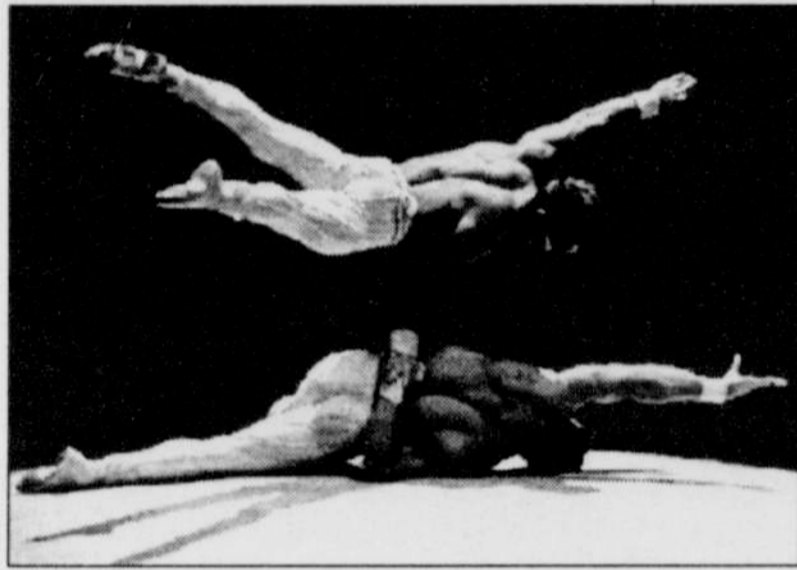


NATIONAL news

of state facilities in furtherance of discrimination, including bias based on sexual orientation.

Meanwhile, the Scouts received more bad news July 13 when the United Church of Christ passed a resolution during its national annual meeting in Minneapolis calling on the organization to "adopt a membership policy that does not discriminate based on sexual orientation." The vote by the 24th General Synod was overwhelming; the two-thirds majority required was far exceeded, with only a scattering of "no" votes.



A gymnast was fired from Cirque du Soleil's popular show *Mystère* because he is HIV-positive

CALIFORNIA

Arguing that Cirque du Soleil violated state and federal laws by denying a highly qualified gymnast an integral part in its popular show *Mystère* this spring, Lambda Legal filed a federal discrimination complaint against the company July 15 in Los Angeles.

Matthew Cusick, who has been living with HIV for 10 years and whose viral load was undetectable in two comprehensive medical exams by Cirque du Soleil's doctor, disclosed his status without incident when he was hired last summer. But after spending four months training in Quebec, Cirque du Soleil told him that because he has HIV it would not continue to employ him.

"For any gymnastics performer, working for Cirque du Soleil is a dream job," said Cusick, who also works part time as a personal trainer. "Maybe it's naive, but I never thought I'd be kept from pursuing my dreams because I'm HIV-positive. I thought society had gotten beyond thinking that people with HIV can only do desk jobs and never come into contact with people."

In a letter this spring responding to Lambda Legal's formal request to reinstate Cusick in the performance, Cirque du Soleil's attorneys said the company was acting as a "socially responsible employer" that has an obligation to avoid "known safety hazards." Federal and state laws prohibit discrimination against people with disabilities if they pose no real risk to themselves or others and if the illness doesn't interfere with their ability to do the job.

NEVADA

Republican Gov. Kenny Guinn has signed legislation concerning the hospital visitation rights of patients and providing a new classification for people who may participate in the disposition of a deceased person.



Nevada Gov. Kenny Guinn has signed a bill granting hospital visitation rights to same-sex couples

Senate Bill 386 was hailed by equal rights activists as an important step forward for same-sex couples and other people who are not legally related.

"This legislation represents another important step forward in the equal treatment of all Nevadans, regardless of the legal status of their relationships and friendships," said Ande Rice, Equal Rights Nevada chairwoman. "With very little effort, patients in Nevada can ensure the person who is most important in their life can be with them in the hospital."

The bill allows a person to designate through a simple letter who should be granted the same hospital visitation rights as legally defined family members. It also lays out a series of affidavits that would allow an individual to appoint the person who will make decisions about burial, cremation and organ donation. These rights previously were unavailable to unmarried couples in Nevada under any existing law.

"This is a remarkable achievement for gays and lesbians in Nevada," said Jere Keys, *Las Vegas Bugle* editor. "It shows that by teaming up with other groups, we can make true progress toward equality of all of us."

Rice explained that the bill isn't just a gay rights victory. "It affects the elderly who are on fixed incomes and cannot afford to get married and unmarried couples of all kinds."

MICHIGAN

An 18-year-old from Grand Rapids may have died as a direct result of a vicious sexual assault, *The Ann Arbor News* reported July 11.

Justin Bogdanik had been discovered in a ditch in Livingston County two weeks prior to his death July 8. According to published reports, the victim had "been beaten until he was unconscious, sexually tortured, and his eyes were glued shut."

"This incident, from what has been reported, bears all the markings of an anti-gay 'pick-up' crime, perpetrated by an extremely disturbed individual," said Jeffrey Montgomery, Triangle Foundation executive director. "We understand that police have not ruled out anti-gay motivation, which is important because it appears more than evident that, regardless of the actual sexual orientation of the victim, a perception that he was gay, or that gay sex was involved, is clear." □

Compiled by News Editor JIM RADOSTA, who can be reached at jim@justout.com.

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