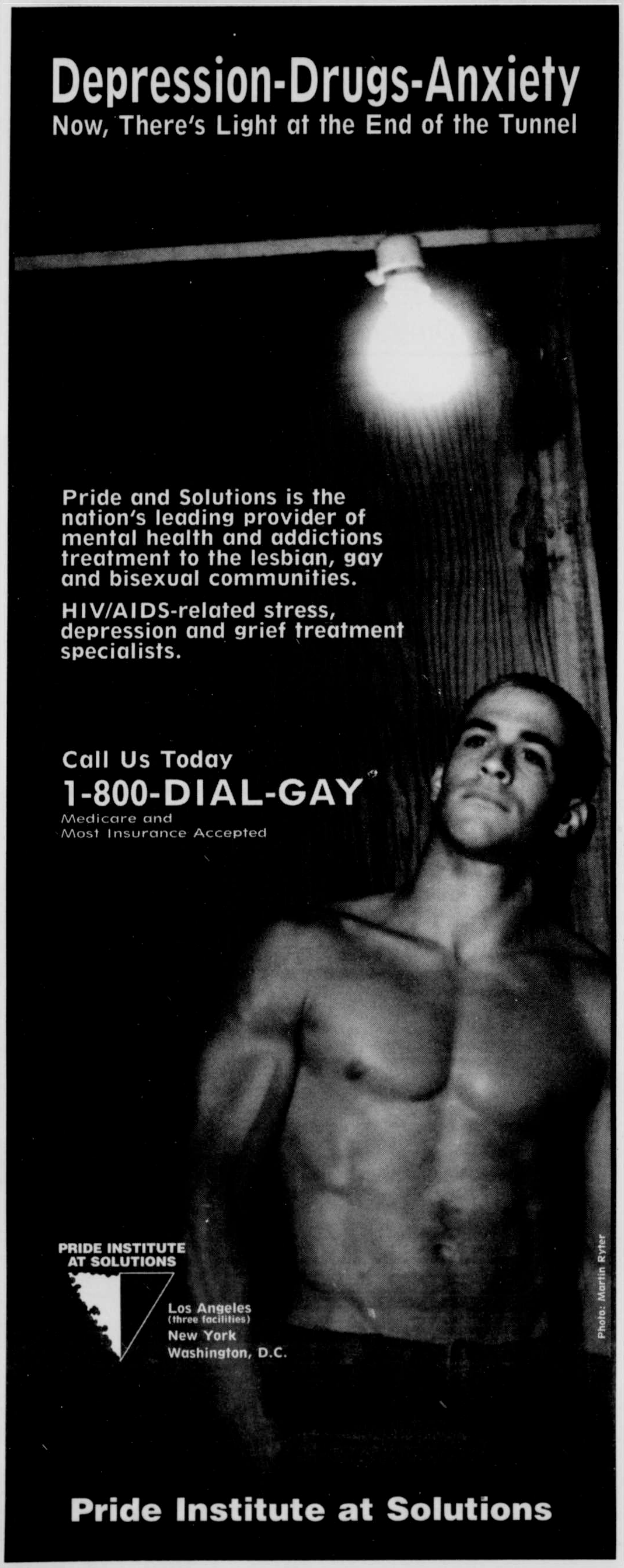


national news

AIDS prevention group hires new executives

The National Task Force on AIDS Prevention, an advocacy and service organization for people of color, on Jan. 29 announced the hiring of Mario Solis-Marich as its new chief executive officer and Stephan Oxendine as its new chief operating officer. Solis-March, a longtime activist and erstwhile public policy director for AIDS Project Los Angeles, began his tenure March 1; Oxendine has been acting executive director for the agency for three months and has already assumed his new position.

Solis-March will lead NTFAP's new initiative, "Recreating Our Future," which seeks to cut in half the number of new HIV infections among gay men of color and effectively end the epidemic in these communities by 2002.

Oxendine also serves as board co-chair of the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum.

Plastic condom breaks, but gets break from FDA

Citing a desire "not to unnecessarily alarm the public," the Food and Drug Administration failed to issue a recall of the Avanti, a superthin plastic condom that was found to have a high rate of breakage, according to a report in the March/April issue of *Mother Jones*. The magazine says London International Group touted that its condom afforded greater sensitivity, could be used by those allergic to latex, and could be used with oil-based lubricants.

