

IRS tackles anti-gay bias of agents

by Peg Byron
Special to Q-Notes

NEW YORK—Following two high-profile episodes of anti-gay bias at the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the agency has promised that its management will travel to field offices across the country and train agents to provide fair treatment to groups supporting gays.

Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund has been urging the IRS to take agency-wide action against anti-gay bias by its agents. In the past year, Lambda represented two lesbian and gay community organizations that initially were denied 501(c)(3) tax exempt status because of their gay-related missions.

"The IRS is taking a meaningful step by addressing anti-gay bias nationally, through training of all the field agents who first see and act upon applications from lesbian and gay groups for tax-exempt status," said Lambda staff attorney David Buckel, adding, "We'll keep hoping and pressing for other meaningful action throughout the entire agency."

In a letter, Marcus Owens, IRS Director of the Exempt Organizations Division, said: "To ensure that the statement I made to you concerning the application of the law in a fair and nondiscriminatory manner is a reality, I along with other EP/EO [Employee Plan/Exempt

Organizations] executives will be traveling to our field offices to speak with our agents about the need for professionalism, impartiality and fairness in their dealings with all taxpayers. To address concerns with bias, we will illustrate those concepts with examples that specifically address the issues of bias against groups that are supportive of gay men and lesbians."

The IRS director added that he was forwarding Lambda's request to Charles Fowler, national director of the agency's Office for Equal Employment Opportunity and Diversity, who has responsibility for agency-wide policy and training concerning anti-discrimination, including sexual orientation issues.

In the past year, Lambda successfully challenged IRS negative responses to applications for tax-exempt status by Kathys' Group and the Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Support System (GLASS), which are all-volunteer, not-for profit organizations. Kathys' Group provides support services for lesbians with cancer in Rhode Island while GLASS assists lesbian and gay youth in Greensboro, NC. As a condition for tax-exempt status, the IRS had ordered Kathys' Group to expand its mission beyond the lesbian community and required GLASS to discourage the "development of homosexual attitudes and propensities by minor individuals." ▼

Raffle helps hotline go national

by Don Bapst
Special to Q-Notes

SAN FRANCISCO—The nation's only nighttime HIV telephone support program, the AIDS/HIV Nightline, has expanded from a California-based hotline to a national service thanks to the charitable efforts of the travel industry. The program's \$50,000 budget is being met with the proceeds from a gigantic charity raffle organized by the industry.

Lufthansa, Air France, British Airways and LTU International Airways are four of the pioneer contributors who began raising money for the hotline as early as 1994. Dozens of other travel professionals joined their example in following years, and this year's raffle has more industry professionals participating than ever.

By the end of the year, AIDS/HIV Nightline volunteers will have handled 20,000 30-minute counseling calls.

"We could not have expanded to a national service if it was not for the efforts of the travel industry," said David Paisley, director of AIDS/HIV Nightline. "The vast majority of our national funding comes from the World Travel Raffle."

Asked why a small San Francisco non-profit expanded to a national program, Paisley responded, "We always hoped that similar programs would open in other regions of the country. After eight years, we remained the only latenight hotline out there. We saw the need and knew we needed to fill it, but funding was a problem. Around that time, I attended a Gay and Lesbian Travel Expo run by Community Marketing and I spoke with the organizers to ask how we could work with the travel industry on this important cause."

Community Marketing, Inc. is one of the leading consulting agencies in gay travel and operates the annual Gay and Lesbian World Travel Expo in San Francisco and New York. It is also the parent company of the Travel Alter-

natives Group, a consortium of over 300 travel professionals who market to the gay and lesbian community.

Tom Roth, president of the organization, helped gather the support to make the World Travel Raffle a reality. "After David approached us, we went right to our best contacts in the travel industry and asked them to make the AIDS/HIV Nightline financially possible. Industry professionals responded with overwhelming generosity."

Roth added that he was thrilled to help an organization that has kept its overhead low by keeping administration costs to a minimum. "People often donate money to large agencies without knowing how the money is spent or if the donation has made any real difference. The exciting thing about the World Travel Raffle is that every cent raised pays for the toll charges of a person with HIV who needs support and counseling in the middle of the night."

Raffle prizes at this year's World Travel Expo include luxury vacations from Lufthansa, Kempinski Hotels and Der Travel Services, as well as tickets from Air France, Alaska Airlines, British Airways, LTU International Airways, Pleasant Hawaiian Holidays and Rail Europe. Other prizes have been donated by Cruisin' the Castro, Hyatt Regency San Francisco, Island House South Beach, le Montrose Hotel West Hollywood, Lonely Planet, National Car Rental, Red & White Fleet, San Francisco Marriott, Thrifty Car Rental, Travel Friends Dallas and Travel Impressions.

The 1998 raffle drawing will be held October 22 at the Gay and Lesbian World Travel Expo in San Francisco. Anyone can order raffle tickets by mailing a check payable to "AIDS/HIV Nightline" to PO Box 191350, San Francisco, CA 94119. The cost is \$4 for one ticket, \$20 for 5 tickets and \$100 for 35 tickets.

To reach an AIDS/HIV Nightline counselor, call toll free 1-800-628-9240. ▼

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