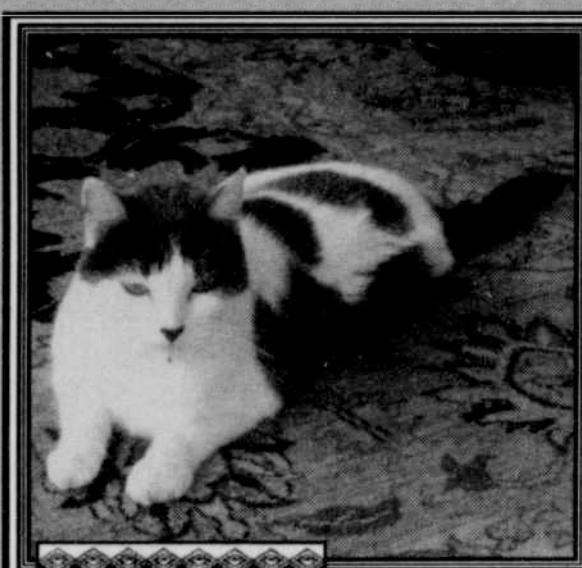


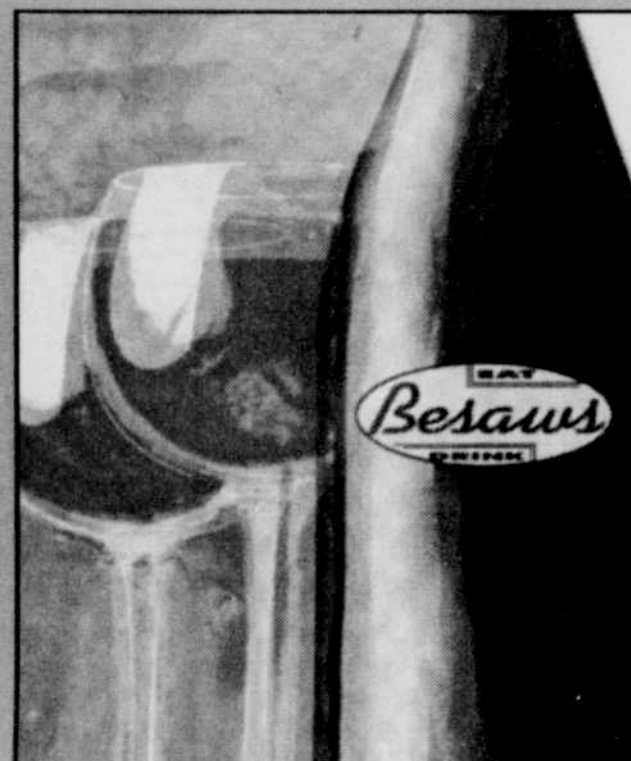
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SEE YOU IN COURT

Lawsuit seeks marriage equality for same-sex couples in Oregon

by Jim Radosta

The American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit March 24 challenging an Oregon law that discriminates against same-sex couples by denying them marriage and the rights and protections that come with it.

"Oregon's constitution doesn't allow people to be discriminated against because they are lesbian and gay, but that's exactly what Oregon's marriage law does," said Jann Carson, ACLU of Oregon associate director. "The lawsuit we filed today will help us get this issue addressed by the courts as quickly as possible so that same-sex couples will no longer have to face family hardships because they are unprotected by the law."

The lawsuit was brought on behalf of nine same-sex couples and Basic Rights Oregon. Four of the couples are already married after receiving licenses in Multnomah County, two of the couples were hoping to get licenses from Benton County before it decided to stop issuing all marriage licenses, two couples were denied marriage licenses in Lane County, and one of the couples has not applied yet. (See related article on Page 16.)

"Marriage is a commitment shared by two people who love each other and agree to look out for each other during the good times and the bad," said Roey Thorpe, BRO executive director. "Two adults who make this personal choice to form a lifelong commitment should not be denied the right to marry just because they are gay or lesbian."

The ACLU filed the lawsuit in accordance with an agreement among the parties already involved in cases that began after Multnomah County started issuing licenses March 3. Cases brought by the Defense of Marriage Coalition, which sought to invalidate the marriages of same-sex couples, will be dismissed on the condition that it is allowed to participate in the ACLU lawsuit.

A hearing on the constitutional issues raised in the complaint is expected in mid-April before Multnomah County Circuit Court Judge Frank Bearden, who said he intends to move the case through the trial court quickly. The couples are



Julie Williams (left) and Coleen Belisle explain why they are suing the state of Oregon for marriage equality during a press conference March 24 at Holocene

represented by the ACLU's Ken Choe and Portland attorney Lynn Nakamoto.

Public Hearings Filled with Emotion

The Multnomah County Commission held a series of intense public hearings March 25, March 31 and April 1 to give citizens an opportunity to testify about same-sex marriage. Chair Diane Linn said 225 people weighed in on the issue altogether.

During the April 1 hearing, the testimony was relatively balanced between supporters and opponents of same-sex marriage. Several newlyweds thanked the commissioners for recognizing their relationships, while the anti-gay crowd cited biblical passages and linked homosexuality to AIDS, pedophilia, incest, bestiality and "the beginning of the end of Western civilization."

After listening to hours of testimony, the commissioners voted 4-1 to reaffirm their support of the county's decision to end marriage discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation. Linn said talks will continue about how the process could have been handled better.

In another positive development, the Multnomah County Charter Review Committee voted March 23 against referring a charter amendment banning same-sex marriage to the November ballot. Also, the Multnomah County Citizen Involvement Committee voted March 18 against resolutions to punish the com-

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