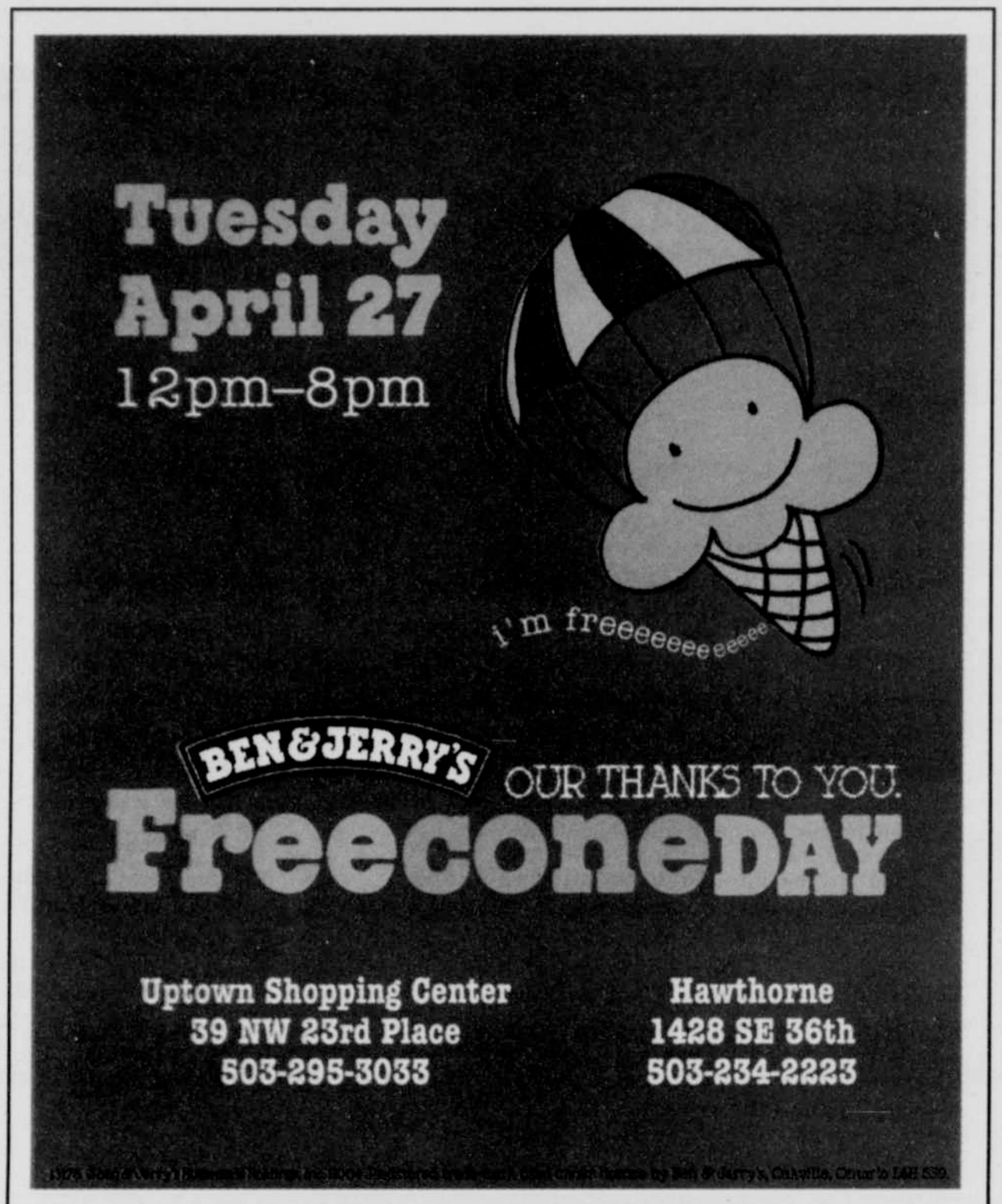

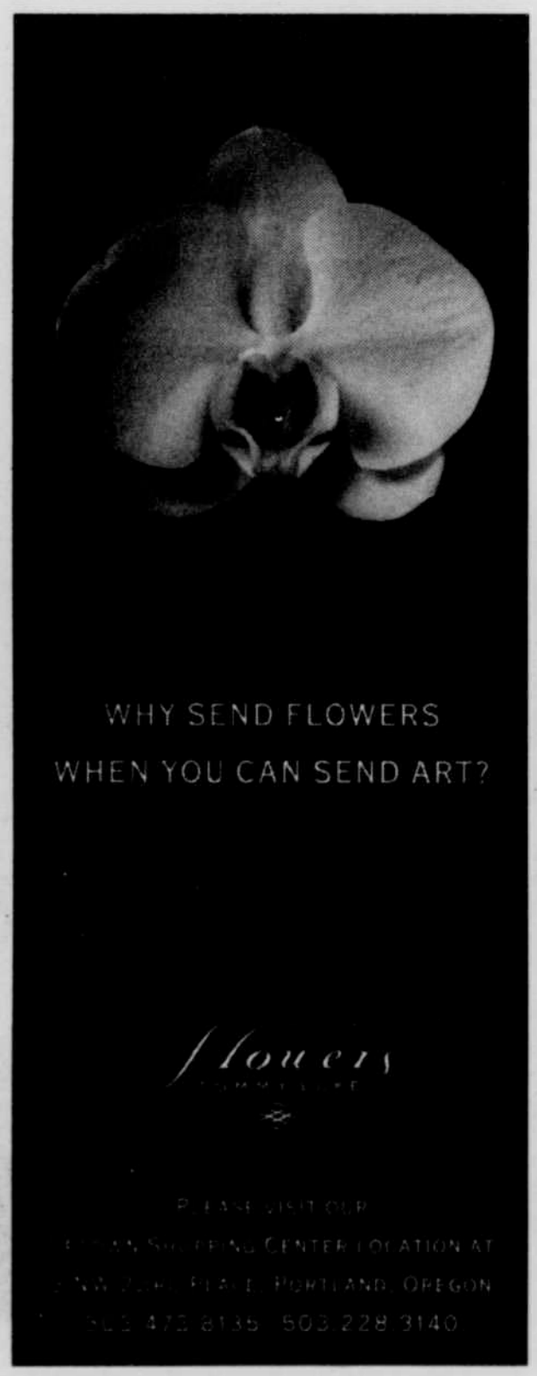

NORTHWEST news

Run for the Border

Couples marry in Oregon, sue in Washington

by Jim Radosta

The American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit April 1 against the state of Washington challenging the denial of marriage rights to same-sex couples.

The case was filed in Thurston County Superior Court on behalf of 11 couples from across the state who wish to marry in Washington or to have their marriage recognized under Washington law. Two of the couples were married in Portland.

Celia Castle, who has been a firefighter for 25 years, and Brenda Bauer, an attorney and director of contracting services for the city of Seattle, are the parents of two girls, ages 8 and 11. The couple have been together 16 years. Although they were married March 16 in Portland, Bauer would not be treated as Castle's survivor under Washington law if she were to die in the line of duty.

Police officer Judy Fleissner and attorney Chris Gamache were married March 19 in Portland. The Seattle couple, who have been together for 14 years, are the parents of a 7-year-old boy and a 4-year-old girl. Fleissner was not able to use family leave like other officers when their daughter was born, and Gamache would not be considered her spouse if she were to die in the line of duty.

"Same-sex couples who have formed families are being discriminated against solely because of their gender," said Kathleen Taylor, ACLU of Washington executive director. "The state of Washington has long acknowledged that gay and lesbian couples are suitable to be parents. We must no longer deny them the ability to marry."

The suit seeks a court ruling that the state laws regarding marriage shall apply without regard to gender, thus providing gay and lesbian couples the same legal rights and benefits now available to opposite-sex couples. The suit also asks the court to recognize same-sex marriages lawfully formed in other jurisdictions.

Vancouver Clergy Support Same-Sex Marriage

The Revs. Richard Jaech and Barbara Baech of Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church in Vancouver, Wash., are among the more than 160 religious leaders from across the state who have denounced the proposed constitutional amendment prohibiting same-sex marriage.

