

NORTHWEST news

The ruling marks a historic step in Washington, but Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund expressed concern for Vasquez. His case was sent back to the trial court for further examination of his relationship with Schwerzler.

Vasquez now must suffer the indignity of "proving" his relationship through a trial while still deeply grieving the loss of his partner. Jennifer C. Pizer, senior staff attorney in Lambda's Western Regional Office, noted that tragedies like an unexpected death show why marriage is essential for lesbian and gay couples.

"This decision affirms that lesbians and gay men form committed, serious relationships with or without marriage, just like heterosexuals," she said. "It rightly judges all unmarried couples with the same standards. However, Frank Vasquez would not be in the sad, painful position of having to prove the nearly 30 years of love and commitment he and his partner shared if they could have married. We will continue to fight for that right."

Vasquez shared a home and business with Schwerzler. He died in 1995 without a will, and two years later his relatives sued to take all of the men's assets, including their home in Puyallup.

Applying a long-standing state equitable rule, a trial court upheld Vasquez's claim to the property, valued about \$230,000, that the two had acquired jointly during their relationship. An appellate court reversed that ruling.

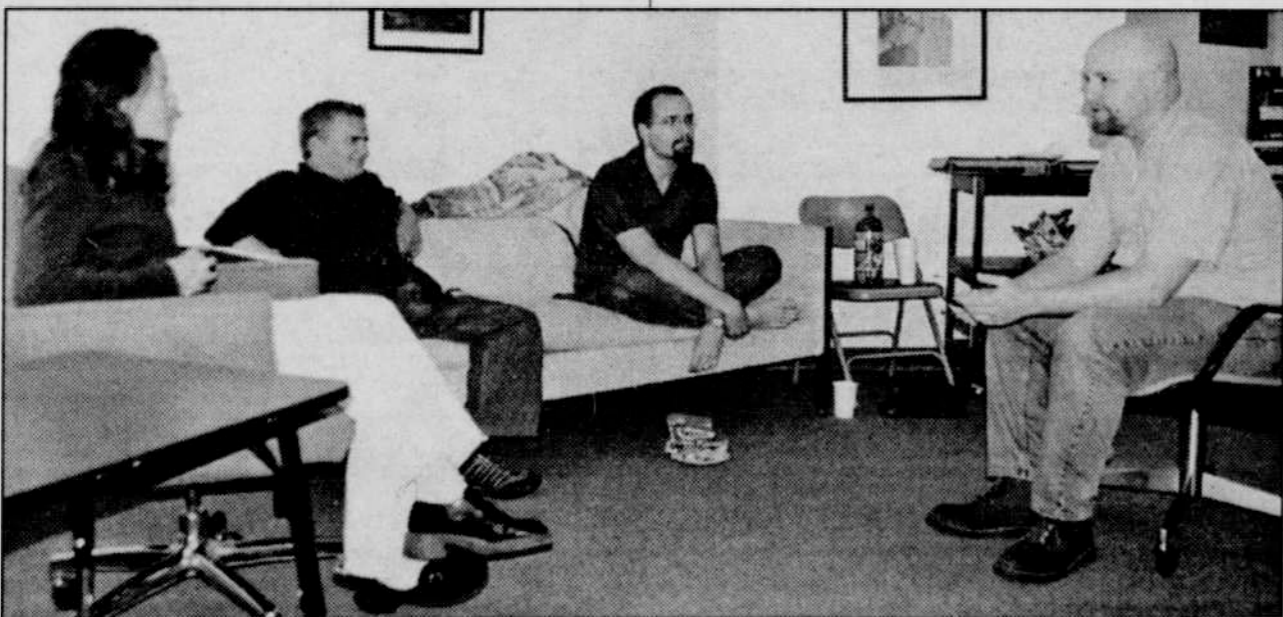
\$5,000 to hire a part-time field organizer who will help coordinate legislative efforts including civil rights and safe schools bills. The non-profit organization was formed in 1998 to protect the rights of gay, lesbian, bi and trans people in the state through lobbying in the Legislature and political contacts in the state and local governments.

"The Equality Fund grants have become an essential component in the struggle for equality and shows HRC's dedication to achieving success at the state level," says Seth Kilbourn, national field director. "Unlike most of the grants that tend to be available to organizations, the Equality Fund grants can be used directly for lobbying purposes. This means that GLBT groups can spend more time working to directly impact the decisions of lawmakers."

YOUTH SUPPORT GROUP GETS TO THE POINT

Triple Point—a support group offering education, support and advocacy to gay, lesbian, bi and trans and questioning youth in southwest Washington—is getting the word out about its weekly meetings.

The gatherings previously were held in downtown Vancouver at Cascade AIDS Project, but funding was cut, so now they are being sponsored by the Children's Home Society until a permanent home is found. The group meets



Triple Point co-facilitator John Furze (right) chats with teens during a recent meeting

"Many unmarried people, gay and straight alike, procrastinate about doing a will because none of us likes to think about death," Seattle attorney Suzanne Thomas explained. "It's a tremendous victory that Frank will have the chance to prove his case at trial, but it won't be pleasant. We all wish Bob had just gotten that will prepared."

No state in the United States offers same-sex couples the option of civil marriage, but in February legislators introduced a pair of bills that would bring civil unions to same-sex couples in Washington. A civil union bill also is pending in California. Civil unions, like those in Vermont, would greatly expand legal protections, rights, and responsibilities for lesbian and gay families.

WASHINGTON NONPROFIT RECEIVES \$5,000 GRANT

The Human Rights Campaign announced Oct. 31 it has awarded 23 Equality Fund grants totaling \$104,000 to lesbian, gay, bi and trans lobby groups across the nation. The money should help these organizations further advance equality at the state level, HRC says.

Washington's Fairness Lobby received

from 6 to 8 p.m. Tuesdays in the Youth House basement at 1112 Columbia St.

John Furze co-facilitates Triple Point with intern Jennifer Parks, who is pursuing a master's degree in social work at Portland State University. He says five to eight people between 13 and 21 years old—usually show up for the meetings.

"We're dealing with harassment at school, counseling services, standing up to school officials about their rights," Furze says. "The youth come in with different issues each week."

Meetings also feature speakers from organizations including Bridge 13 and Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. The group also discusses a number of issues such as body image and relationship problems, and Furze says the results have been positive.

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—John Furze

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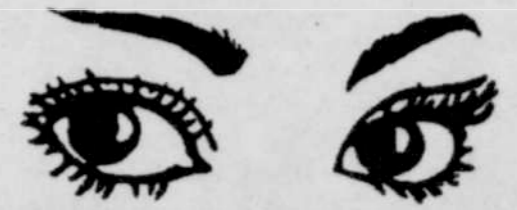
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