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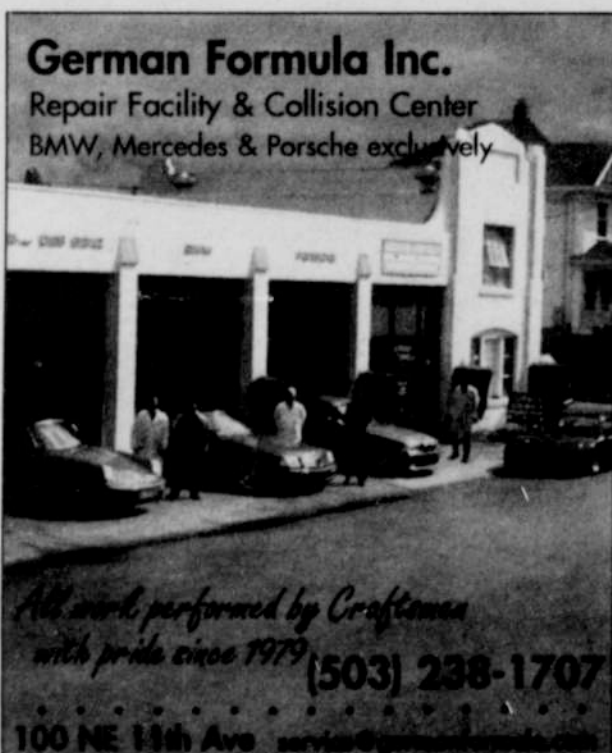
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WORLDnews

INTERNATIONAL PRIDE AROUND THE PLANET

About 500 people marched in the first large-scale Gay Pride parade in Athens, Greece.

"The only way to safeguard our rights is for everyone to understand that homosexuality is a reality and that people should not behave as if we don't exist," marcher Maria Gouma told *The Scotsman* newspaper.

About 300,000 people turned out for Pride in Paris. The procession snaked from the Montparnasse train station to the Bastille. The parade was so massive that some marchers waited hours to step off from the Left Bank starting point.

About 250 people marched in Kolkata (Calcutta), India, "dressed in gaudy, revealing clothes," said Rediff.com. Police made no effort to halt the parade even though homosexuality is illegal. "We want to tell the world we exist," said Teesta, a 27-year-old student.

More than 125,000 people turned out for Toronto's 25th parade—including Police Chief Bill Blair. According to CTV.ca, "The parade showcased everything from bronzed, scantily clad dancers gyrating on floats to pounding dance music to the more sedate groups, like Grandparents for Gays and Lesbians." Mayor David Miller told the Canadian Broadcasting Corp.: "To me, it sums up so much of what Toronto is about. Everyone's welcome here, everyone's respected. We're very proud we're the place where same-sex marriage, the first one [in Canada], was performed." Members of the Ontario Provincial Police marched for the first time, including two female officers holding hands, the CBC said.

About 4,000 people marched in Edinburgh, Scotland—from Waverley Station, down Princes Street to the Gay Village. Asked what happened after the parade, Pride Scotia (Edinburgh) Convener John Hein said: "Lots of people got very drunk, a few went to the Health and Community Fair, and then there was a big loud-popular-noise thing called Ocean Pride held from 10:30 p.m. to 3 a.m. at Ocean Terminal."

Panama saw its first Gay Pride parade June 25. About 70 people marched, with at least an equal number walking along on the sidewalks, out of view of media cameras. Six newspapers, five radio stations, two television stations and numerous Web sites covered the parade.

"For being our first-ever march, that was quite a turnout—definitely beyond what we were expecting," said Javier Rodríguez of the New Men and Women Association of Panama, which organized the parade.

"This, for me, is the first time that I've been able to gauge an actual 'gay community' in Panama," Rodríguez said. "All these years, everyone's been talking about such a community. To me, it had never existed until now.... This is the first time that the different actors—from the clubs to the boutique to the bathhouse to the bars to the Web site—have responded to the call of one actor, our group, and joined efforts to make something, anything, happen!"

