

**NATIONAL news**

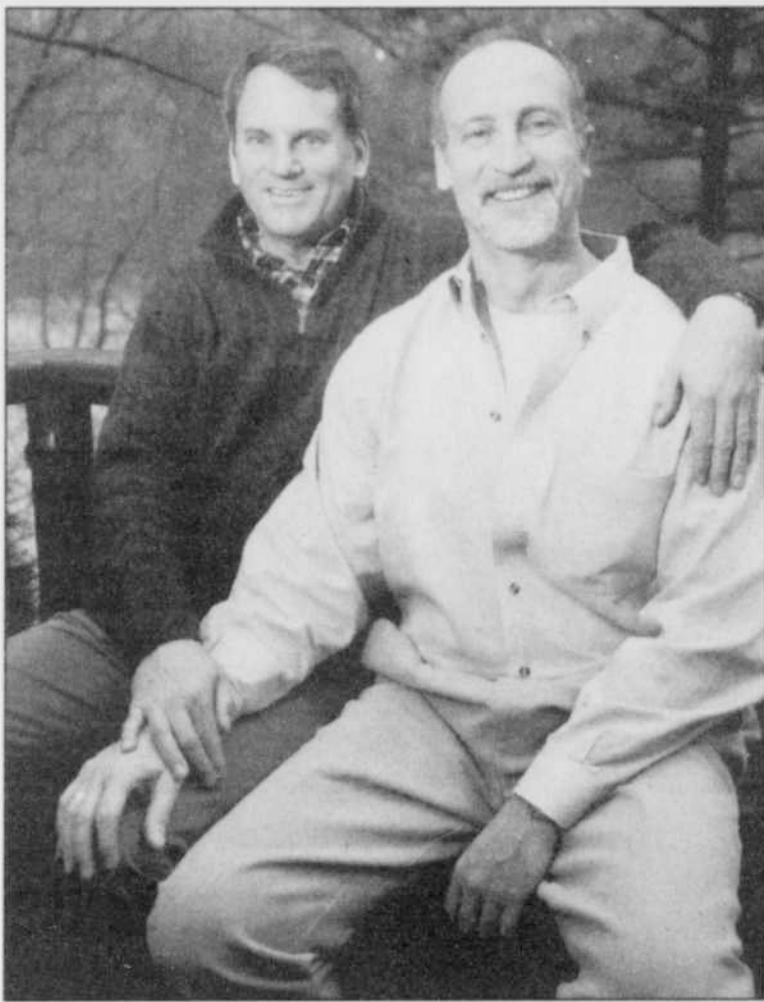
**NEW JERSEY**

Lambda Legal said Nov. 5 that it will appeal a trial-level state court ruling against legalizing marriage for same-sex couples in New Jersey.

"We're not surprised by this lower-court ruling," attorney David Buckel said. "More than anything, this ruling propels us forward to higher courts where both sides have always known it will be decided. Today's ruling speeds the clock up toward the day lesbian and gay couples in New Jersey can seek the protections they need for their families from the state's high court."

The historic lawsuit, filed in June 2002 on behalf of seven gay and lesbian couples, is based solely on the New Jersey Constitution. Therefore, the state's Supreme Court will have the last word in the case.

The words "husband," "wife," "spouse" or some form of "marry" appear in more than 850 separate provisions of New Jersey law. Beyond legal rights and responsibilities, Buckel noted, marriage is an enormous part of day-to-day life and is the most common way that couples prove their enduring commitment to each other.



Craig Hutchison and Chris Lodewyks, who have been a couple for 32 years, are suing the state of New Jersey for the right to marry

**OHIO**

In a historic victory, Cleveland Heights voted overwhelmingly Nov. 4 in favor of Issue 35, a measure establishing a domestic partner registry. While such registries exist in more than 60 localities nationwide, this win marks the first time a registry—or any other pro-gay measure—has been adopted through a ballot initiative.

The registry, which will be open to same- and opposite-sex committed couples, will provide them a certified record of their relationship. While conferring no outright benefits, this official documentation has been used in other jurisdictions with registries to qualify for health insurance benefits and to secure other basic rights, such as visiting a sick partner in the hospital.

The effort to create the registry started more than a year ago, after Cleveland Heights granted health benefits to domestic partners of city employees. Anti-gay groups then mounted a campaign to repeal those benefits, so Heights Families for Equality was formed in response. They then began gathering signatures to place the registry on the ballot so that everyone, not just city employees, would have some basic protections.

Dave Fleischer of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force noted that this victory marks the third consecutive year in which queers have successfully battled the forces of homophobia at the ballot box. "Up until 2001, our community lost three out of every four anti-gay or gay-related ballot measures. We've now won 11 out of 14—an unprecedented winning streak."

Fleischer added that Cleveland Heights represents the future for advancing equal rights. "Instead of waiting for the next attack by a homophobic ballot initiative, we go on the offensive and speak directly to voters about issues affecting our community—and that's exactly what happened here."

**WISCONSIN**

Democratic Gov. Jim Doyle vetoed legislation Nov. 7 that sought to define marriage in Wisconsin to exclude same-sex couples. He called Assembly Bill 475 "divisive and mean-spirited."