They are members of an ad hoc coalition, representing a wide spectrum of faiths, that came together after being galvanized by political efforts to legalize discrimination. Representatives gathered March 23 at Plymouth Congregational Church in Seattle to call on local, state and national leaders to extend the right to marry to queers.

The coalition opposes any legislation limiting the civil rights of gay and lesbian couples to join together in marriage. Religious leaders who have signed on to the statement hail from a range of faith traditions: Jewish, Buddhist and Christian, including Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, Unitarian Universalist, United Church of Christ and other denominations.

Phelps Counterprotests Planned

When the Rev. Fred Phelps comes to town April 17 to 19 to demonstrate against same-sex marriage, he'll be greeted by a number of counterprotesters.

The anti-gay preacher is traveling to Oregon from Topeka, Kan., where he leads Westboro Baptist Church and operates the Web site GodHatesFags.com. He achieved infamy for picketing the 1998 funeral of Matthew Shepard, who was murdered in an anti-gay hate crime.

Phelps is scheduled to picket from 11 to 11:30 a.m. April 18 at Portland State University, Southwest Sixth Avenue and College Street. A group of silent protesters will meet at 10 a.m. between Shattuck and Neuberger halls to prepare for his arrival. The plan is to make a ring around Phelps and his followers, hold up sheets and block them from view. A similar counterprotest was staged when Phelps protested at the trial of Shepard's murderers.

The next day, a group called Queer Revolution will confront Phelps when he pickets from 9:15 to 9:45 a.m. April 19 outside Portland City Hall, 1220 S.W. Fifth Ave. The idea is to create a street party with music and piñatas to take all focus off the notorious bigot.

PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

Rick Christman (left) of Save Portland Now and John Belgarde of the Oregon Christian Coalition stage the "Recall Rally for Answers 2004" April 12 outside the Multnomah Building. The bad news: They claim to have collected about half of the necessary signatures to recall Multnomah County Chair Diane Linn and Commissioner Lisa Naito. The good news: Fewer than a dozen supporters showed up for the alleged rally.