

# NORTHWEST newsbriefs

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ing all gay people from adopting children. "There are 3,400 children in Florida foster care in need of permanent homes," attorney Matt Coles said. "The state keeps these kids in limbo, burdening a child welfare system already in crisis, just so it can make a political statement against lesbians and gay men."

The ACLU argued that the Florida law violates equal protection guarantees. "Fortunately our Constitution says you can't enact laws to discriminate against a group of people," Coles said. "This law has nothing to do with child welfare, and every responsible person in the state knows it. It is shameful what the state has done to its children in the name of tired myths and stereotypes."

The lawsuit, first filed in 1998, came before the 11th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals after a lower court judge dismissed the case without allowing it to go to trial. "We are asking the federal courts to protect both the children of Florida who need loving, stable homes and their qualified parents from the irrational prejudices of our state legislators—prejudices that were placed in the law a generation ago," said Howard L. Simon, ACLU of Florida executive director.

Even though the state prevents gay men and lesbians from adopting, it frequently relies on gay people to be foster parents to children in need of stable homes. One of the three families represented by the ACLU in the case are Portlanders Steven Lofton and Roger Croteau, who are raising five children, including three foster kids from Florida. Although the children never have known any other family, they cannot be adopted by the couple because of Florida's law.

In another landmark case involving a Portlander, the ACLU urged U.S. Supreme Court justices March 5 to reject a law forcing libraries to censor constitutionally protected online speech by adults as well as children. At issue is the Children's Internet Protection Act, which requires any library receiving certain forms of federal aid to install Web "blocking" programs that censor a wide range of valuable material for adults and minors.

"The lower court described in detail just how flawed these Internet blocking programs are," attorney Chris Hansen said. "We are hopeful that the Supreme Court will agree that the government cannot force adults to use technology that routinely blocks access to a wide range of valuable Web sites."

Last May, a three-judge panel of the U.S. District Court in Philadelphia agreed with arguments made by the ACLU that blocking programs cannot effectively screen out only material deemed "harmful to minors." The court called the software a "blunt instrument," adding that "the problems faced by manufacturers and

vendors of filtering software are legion."

The court supported its ruling with more than 100 pages of detailed findings of fact, which established that "at least tens of thousands" of Web pages are wrongly blocked by the programs, including Web sites for the Knights of Columbus, a Christian orphanage in Honduras and several political candidates.

Significantly, the court cited the experience of library patrons who said that if the law had been in place they would not have been able to access socially valuable material on a library computer. Emma Rood, a 17-year-old Portland lesbian attending Simon's Rock College in Massachusetts, told the lower court that the law would have blocked her from finding information about human sexuality at her local library.

## CHORUS LENDS VOICE TO OPB

The Portland Gay Men's Chorus fielded telephone calls at an Oregon Public Broadcasting pledge drive March 2.

The station asked viewers to make donations during a broadcast of *He Touched Me*, which featured gospel songs by Elvis Presley. Sadly, publicist Shannon Grosswiler said OPB received a handful of complaints—fewer than 10 during the program itself as well as "a few residual calls"—from homophobic viewers.

"It was one of the best groups [we] ever had in there," she told *Just Out*. "They're definitely coming back."

## ELDER GROUP GETS A NAME

A 1-year-old organization for sexual minority senior citizens settled on a new name—Elder Resource Alliance—during its Feb. 5 meeting.

The group's goals are to develop a resource directory, establish speaking groups and fight homophobia among health care and service providers through cultural competency training. The alliance's next meeting will be held from 2 to 4 p.m. April 2 at the Friendly House Community Center, 2617 N.W. Savier St.

For more information contact Paul Iarrobino at 503-988-3620 or paul.iarrobino@co.multnomah.or.us or Eileen McClary at 503-224-2640 or emcclary@friendlyhouseinc.org.

## SHARE YOUR MEMORIES

Portland Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays is putting together a memory book in honor of co-founder Ann Shepherd, who died Jan. 4 at the age of 84. Members are

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Members of the Portland Gay Men's Chorus take to the phones March 2 for Oregon Public Broadcasting's pledge drive

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