

Virginia Supreme Court denies lesbian custody

The Virginia Supreme Court ruled late last month that a woman's sexual orientation could put her son at risk of social condemnation and denied the woman custody of her child. The justices, in a 4-3 decision, overturned a lower appellate court ruling that gave Sharon Bottoms custody of her 3-year-old son Tyler Doustou, according to a Reuters report.

Custody was awarded to Bottoms' mother, with whom the child has lived since 1993.

The justices said their decision was based not only on Bottoms' live-in relationship with her lover, but also on her maturity and stability.

Bottoms is expected to request a rehearing of the case, but legal experts say that reversals are rare.

Hate crimes hit queers hardest

According to a report released March 30 by the Southern Poverty Law Center, more than 25 percent of all hate-motivated assaults nationwide committed in 1994 were attacks against gay men or lesbians. The center's Klanwatch project verified 18 hate-motivated murders in 1994. Of those, 11 were against sexual minorities. While the number of assaults rose from 183 in 1993 to 228 in 1994, the number of murders fell from 30 in 1993 to last year's 18.

The Southern Poverty Law Center monitors hate crimes based on racial, ethnic, religious and sexual-orientation bias. The center's information came primarily from the media and law enforcement reports.

Women's land project seeks everything

Organizers of Maat Dompin, the Womyn of Color Land Project, have announced the project is actively seeking donations to purchase land for a Womyn of Color Retreat and Conference Center. Maat Dompin, currently headquartered in West Virginia, is a nonprofit corporation committed to creating a safe place for women of color to explore and share traditional values and perspectives.

Maat Dompin hopes to provide space for conferences, retreats and ecological education. It will also be home to the Institute of Ancient African Herstory, which will provide a library and study space for scholars and students involved in the study of the history of African women and the histories of other women of color.

For more information, contact: Maat Dompin, the Womyn of Color Land Project, Auto Road, Auto, WV 24917, (703) 992-0248 (voice mail).

California group fights tobacco campaign

The California Lavender Smokefree Network, a joint project of the Coalition of Lavender-Americans on Smoking and Health and Community Focus, has received a two-year, \$200,000 grant to combat the tobacco industry's targeting of gay men and lesbians, according to a story in *The Washington Blade*.

The money comes from funds collected by Proposition 99, the "Tobacco Tax Health Protection Act." Proposition 99 money is used to fund anti-smoking campaigns among groups targeted by the tobacco industry. The gay and lesbian community has been aggressively targeted by Philip Morris, the industry giant that produces Virginia Slims and Marlboro.

Benefits given Olympia workers

The City of Olympia, Wash., has extended employee benefits to the domestic partners of city employees, regardless of gender. Unmarried partners can now receive health and dental care, and bereavement and sick leave. In a story in *Bay Windows*, city human resources director Cathy Raymond said, "We value a diverse work force, and the notion of excluding benefits is inconsistent with that."

City officials believe 12 to 15 employees—out of a work force of 500—will use the program. They estimate this will cost approximately \$32,000 a year.

Baltimore Pride on cable TV

United Artists Cable of Baltimore City has joined with Pride Broadcasting to produce *Pride Magazine*, a television show that focuses on the Baltimore, Md., gay and lesbian community. The pilot show was completed last month. United Artists provided studio time, equipment and technical assistance. Pride Broadcasting provided the hosts, reporters, story ideas and writing.


The show is now searching for sponsors.

Sodomy law repealed


The Pennsylvania sodomy law—declared unconstitutional by the state Supreme Court in 1980—was finally repealed by the Pennsylvania legislature. The repeal came as part of an updating and revamping of the state's sex-crimes laws.

Although the law has been unenforceable for the past 15 years, it has been cited by attorneys trying to deny lesbian mothers custody and visitation rights.

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