

# national briefs

## CALIFORNIA

Singer k.d. lang and breast cancer activist Dr. Susan M. Love will be honored by the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center on March 1 at the Women's Night '97 dinner and dance, a fundraiser for the organization's lesbian services. Ellen DeGeneres will present the Creative Integrity Award to lang, and the evening will feature performances by Kathy Najimy and Jennifer Holliday.

Love, a surgeon, researcher, author and teacher, will receive the Community Role Model Award. She is a cofounder and member of the board of directors of the National Breast Cancer Coalition. Her next book, on hormone replacement therapy, will be published in February.

## COLORADO

Last spring the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the measure approved by Colorado voters that would have banned laws to protect sexual minorities from discrimination. In early January, according to a United Press International report, state Attorney General Gale Norton announced a settlement with plaintiffs in the case to pay \$950,000 for legal fees incurred in the successful civil rights challenge to Amendment 2.

Attorneys for the plaintiffs—from the American Civil Liberties Union, Lambda Legal Defense Fund and the Denver city attorney's office—spent nearly \$1.4 million arguing the case on its way to the Supreme Court. The high court ruled May 20 that the amendment was unconstitutional because it singled out homosexuals for unequal protection.

## DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

The Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League is sponsoring a legal project on behalf of Washington, D.C.-area queer youth that is inspired by a recent court case in which a federal jury decided that a Wisconsin school district had violated a student's rights by failing to protect him from anti-gay harassment.

*The Washington Blade* reports that the goals for SMYAL's legal project are increased awareness among queer youth about their legal rights,

creation of a network of legal experts to advise youth and schools on queer issues, and a system to monitor how sexual minorities are treated in local schools.



A new federal tax law allows people with chronic or terminal illnesses to sell their life insurance without paying income tax on the benefits, reports the *Journal of Commerce*. The law took effect Jan. 1, 1997.



Phyllis Randolph Frye, executive director of the International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy, will lead a national transgender lobbying event in Washington, D.C., to coincide with the True Spirit Conference to be held Feb. 22 and 23 in Laurel, Md. An organizing and training meeting will convene immediately after the conference, and on the two days following the event Frye and other transgendered citizens will meet with and educate their congressional representatives.

The True Spirit Conference, sponsored by the American Boyz, is a "gathering of gender-variant people categorized at birth as female," and the first national conference of transgender people to be held in the Washington-Baltimore area.

## ILLINOIS

A state appeals court has returned two children to the custody of their bisexual mother, according to a story in the *Chicago Sun-Times*. Rebecca Schroeder, a Peoria-area resident, lost custody of

her children last year when a Tazewell County judge agreed with her ex-husband that the fact that she is now living with a female lover might result in the children facing social condemnation.

Ruling in favor of the mother, Justice Peg Breslin of the 3rd District Illinois Appellate Court said state custody laws are neutral on the issue of sexual orientation and that the father failed to present evidence backing his claim that the children's moral well-being is suffering. It is the first time an Illinois appeals court has upheld the custody rights of a bisexual, lesbian or gay parent.



## MASSACHUSETTS

A Harvard Medical School study, published in the journal *Nature Medicine*, has revived interest in the live-virus approach to AIDS vaccination. Scientists had been testing a monkey version of the vaccine, but encountered difficulties in 1995 when experiments showed the vaccine caused active infection in newborn monkeys.

Researchers now conclude that transmission occurs only when baby monkeys are given very high doses of virus and their mothers have not been vaccinated. They say mature monkeys respond well to the treatment and monkeys vaccinated during pregnancy did not give the virus to their babies.

## NEBRASKA

The Nebraska attorney general issued an opinion Dec. 30 indicating that a legislative ban is the only certain way for the state to avoid recognizing same-sex marriages performed in other states. Such marriages are refused recognition in Nebraska based on a 1977 attorney general's opinion, however, state law recognizes all marriages that are valid by the laws of other states and the United States.

The state Legislature ended last year's session without voting on a measure to recognize same-sex marriages proposed by Sen. Ernie Chambers of Omaha or a ban advocated by the Nebraska Christian Coalition. Another ban is expected to be proposed this session.

## NORTH CAROLINA

A federal court in North Carolina recently rejected the employment discrimination claim made by an HIV-positive asymptomatic man. It is the first time any court has ruled that HIV infection is not a disability.

According to Reuters news service, Fernando J. Cortes had sued a McDonald's restaurant, but the court ruled that he failed to prove his claim that being HIV positive constituted "a physical impairment that substantially limited a major life activity."

## OHIO

Enacting what may be the first legislation of its kind, the Cleveland City Council has instituted criminal penalties, including fines and jail terms, for employment discrimination. Under the new ordinance, employers who reject job applicants or deny promotions to employees based on their membership in any of eight categories—sexual orientation among them—will face criminal prosecution and sentences of up to \$1,000 and six months behind bars.

Traditional civil court remedies will remain available to victims of discrimination, while action in criminal court will be at the discretion of the city attorney's office. Sponsoring Councilmember Bill Patmon told the NewsPlanet news service that he thought the city's human rights laws needed sharper teeth because civil ordinances were not stopping discrimination.

Compiled by Christopher D. Cuttone



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