

NORTHWEST newsbriefs

WASHINGTON JUDGE RULES FOR SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

Thurston County Superior Court Judge Richard Hicks ruled Sept. 7 that state laws barring same-sex couples from marriage violate the Washington Constitution's guarantee of equal protection for all citizens. The government cannot give the legal benefits of marriage to one group of adult citizens but not to another, he said.

The ruling comes in a lawsuit filed five months ago on behalf of 11 couples who wish to marry in Washington or to have their marriage recognized under state law. Plaintiffs include a police officer, a firefighter, a banker, a nurse, a retired judge, a college professor and a business executive. They reside from Seattle to Spokane and from Port Townsend to Hoquiam.

"This is an important victory for fairness and equality," said Kathleen Taylor, American Civil Liberties Union of Washington executive director. "The judge ruled that government must treat same-sex couples the same as other couples. Two consenting adults who wish to enter into the commitment of marriage cannot be denied its benefits simply because they are of the same gender."

Current law deprives same-sex couples of numerous rights available as a direct benefit of the marriage contract. Among these are community property rights; access to family court; joint assessment of income and needs for determination of state assistance programs; access during health care emergencies and the ability to participate in health care decisions; survivor benefits; and authority to make decisions regarding funeral arrangements.

The court rebuffed arguments that same-sex marriage destabilizes the family, noting that gay and lesbian couples have already been found to serve as capable foster and adoptive parents. In his ruling, Hicks pointed out that marriage equality actually strengthens the community: "Our fundamental principle is that we share the freedom to live with and respect each other and share the same privileges or immunities. We need each other."

Hicks concluded: "Democracy means people with different values living together as one people. What can reconcile our differences is the feeling that with these differences we are still one people. This is the democracy of conscience."

In April, King County Superior Court Judge William Downing ruled that Washington's laws limiting marriage to opposite-sex couples violate the state constitution. In that case, eight same-sex couples sued King County for refusing to give them marriage licenses. Both rulings are expected to be heard by the Washington Supreme Court, most likely on the same day.

The ACLU of Washington started working to secure marriage equality more than 30 years ago. In 1971, it represented John Singer and Paul Barwick when they sought to obtain a marriage



Pamela Coffey and Valerie Tibbett of Friday Harbor (above) and Lauri Conner and Leja Wright of Seattle are suing the state of Washington for the right to marry

license in Washington. The Washington Court of Appeals sided with the state, ruling that marriage is the "appropriate and desirable forum for procreation and the rearing of children" and therefore not applicable to gays and lesbians. Hicks, however, said that "the community, and its values, has substantially changed" since then and that the Singer case "cries out for re-examination."

UP, UP AND AWAY!

Basic Rights Oregon will hold its annual dinner Oct. 2 in the Portland Ballroom at the Oregon Convention Center, 777 N.E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. Cocktails will be served at 6:30 p.m., and the program will start at 7:30.

The 2004 theme is "The Amazing Year of Superheroes," and donors are welcome to come dressed as their favorite superhero. "We're honoring our local treasures, the incredible talent that people have shown in our state," BRO executive director Roey Thorpe told *Just Out*.

The dinner will honor many of the people behind Oregon's push for same-sex marriage: commissioners in Multnomah and Benton counties, the American Civil Liberties Union and BRO's Legal Advisory Group. In addition,



Portland Mayor Vera Katz will receive a Career Achievement Award, and activists from Central Oregon will be recognized for the passage of a civil rights ordinance that bans bias based on sexual orientation and gender identity in Bend. Daria O'Neil of KRSK-FM and KPDX-TV will be the host, and gay entertainer Wade McCollum of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* and *Bat Boy: The Musical* will entertain along with singer Julianne Johnson. Tickets are \$125.

All of the money raised during the dinner will help the No on Constitutional Amendment 36 campaign place advertisements on television to convince voters to oppose the anti-gay ballot measure, but Thorpe also is looking toward the future. "We recognize that it's important for all of us to focus on November," she said, "but win or lose, Basic Rights Oregon will be there on the front lines in the 2005 legislative session and beyond."

To reserve a seat, call 503-222-6151 or visit www.basicrights.org by Sept. 24.

CANDIDATES FACE OFF AT POLITICAL FORUMS

In less than two months the Rose City will elect its first new mayor since Vera Katz took office 12 years ago.

The front-runner, former Portland Police Chief Tom Potter, is a member of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. His opponent is City Commissioner Jim Francesconi, whose vacated seat will be filled by Nick Fish, a labor attorney, or Sam Adams, Katz's former chief of staff, who would be the first openly gay member of the Portland City Council if elected.

Queers have several upcoming opportunities to hear the Portland politicians pitch their platforms:

- **League of Women Voters of Portland:** Meet all four candidates during a free, unbiased, informational town hall forum 7 p.m. Sept. 22 in Bishop Morris Hall at St. David of Wales Episcopal Church, 2800 S.E. Harrison St. Speak with the candidates and register to vote during an informal coffee hour afterward. For more information call 503-285-9041.

- **City Club of Portland:** Adams and Fish will debate during the Friday Forum from 12:15 to 1:15 p.m. Sept. 24 in the third-floor ballroom of the Governor Hotel, 611 S.W. 10th Ave. General seating is free for members and \$5 for non-members. Coffee/tea tickets are \$5. Lunch tickets are \$16 for members and \$18 for nonmembers and can be reserved by calling 503-228-7231 or visiting www.pdxcityclub.org before 2 p.m. Sept. 22.

- **KBMS-AM:** The mayoral candidates will participate in a panel addressing issues facing black voters from 6 to 9 p.m. Sept. 29 at Reflections Coffeehouse, 446 N.E. Killingsworth St. Time will also be allotted during the forum for a question-and-answer period.

- **Community Association of Portsmouth:** The Rev. Jeanne Knepper will moderate a mayoral candidate forum from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Oct. 8 at University Park United Methodist Church, 4775 N. Lombard St. Refreshments will be served afterward, when attendees will have an opportunity to speak with the candidates. More than one-third of the welcoming congregation's members are queer.

LESBIAN RAISES MONEY TO FIGHT LEUKEMIA, LYMPHOMA

Jeanette Jansson lost her cousin to leukemia nearly two decades ago, but the Portland lesbian is carrying on the fight for a cure.

Jansson is training to complete the Honolulu Marathon on Dec. 12 to raise money for the Oregon chapter of the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. The 35-year-old, who is a registered

Continued on Page 9

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Floreid Walker

3529 NE Broadway^{STE 100}
Portland, OR 97232
503.445.9390 ext.101
floreid@wfgadvisors.com



Greg Look

3550 Liberty Rd. S^{STE 230}
Salem, OR 97302
503.566.7266 ext.114
greg@wfgadvisors.com



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