

national briefs

CALIFORNIA

The marriage between a woman and her transsexual husband cannot be annulled, a judge ruled Nov. 25.

According to The Associated Press, the decision means a custody battle over the couple's 3-year-old daughter will likely continue.

As part of the custody fight, Kristie Vecchione sought to annul her marriage to Joshua Vecchione on grounds that state law does not recognize same-sex unions. Joshua had gender reassignment surgery in 1976.

Superior Judge Gary Ryan ruled that because state law recognizes a person's gender after a sex-change, the court recognizes Vecchione as a man.

A lawyer for Mrs. Vecchione was unsure whether she would appeal.



With businesses and religious organizations complaining and two lawsuits filed, San Francisco's domestic partner benefits law, which took effect June 1, has already made its mark. Despite the thousands of companies that now offer such benefits, however, city departments often must scramble to find vendors who comply—leading to backlogs and sometimes standstills in city business—and some contractors are faking compliance.

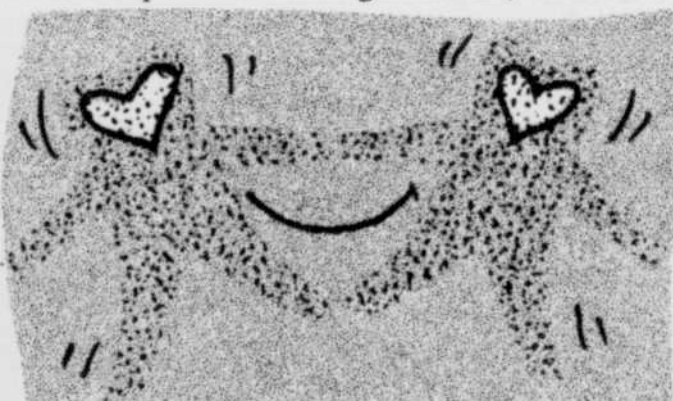
According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the board passed an amendment designed to address these concerns in mid-November that grants department heads the power to waive requirements under special circumstances, and only with the approval of the city's Human Rights Commission.

Some queer rights advocates fear the move could weaken the law and send the wrong message to the rest of the country, but supervisors Tom Ammiano, Leslie Katz and Susan Leal—the board's three openly gay members who wrote the law and its amendment—say it's clear that the law is already a success.

DELAWARE

A mock marriage ceremony that paired second-grade pupils of the same sex has drawn protests from some parents.

According to a Nov. 18 Associated Press report, many others supported the teacher who developed the "wedding of friends," and a school



curriculum panel recommended 9-2 that the district not change the class at Star Hill Elementary outside Dover.

Teacher Ede Outten told the panel the ceremony was a creative way to get pupils to promise to care for each other as friends.

The lesson went along with readings from *Carry, Go, Bring and Come*, a story about a West Indian wedding.

Outten likened it to the television show *Barney*, where children sing "I love you, you love me."

"Even Barney's intentions would be suspect in Dover, Delaware," she said.

A local educators' group submitted 350 signatures in support of the teacher.

GEORGIA

Victory Fund candidate Cathy Woolard won a fiercely contested Nov. 26 run-off for the District 6 seat on the Atlanta City Council.

Woolard beat a 20-year incumbent by a 52 percent to 48 percent margin, making her the first openly lesbian or gay official in the Peachtree State.

ILLINOIS

In the wake of public controversy, the City of Chicago has released its toned-down beautification plan for North Halsted Street. The \$3.2 million proposal still pays tribute to the area's gay and lesbian community, but in a subtler way, the *Chicago Tribune* reports.

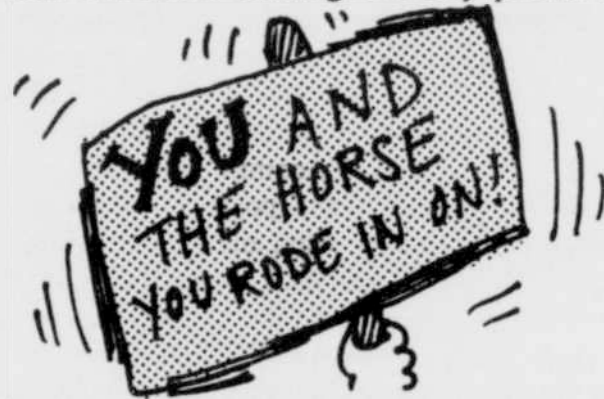
The new plan eliminates the 25-foot tall gateway structures, which would have featured a gay pride rainbow motif, in favor of "more refined" and smaller bronze streetside markers reading simply "North Halsted" and "Lakeview."

Chicago is the first city in the nation to honor the gay and lesbian community as part of a multimillion dollar street beautification.

MINNESOTA

The state Supreme Court has been asked to rule on a bias-motivated harassment case against "horseback evangelist" Kurtis Dean Machholz of Rochester.

United Press International reports that Machholz, who was arrested after riding his horse into a National Coming Out Day parade and



hurling epithets at marchers, is arguing that the anti-harassment felony law under which he was charged is unconstitutionally vague.

The law stipulates that harassment which causes victims to feel intimidated because of their sexual orientation (among other things) should be singled out for harsher penalties.

VERMONT

Lawyers for three same-sex couples seeking marriage licenses filed arguments in court Nov. 25, saying Vermont marriage laws allow same-sex unions and that prohibiting such unions violates the couples' rights.

The action is part of a lawsuit, brought in July by two lesbian couples and a gay male couple, which challenges an attorney general's 1975 ruling that a state law defining marriage as a union between a "bride and a groom" prohibits same-sex couples from marrying.

According to the *Burlington Free Press*, the attorney general's office maintains the Vermont Constitution does not guarantee same-sex partners the right to marry and has requested the couples' complaint be dismissed.

WEST VIRGINIA

The Jackson County School Board ordered 16 books—including John Grisham's *The Client* and Tom Clancy's *The Hunt for Red October*—be removed from the shelves of school libraries pending a review of whether they should be banned outright.

Among the reasons cited for reviewing the books were homosexual content, sexually explicit language and violent imagery, The Associated Press reports.

The board decided it didn't need to review *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about a Southern black family, which touches on issues of incest, lesbianism, racism and family violence. It ordered the book banned.

Another book taken out of circulation was *100 Q & A about AIDS*, Ripley High School Principal Jack Wiseman told reporters.

Saying most of the books in question "are classics or will be," Wiseman disagreed with the board's action, which was spurred by a complaint from a parent.

Compiled by Christopher D. Cuttione

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