At the end of the parade, 600 balloons were released, 100 for each color of the rainbow flag.

AMERICAS

QUEERS MARCH IN VENEZUELA

More than 3,000 queers marched July 3 in the largest-ever Pride parade in Caracas, Venezuela—from Plaza Brion to Plaza de los Museos. They demanded legal recognition of same-sex relationships and an end to police abuse.

"We're in the streets to obtain equality and the respect of society," Jesús Medina, president of Lambda Alliance, told the newspaper *Últimas Noticias*. "This is a cause similar to ones in the



Referring to his city's Pride festival, Toronto Mayor David Miller told the CBC, "Everyone is welcome here."

past to end racial discrimination and for women's rights to work and vote."

EUROPE

RULING EXTENDS GERMAN PARTNER BENEFITS

Berlin's Administrative Court ruled June 24 that people united under Germany's same-sex partnership law are entitled to each other's pension when one of them dies.

The court redefined the word "spouse" in pension benefit plans. More than 6,000 same-sex couples have registered since 2002.

POLES PROTEST U.S. GAY CHORUS

The Boston Gay Men's Chorus got less than a unanimous welcome at its June 27 concert in Wroclaw, Poland—the nation's first such performance.

The League of Polish Families staged a crude demonstration, and the singers had to be transported to the concert site in secure buses and protected by police as they entered the building.

Ticket sales were suspended after the league threatened to buy up all remaining tickets and occupy Philharmonic Hall during the performance. Sales were reopened just prior to the concert, and 450 of the hall's 500 seats were filled.

"Early in the day, we noticed a substantial police presence at our hotel, with two large blue police vans filled with four armed police at each entrance," said chorus executive director Steve Smith. "Chorus members were advised to stay in the hotel."

"Although the concert hall was only four blocks away, we were required to be transported to the concert in buses that received police escort. At the hall, I saw more than 25 armed policemen forming a secure path to the concert hall from the street. Five more vans with obvious riot gear were parked next to the hall."

As the singers entered the building, protesters called them pedophiles and disease carriers.

But inside the hall, the chorus received numerous standing ovations. "The chorus had to re-enter the stage twice for bows after the concert," Smith said. "Literally hundreds of people were visibly in tears."

ASIA/PACIFIC

MUSLIMS DISRUPT

TRANSVESTITE PAGEANT

About 10 members of Indonesia's Islamic Defenders' Front barged into a Jakarta nightclub during the Miss Transvestite pageant June 28. They left after 20 minutes, when pageant organizers agreed to wrap up the contest earlier than planned.

"We were all traumatized. They said we were immoral, but God created us this way," organizer Megi Megawati told *The Associated Press*.

NEW ZEALAND CIVIL UNIONS SLOW TO CATCH ON

Only 56 couples have tied the knot since New Zealand's comprehensive civil union law came into force April 26—23 female couples, 23 male couples and 10 heterosexual couples.

About 1,700 straight couples get married in New Zealand each month, reported *Stuff.co.nz*. Civil union couples are granted the same rights as married people.

ANTI-GAYS MARCH IN FIJI

Even though there are no proposals to legalize same-sex marriage, 200 Methodists marched against it June 25 in the Nausori neighborhood of Suva, Fiji.

"A marriage between two men is very sinful. It's against God's law," the Rev. Kalivati Ravoka told *The Fiji Times*. "We need to make a stand before it happens.... The legalization of gay marriage will bring other ungodly acts to our country."

The Rev. Malakai Tuikadavu added: "These people who have this spiritual disease do not like to listen. Even if we talk to them nicely and in the right way, they still look at us and walk the opposite way.... This is a sickness and can be healed.... It is a sickness caused by the devil."

The Sexual Minorities Project tried to stop the march by writing to



Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai thinks gays are "not a serious problem" in his country.

church leaders, the attorney general and the Fiji Human Rights Commission.