get of an anti-gay arsonist July 8. The congregation defied the attack by holding services outside under tents.

"Throughout the nation and the world, religious fundamentalists of all the major faiths are inflicting violence on those who don't believe exactly as they do," pastor Dorcas Lohr said in her revised sermon.

The church suffered graffiti as well as fire. Two church members discovered the fire and the words "UCC Sinners" and "Gays Lovers" spray-painted on the side of the main building. Police and fire investigators are looking into the incident as a hate crime.

TEXAS

Texas Music Association Discriminates Against Boy Soprano

Mikhael Rawls, a Texas high school senior, won't be performing before music college recruiters next school year. He won't even have the chance to audition for an elite ensemble of Texas high school singers. The Texas Music Educators Association eliminated this possibility for Rawls when it rejected his audition request for a soprano position, which is traditionally for girls.

The music association began prohibiting boys from singing soprano or alto, and girls from tenor or bass, two years ago, according to KXAS-TV.

Rawls often sings "countertenor," which was a popular part in the 17th and 18th centuries, when women were excluded from singing groups. It was rarely heard in modern times until an English singer revived it about 60 years ago. Today men can be found singing countertenor in music schools across the country.

Rawls hopes to pursue a joint degree in vocal performance and liberal arts from the New England Conservatory and Harvard University after high school graduation.

"Music education, like all education, should be about helping young people realize their full potential and achieve their dreams. Discrimination against male or female students is just plain wrong," said Lindsay Bond, GenderPAC's youth program coordinator.

MISSISSIPPI

Equality Mississippi Calls for Disqualification of Judge

Mississippi Supreme Court Judge Mike Randolph spoke publicly of his opposition to laws granting marriage to same-sex couples at an Exchange Club event July 8 in McComb.

Judge Mike Randolph has been called out by Mississippi civil rights organizations for airing his private views on same-sex marriage.

Equality Mississippi, the state's advocate for the rights of its queer citizens, noted that these comments were in violation of the Mississippi Judicial Code of Conduct. This code states that no judge shall speak publicly his or her opinion on matters that may come before the court nor give a public opinion in regards to certain classes of citizens. Those classes, as outlined in the code, include race, religion and sexual orientation.

According to Equality Mississippi, Randolph has cast reasonable doubt on his capacity to act impartially as a judge in queer-related cases because of his public expression of bias against marriage laws for same-sex couples.

In addition, the organization called for Randolph to disqualify himself from hearing and ruling on any case involving gay and lesbian people that may come before him during the rest of his professional career as a judge. Joining Equality Mississippi in calling for Randolph's disqualification were Sister Spirit of Ovett, the Mississippi Gay & Lesbian Alliance of Jackson and the American Civil Liberties Union of Mississippi, among others.

CALIFORNIA

Court Called on to Decide Same-Sex Marriage Controversy

The California Supreme Court was urged July 7 to decide whether same-sex couples must be permitted to marry under the state constitution.

California Attorney General Bill Lockyer asked the justices July 1 to review a trial court decision holding that excluding same-sex couples from the right to marry violates the California Constitution. That ruling by San Francisco County Superior Court Judge Richard A. Kramer has been stayed pending appeal.

The National Center for Lesbian Rights is lead counsel in the case, Woo vs. Lockyer, representing Equality California, Our Family Coalition and 12 same-sex couples. Executive director Kate Kendell issued the following statement: "Every day, we remember the faces of the couples that married in San Francisco in the winter of 2004. We remember the faces of their children. All filled with the joy of finally having full legal recognition of their relationships. Those same faces haunt us, filled with sadness, but also determination. Real lives, real families are on the line, each and every day, waiting for the court to rule. We urge the Supreme Court to accept immediate review of the case and to uphold Judge Kramer's decision."

