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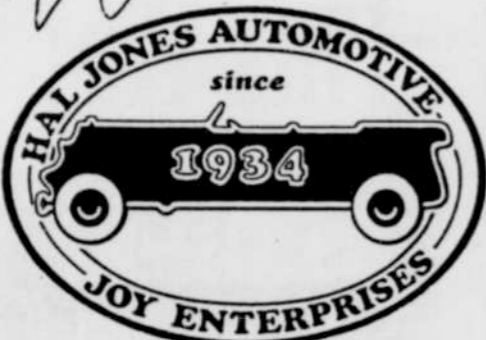
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NATIONAL news BRIEFS

ARIZONA
 A judge ruled March 13 it is legal for Pima County to offer health insurance benefits to the unmarried domestic partners of county employees, reports the *Arizona Daily Star*.

The ruling came eight months after domestic partners were to begin receiving benefits under a new county policy. Enactment of the policy was delayed by a lawsuit filed by a taxpayers' group that opposed it.

The *Daily Star* says 90 percent of the county employees who applied for benefits did so for partners of the opposite sex. Only 10 employees signed up for same-sex domestic partners.

CALIFORNIA
 More than a quarter of the San Francisco bars and restaurants that have been cited for violating the statewide ban on smoking since Jan. 1 have been gay bars, according to the *Bay Area Reporter*.



As of early February, inspectors had cited a total of 14 establishments over their inability or unwillingness to make customers comply with California's smoking ban. Of those 14, four have mostly gay clientele: Reflections on Polk Street, Trax on Haight Street, the San Francisco Eagle on Harrison Street and The Hole in the Wall on Seventh Street.

The article says in all the cases the owners were ordered to attend administrative hearings about complying with the new ban.

Four mayors have sent letters to President Clinton asking him to allow, or at least ignore, medical marijuana clubs in their cities.

The Associated Press reports the mayors—representing Oakland, San Francisco, Santa Cruz and West Hollywood—argued club closures would harm AIDS and cancer sufferers who use marijuana to combat pain and nausea.

Despite voter approval of a statewide initiative allowing possession and cultivation of the drug with a doctor's recommendation, federal prosecutors have targeted the clubs for violating laws against the possession and sale of drugs.



Seven men arrested at an adult bookstore in Livermore filed a federal lawsuit March 11 claiming they were targeted because they were perceived as gay. The plaintiffs also accuse city officials, business leaders and police of conspiring to shut down the store to clean up downtown's image.

The men were allegedly alone in video booths masturbating, visible to police only if officers looked under a partition, according to attorney Bruce W. Nickerson. City officials contend the booths are public and the arrests simply enforced decency laws.

Two dozen men were arrested, including a junior high school teacher who was sentenced to two years probation, fined \$250 and required to register as a sex offender. Most of the arrested men agreed to plea bargains to avoid being registered as sex offenders.

HAWAII
 The fight for legal same-sex marriage is drawing some powerful support. Oswald Stender, a trustee of Bishop Estate—one of the largest land-holding entities in the state—has joined the executive panel of Protect Our Constitution, a political action committee which aims to prevent the Legislature from amending the state constitution to allow prohibition of same-sex marriage.

According to the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, other prominent Hawaiians who have given their support to the PAC include Assistant U.S. Attorney Loretta Matsunaga and Wally "Famous" Amos.

NEW YORK
 In keeping with tradition, the Big Apple's St. Patrick's Day festivities involved the wearing of green, widespread beer consumption, a monumental parade and the arrests of Irish American queer-rights demonstrators.

According to United Press International, an estimated two dozen folks were arrested for protesting the parade because the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization is banned from marching behind its own banner.

The Ancient Order of Hibernians, the fraternal Irish Catholic group that organizes the event, has suggested ILGO members march with banners representing Irish counties.

In 1995, the Hibernians won a court ruling that the parade is a private religious event and therefore they are not required to include any group which asks to march.



TEXAS
 A judge has blocked the city of Houston from enforcing Mayor Lee Brown's executive order banning discrimination against lesbians and gay men in city government.

State District Judge Patrick W. Mizell agreed with opponents who argued the mayor lacks authority under the city charter to impose such an order. Mizell said the charter authorizes only the Houston City Council and the Civil Service Commission to make rules regarding discrimination.

After a briefing by city attorneys, Brown said he is considering an appeal.

Brown signed the order in January, fulfilling a campaign pledge to ban discrimination in city government on the basis of sexual orientation.

UTAH
 A student club, the East High Gay/Straight Alliance, is fighting discrimination—and the Salt Lake City Board of Education—in a lawsuit filed March 19 by three civil rights groups on behalf of two students.

The students, represented by Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, the National Center for Lesbian Rights and the American Civil Liberties Union chapters of Utah and Northern California, claim the board is violating the federal Equal Access Act, which requires public secondary schools accepting federal funds to allow all school clubs access to school facilities.

The lawsuit comes more than two years after the Salt Lake City School Board voted to ban 46 noncurricular clubs rather than allow the Gay/Straight Alliance to meet as a school-sponsored club.

Compiled by WILL O'BRYAN