compound (owned by Navigators, a conservative Christian publishing house), a tape recording of the meeting was obtained by the Institute for First Amendment Studies, reports the *Kansas City News-Telegraph*.

Among the ideas proposed at the meeting were plans to draw up a list of enemies using computer databases of businesses, educators, politicians and media personalities who are supportive of civil rights for sexual minorities; to launch an attack on accepted scientific theories on homosexuality; and to distribute propaganda that promotes a connection between homosexuality and pornography. Plans also include countering the criticism of their campaign that is sure to arise with claims of "heterophobia" and "Christian-bashing."

The *Seattle Gay News* reports that the group discussed a campaign to lobby the government to defund AIDS research, because it supports "immoral behavior."

Sue Hyde, coordinator of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Fight the Right Project, described the tapes as "frightening."

"What's so chilling is how streamlined their process is," said Rob Gregson of the Office of Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Concerns of the Unitarian Universalist Association. "It was almost like hearing a corporation's board minutes," he told *Bay Windows*.

The right wing leaders will reportedly meet again this fall.

## Cincinnati measure ruled unconstitutional

A federal judge ruled Aug. 9 that a discriminatory initiative passed by Cincinnati, Ohio, voters last November is unconstitutional. The ballot initiative, known as Issue 3, stripped gay men and lesbians of any protections they had and would prohibit Cincinnati lawmakers from extending any protections in the future.

The 75-page decision, issued by U.S. District Judge S. Arthur Spiegel, ruled that Issue 3 violates the constitutional guarantees of free expression and equal protection and infringes on the fundamental rights of lesbians and gay men to participate effectively in the political process.

"This ruling provides a critical boost to our challenges to anti-gay measures across the country," said Lambda staff attorney Suzanne Goldberg. "It shores up the other court decisions that have found ballot initiatives to be blatantly discriminatory and offensive in our Constitution."

Lambda and local counsel is gearing up to defend the ruling against the city's probable appeal.

## Discrimination suit filed against Delta Airlines

June 11, Richard Cloutier was asked either to leave the plane he had just boarded or to cover the warts and sores on his arms and hands. Cloutier left the plane to buy a long-sleeved shirt, and when he returned, his flight had left. He caught the next flight 30 minutes later. On June 13, he filed a discrimination suit with the U.S. District Court of Massachusetts against Delta Airlines, based in Atlanta, Ga.

The suit was filed under the Air Carrier Access Act, which prohibits discrimination in air transportation against people with disabilities, including HIV infection, according to Bennett H. Klein of the Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders. Klein is Cloutier's attorney.

"We routinely transport people with HIV," said Todd Clay, a spokesman for Delta. He said company managers "conduct HIV and AIDS sensitivity training...on a regular basis." "[Cloutier] had exposed sores on his arms and shoulders. The sores were weeping, and he was wearing a tank top and shorts," said Clay. "We feel that we acted appropriately to protect our passengers and our crew members by covering his sores."

The lawsuit states that Delta "incorrectly and illegally assumed" that Cloutier was contagious and dangerous to other passengers.

Cloutier is suing for an unspecified amount of damages.

## PBS breaks promise to produce *Tales* sequel

Public Broadcasting System's new president, Ervin Duggan, recently insisted at a news conference that gay novelist Armistead Maupin "should be sending us letters of thanks" for broadcasting *Tales of the City*, instead of criticizing Duggan's refusal to produce a sequel to the critically-acclaimed series.

Shortly after Duggan took the helm, PBS reneged on a promise to produce the sequel to *Tales*. Media activists believe that action was due to pressure from right wing organizations.

"We are the people who have written the word 'courage' across the [television] screen," Duggan said in response to questions about PBS' trend toward more conservative programming. Later, Duggan admitted to receiving at least 2,000 letters of approval, encouraging PBS to produce a sequel. He dismissed those letters as a "coercion" effort orchestrated by Maupin.

Compiled by Jann Gilbert and Renée LaChance

# cathartic comics I featuring The Brown Bomber and Diva Touché Flambé by Prof. I.B. Gittendowne