WISCONSIN

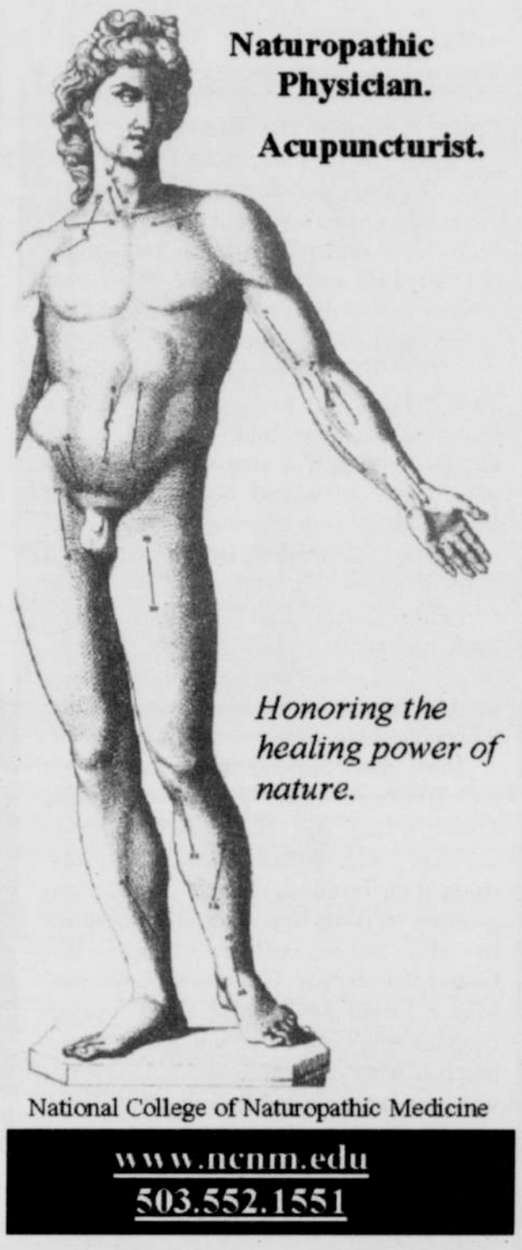
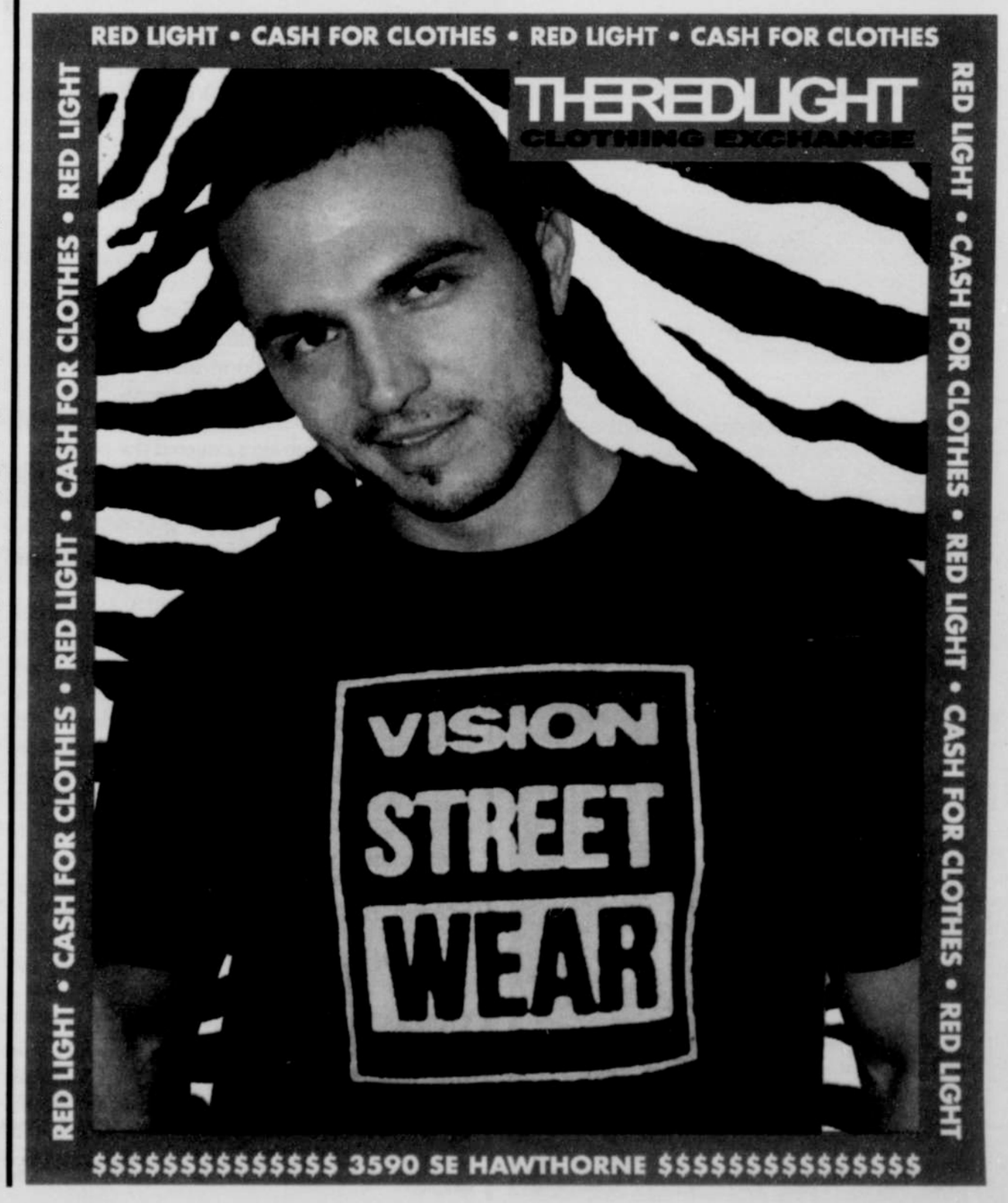
HRC Gives Big to Wisconsin Amendment Fight

The Human Rights Campaign has announced a $50,000 contribution to Action Wisconsin to fight an amendment to the state constitution that would deny civil unions and marriage to same-sex couples.

The Brico Fund, a Milwaukee-based organization working to drive change that creates a more just and equitable society, has also donated $75,000 to Action Wisconsin and the Milwaukee-based Center Advocates. These contributions are also challenges to the queer and progressive communities to match the levels given to Action Wisconsin and Center Advocates for the fight.

Action Wisconsin, the statewide queer advocacy group, will use the funds to hire a campaign manager, build a data system to manage voter information and put together a robust field plan to mount a campaign against discrimination in the Wisconsin Constitution.

"We are very thankful for this major investment in the Wisconsin campaign from such a strong state and national partnership," said Action Wisconsin executive director Christopher Ott. "These contributions will allow us to increase the already unprecedented level of support we are finding for our work to reject discrimination in Wisconsin."

The constitutional amendment, which would deny marriage as well as civil unions and domestic partner benefits to same-sex couples, was passed by the Wisconsin Legislature in 2004. The measure must pass again this legislative session. If passed, it could be on the ballot as soon as November 2006.

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