The FDA initially approved the Avanti in 1991 based on LIG's own research data, which asserted that the plastic condom had a lower breakage rate than latex. Tests run by the National Institutes of Health between 1991 and 1994, however, revealed an average breakage rate of more than 9 percent for the Avanti, as compared to 2 percent for latex. The condom went on sale in December 1994. According to *Mother Jones*, the agency allowed the Avanti onto the market on the premise that it is better to provide a product for people allergic to latex than to offer them nothing at all. But, the magazine says, with its claims of being thinner and more sensitive than latex, the Avanti appeals to a much wider market than just people allergic to latex: LIG reports that in its first year, the condom captured three percent of the market.

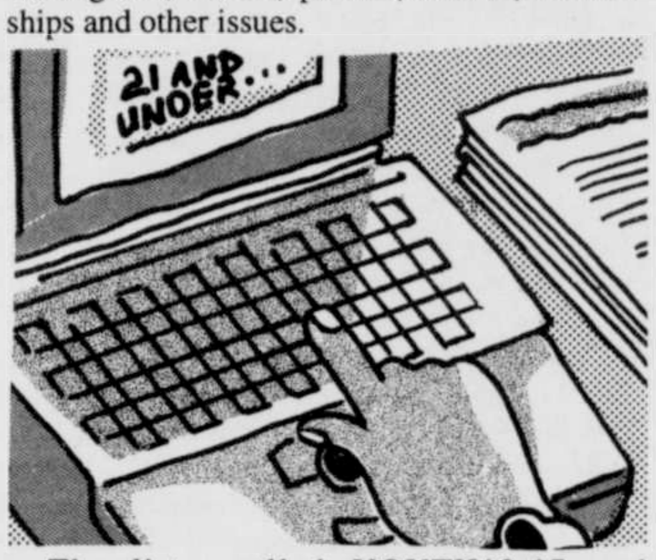
Early in 1996 the FDA required LIG to place a warning label on the product reading "The risks of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including AIDS (HIV infection) are not known for this condom." The FDA reportedly did not force a recall because LIG, the world's leading condom maker, whose 1996 sales neared $500 million, claimed that would cause undue financial hardship.

Meanwhile, in May 1996 LIG changed the specifications of the Avanti condom, making it thicker. Although the company would not specify that the change was made for safety reasons, it also voluntarily began placing warning stickers on the box which read "Intended for latex-sensitive condom users only."

Mother Jones claims that the thinner version of the condom could still be found on shelves as late as December 1996.

E-mail lists for youth reach far and wide

In an attempt to reach a wider audience than is possible with newsgroups, Internet relay chat (IRC) and chat rooms, two new e-mail lists for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, questioning and supportive youth debuted Jan. 31. Organizers hope the lists will make it easier for young people under 21 to talk with each other about coming out, school, parents, friends, relationships and other issues.



The lists, called YOUTH13-17 and YOUTH17-21, are the first to offer a youth conversation and support group in e-mail form. The age policy will be strictly enforced, with one exception: subscribers under 13 will be allowed on the 13-17 list. In order to maintain these standards, subscription requests will be sent to the "List Owner" for approval and are contingent upon agreement to the list's rules and guidelines.

To subscribe, send a message reading "subscribe youth13-17 [your name]" or "subscribe youth17-21 [your name]" to listproc@critpath.org. ("Your name"—without brackets—may be your real name, an alias or your e-mail address.) For information on the lists, send a message reading "info youth13-17" or "info youth17-21" to the same address, visit the Web site http://www.critpath.org/youth/, or contact a YOUTH List staff member: jason@critpath.org, millerj@webtv.net, bj410@aol.com, cariboo@vector.net, gestalt@jnpcs.com

Conservative lawmakers revive NEA attack

The National Endowment for the Arts, which suffered a deep funding cut two years ago, may come under fire again when Congress evaluates President Clinton's 1998 budget proposal, reports The Associated Press. For years the NEA has been attacked by conservative politicians who complain that federal money is being spent on questionable programs and grants involving nudity, pornography, blasphemy and obscenity, while supporters—including Clinton—say the agency makes the arts accessible to people who otherwise would not experience them.

Already this year, Rep. Pete Hoekstra (R-Mich.) has criticized the NEA funding for *The Watermelon Woman*, a movie that shows lesbian sex and illegal drug use. The AP story says debates over similar issues in the past led Congress to prohibit general support grants and require that applications cite specific projects. However, a 40 percent cut in the agency's budget two years ago has reduced the money available for many other, less controversial aid recipients, and the NEA's conservative, mostly Republican, enemies have vowed to reduce public funding of the arts to zero.

Overall this year, the NEA received $95.5 million in taxpayer money to support the arts. Clinton has asked for $136 million for the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1, which would not quite restore the agency to its pre-1995 funding level.