"Lesbian and gay couples are already excluded from over 1,000 rights and responsibilities that come with a civil marriage license," said Christopher Ott, executive director of

Action Wisconsin. "It couldn't be clearer to these couples that they don't have the right to visit each other in the hospital, to make medical decisions for one another or to share equal legal responsibility for their children. Marriage in Wisconsin is already defined as 'one man and one woman,' and that is painfully clear to these families. AB 475 just adds to the sting of that discrimination."

**NATIONAL**

Democratic presidential candidate and former Army Gen. Wesley Clark stated his support for a broad range of issues affecting the queer community in a questionnaire for the Human Rights Campaign released Nov. 12.

"All Americans should be treated with equality and dignity," he wrote. HRC has received the same questionnaire from the other eight candidates seeking the nomination and has not yet made an endorsement.

In terms of relationship recognition, Clark believes "same-sex couples deserve the same federal benefits, rights, privileges and responsibilities as opposite-sex couples," although he stopped short of supporting equal access to civil marriage licenses for same-sex couples. He signaled his support for civil unions as a mechanism to provide these rights to same-sex couples.

Clark backs two key pieces of legislation: the Employment Nondiscrimination Act, which would outlaw job bias based on sexual orientation, and the Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act, which would add sexual orientation, gender and disability to the 1968 law that covers crimes based on race, religion and national origin.

Clark also reiterated his opposition to "don't



Jim Doyle

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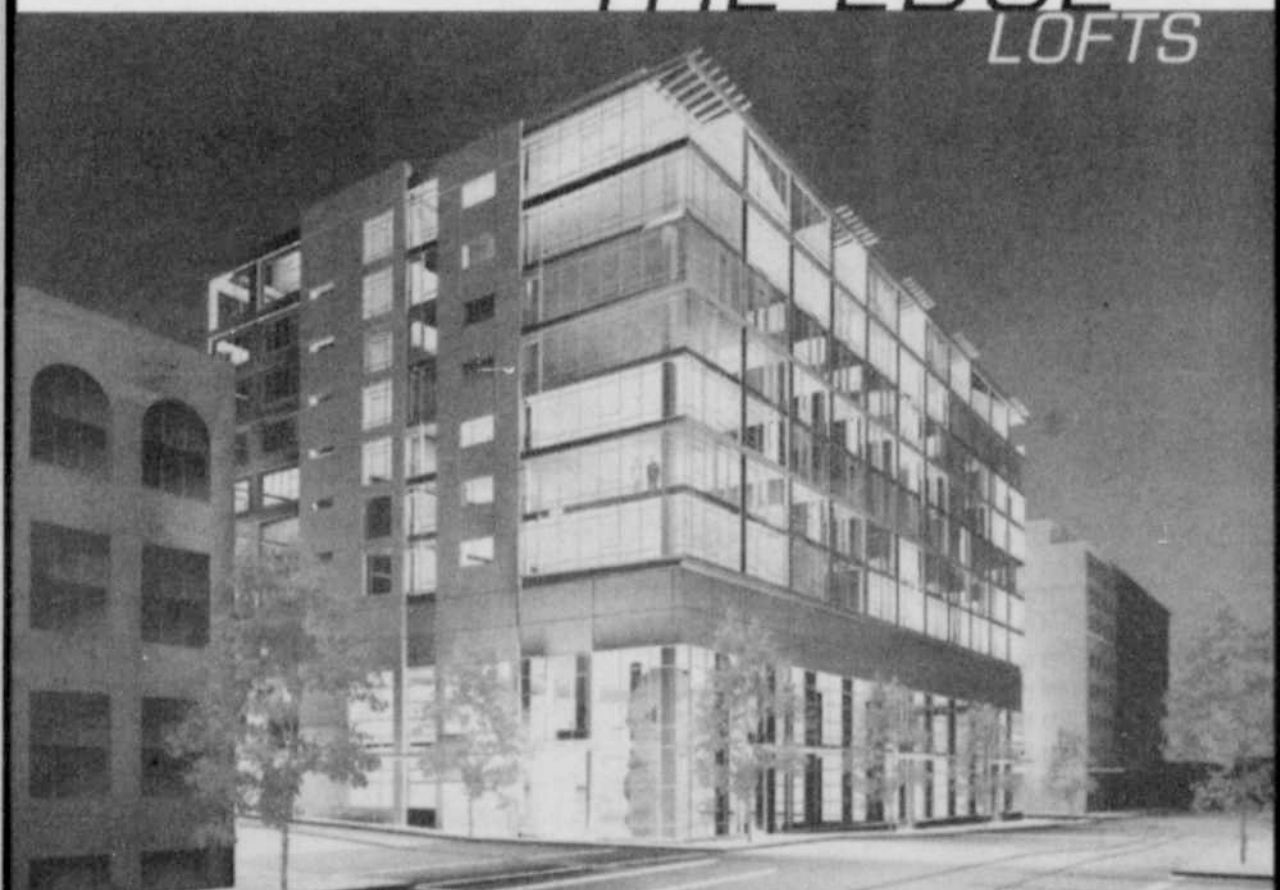
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