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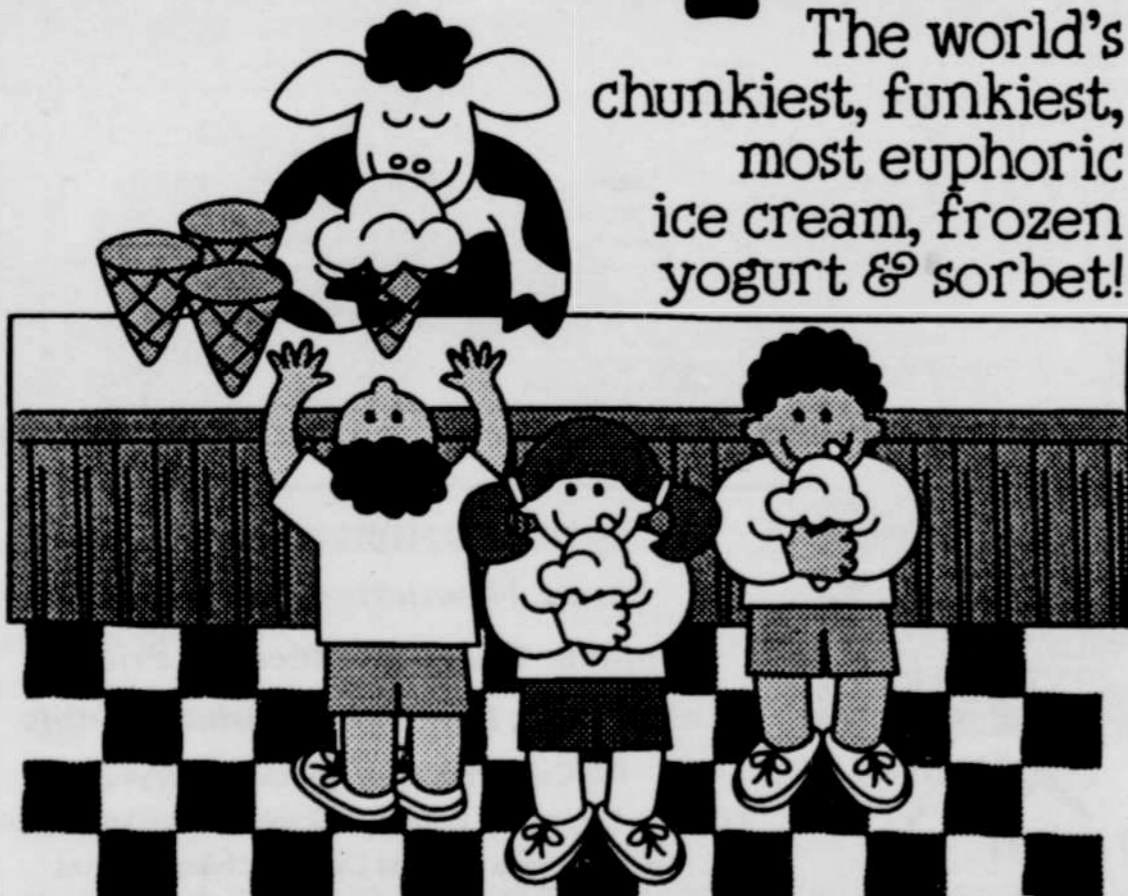
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## LOCAL news

### SALEM GAY MAN BEATEN; COP VOWS CASE WON'T BE HIS 'NO. 1 PRIORITY'

Given a decade of anti-gay initiative campaigns here in Oregon, it's no wonder hostility directed toward gay men and lesbians ensues, say gay rights advocates, who point to a March 29 assault on a Salem man as the most recent example of the divisiveness.

Redomer "Chuck" French, a 25-year-old gay man, was beaten by an acquaintance, resulting in hearing loss and facial lacerations. Witnesses say the attacker hurled gay epithets at French as he punched him and slammed his head against a door. French, who was taken to Salem Hospital, suffered a concussion and required more than two dozen stitches near his right ear.

"Anytime one of us gets beaten up, it's frightening for everybody," says Jean Harris, executive director of Basic Rights Oregon, a statewide gay and lesbian group. "You know, we're just trying to live our lives here."

A 38-year-old suspect, William Antone Hirni Jr., has been arrested and charged with assault. Police were reportedly looking into the possibility this was a bias crime, but have

not determined that to be the case at this point.

Prior to Hirni's arrest, Salem Police Lt. Bill Kohlmeyer told the *Statesman Journal*: "This particular case, while it's a bias crime, is still a relatively minor assault in the large scheme of things. We didn't get the impression from the report that the subject is out there randomly targeting gays.... I'm confident in saying this case is not going to be the No. 1 priority for this detective."

That attitude angers many, including Harris.

"Basic Rights Oregon will use whatever power we have with local Salem and state officials to say this is enough," she promises. "The gay bashing rhetoric and violence must stop."

The day after the beating, French's partner, Steve Mattix, told the *Statesman Journal*: "I was one of those people who never believed in gay rights. I believed we were equal until last night."

■ Reported by INGA SORENSEN

### NATIONAL VACCINE TRIAL COMES TO AREA

The Portland-based Research & Education Group has been selected to work on a trial of an HIV prevention vaccine, AIDSVAX, to be conducted in Oregon and southwest Washington.

Dr. Jim Sampson is planning to enroll 75 volunteers into the Phase III clinical trial sponsored by VaxGen Inc., the developer of AIDSVAX.

"This trial encourages efforts to further worldwide research in pursuit of an effective HIV vaccine," says Sampson.

The study is recruiting volunteers who are at risk for HIV infection but who are currently HIV-negative. Each volunteer will be given a total of seven inoculations during a 30-month period. Sixteen follow-up counseling sessions

with each volunteer will stress HIV and AIDS prevention messages.

AIDSVAX is designed to stimulate an immune response resulting in the production of antibodies that may hopefully identify and neutralize HIV.

More than 1,500 individuals have been enrolled in the trial, which will eventually reach 5,000 volunteers throughout North America. In Thailand, a similar trial will involve 2,500 volunteers at risk through injection drug use.

Earlier clinical trials have shown that AIDSVAX is safe for use in humans and induces a strong immune response. Volunteers cannot become infected with HIV by this vaccine. It is not made from live HIV-1 virus. To date, there are no known side effects except those that often occur with inoculations, such as soreness in the arm. For more information, call 229-8428.

### RIP IT DOWN AND SNAG A SURPRISE!

It's a nifty trick. "Our notices were always getting torn down," explains James Gray, a member of a queer student group at Linn-Benton Community College in Albany.

The notices listed the time and place the gay, lesbian, bi and trans student organization was to meet.

Instead of stewing, Gray and other group members came up with a plan. Under each meeting notice, they placed another message which informed the tearers-down: "You have just committed a hate crime."

Talk about getting right to the point. Seems at least one student doesn't approve. In a letter to the school newspaper, *The Commuter*, missive writer Nick Walton blasts the creative initiative, saying in part: "I think everyone needs to calm down and sit back and relax awhile. I personally (and this is opinion, based on my personal religion) do



not believe in abortion as a viable alternative to pregnancy either. But you don't see me getting all militant about it! And I for one am highly offended at the posters."

For his part, Gray hopes the letter spawns further dialogue about diversity issues on campus. As for the queer group's posters getting yanked down, he assesses: "It seems to be happening less now."

■ Reported by INGA SORENSEN