

Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian met with five gay activists Sept. 4 after the first-ever gay pride festival staged by the Taipei Bureau of Civil Affairs.

He invited Nan Hunter and Michael Bronski of the United States to meet with him, and they brought three Taiwanese activists along. "[The request] came completely out of the blue and was stunning to local activists," Hunter said.

She and Bronski discussed gay rights issues with Chen and gave him a rainbow flag and a rainbow lapel pin. The local activists urged him to enact laws to protect gays from discrimination.

The pride festival featured a band, dancers, a gay history exhibit and booths staffed by gay organizations. In preparation for the events, the city printed pamphlets for the general public explaining gay history and culture and that homosexuality is biologically based. Officials also published a guide to the island's gay groups and meeting places.

THAILAND

Police are refusing to close Silom Road for Bangkok's Nov. 5 gay pride parade.

They say it would create traffic chaos. Organizers are confused, because access was granted in previous years.

The *Bangkok Post* said the turn of events has thrown plans for the parade into "disarray." Organizers are seeking a meeting with police officials.

ITALY

The Vatican said Oct. 9 that Oscar Wilde's deathbed conversion to Roman Catholicism was real, even though he was only semi-conscious. "The time spent behind bars [on a gay-sex conviction] was decisive," said the Rev. Antonio Spadaro, writing in the Vatican-endorsed Jesuit publication *La Civiltà Cattolica*.



The priest summoned to Wilde's deathbed was "absolutely sure" that the conversion was authentic and that Wilde had renounced his life of degradation, vanity and frivolity, Spadaro said. The Jesuit magazine, founded in 1850, previously had condemned the famed gay author based on his poem "The Ballad of Reading Gaol."

Pope John Paul II denounced gay families Oct. 14.

Speaking to 300,000 people in St. Peter's Square for the Jubilee of the Family, part of the Roman Catholic Church's millennium celebration, he said: "No one but parents can know just how important it is for children to have both figures—that of a mother and of a father. It is not a step forward for civilization to favor those tendencies which put in the shade that elementary truth and would like to see themselves put on the same legal footing."



RUSSIA

Russia's National Center for the Fight Against AIDS began running newspaper

advertisements Oct. 11 recommending "virginity, masturbation and telephone sex" in place of intercourse. More cases of HIV have been reported nationwide this year than in the past 13 years combined.

The ads also promote "oral sex, condom use and limiting the number of sexual partners." Up to 400,000 Russians are thought to be HIV-positive.

CANADA

Tourism Toronto will spend \$20,000 to print brochures and set up a toll-free telephone line for gay and lesbian visitors, the local newspaper *Xtra!* reported.

"For about two or three years, Tourism Toronto has been looking at a 'visit gay-friendly Toronto' campaign," said Patrick Barry of Rainbow High Vacations, which lobbied for the campaign. "They're putting a lot of money into it."



COSTA RICA

Central America's only gay leather bar has opened in San José, Costa Rica. The Back Room is located downtown, just north of the Hotel Europa.

Costa Rica is more prosperous than most Latin American nations. The listing of gay bars, bathhouses, restaurants, organizations, hotels, stores and travel agencies in the local paper *Gayness* now takes up half a page.

FRANCE

More than 46,000 couples have registered under France's Civil Solidarity Pact law since it took effect in November 1999. Officials estimate between 50 percent and 70 percent of them are same-sex partners.



Registered couples acquire marriage rights and obligations in areas such as income tax, inheritance, housing, immigration, health care, job transfers, synchronized vacation time, debt responsibility and social welfare. The law does not grant parental, adoption or medically assisted procreation rights.

Polls show 70 percent of the French population supports the law. Several other European nations—including Denmark, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden—have gay-only registered partnership laws that grant more than 99 percent of the rights and obligations of matrimony.

The Netherlands also is in the final stages of legalizing traditional marriage for gays. It should be available to Dutch residents by Jan. 1.

Compiled by REX WOCKNER, who has reported for the gay press since 1985. He has a bachelor's degree in journalism from Drake University and started his career as a radio reporter.



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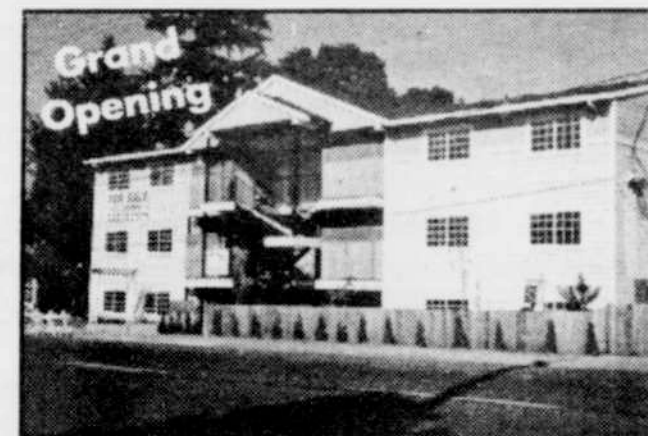
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