

## news notes

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### CORRECTION:

In a news item in last issue's News Notes, based on an article from the *New York Times*, Connecticut Republican Rep. Brian J. Flaherty was incorrectly identified as having come out. It was instead Democratic Rep. Patrick J. Flaherty who revealed he is gay.

### Carolinas

#### Priscilla's under attack

CHARLOTTE, NC—Charlotte/Mecklenburg zoning officials say Priscilla's, a frequent advertiser in gay publications, is breaking the law by selling sex toys, adult magazines and videos, and they're going to order it to stop. According to Zoning Administrator Robert Brandon, Priscilla's violates Charlotte's zoning ordinance because it is, by legal definition, an adult bookstore within 1500 feet of a residential neighborhood. Brandon said his office will soon send a letter to store owners telling them they must "cease and desist" operation of the shop. The owners will have 30 days to appeal to Superior Court. A zoning inspector determined it was an adult establishment because it sold see-through gowns, latex panties, sexual devices, books with titles such as *Bondage on a Budget* and *Spanky Spanky*, adult movies and exotic lotions. Zoning officials notified the store's owners that they were in violation of the law on October 30. The owners appealed and the Zoning Board of Adjustment heard their case on March 30. The board voted 5-0 that the store was an adult establishment and in violation of the city's zoning law.

### National

#### Settlement reached

SAN FRANCISCO, CA—The city has paid out \$150,000 to a gay man who was attacked on a city (Muni) bus by one uniformed driver

who was riding as a passenger while the driver of the bus did nothing to intervene. The passenger, Sinisa "Sonny" Vukic, 32, received the money in settling a lawsuit he filed last year. The case stemmed from an incident in 1996, when Vukic along with a male companion who is also gay, boarded the bus. A block or two before Vukic's companion got off at his stop, the two men kissed, and Municipal Railway driver Wardy Joubert — riding as a passenger — began shouting at them. According to the lawsuit, Joubert yelled an anti-gay epithet. He also told the two men he was acting under his authority as a Muni driver. After Vukic's companion left the bus, Joubert hit Vukic repeatedly in the head and chest. The assault could be heard at the front of the bus, where driver Bennie Jackson sat and did nothing to intervene. Another passenger pulled Joubert off Vukic after the attack had continued for about nine blocks and several passengers helped Vukic move to the front of the bus. At that point, Vukic asked Jackson why he had not helped him, and Jackson responded casually that he thought Vukic would have been "man enough" to handle the situation himself.

#### Boy wears gown to prom

PIERSON, FL—School officials originally refused to allow a teenage boy to attend his high school prom in drag, but later reversed their decision. Charles Rice wore a red, floor-length evening gown, red satin shoes, gloves and matching rhinestone jewelry. Principal Peter Oatman told the gay, 18-year-old Taylor High School senior he would be refused entrance to the prom if he showed up in drag. However, Oatman backed down after conferring with Superintendent Bill Hall and school district attorneys, as well as reviewing news accounts of his initial decision. Hall said Rice gets to don his gown for the prom only because the principal let him wear skirts and dresses to special events in the past. Because of these prior episodes, the school system would have had a weak case if the matter had gone to court.

#### Minister found guilty

DOWNERS GROVE, IL—A Methodist minister who officiated at the "marriage" of two

gay men has been convicted in a church trial of disobedience in the first test of the denomination's ban on same-sex ceremonies and could be defrocked. The jury of 13 pastors decided 10-3 that the Rev. Gregory Dell, 53, disobeyed church law when he presided over the "holy union" of two Chicago men last September. Dell was suspended for disobeying church law. The suspension begins July 5 and continues until Dell signs a statement saying he will comply with church law or until the law is changed. "I will never sign such a statement," Dell said. He testified that he was being faithful to his vow to minister to all people when he blessed the "holy union" of Karl Reinhardt and Keith Eccarius.

#### Gay couples "wed"

SAN FRANCISCO, CA—Mayor Willie Brown and most members of the Board of Supervisors officiated as 190 gay and lesbian couples participated in a wedding ceremony at San Francisco City Hall. It was the third and largest city-sponsored mass wedding ceremony for gays. Brown planned the festivities as a high-profile way of making clear that the city is opposed to a measure on the state ballot next year that would make it impossible for lesbian and gay couples to marry legally in California. The nuptials had no force of law.

#### Gay youth honored

TEANECK, NJ—The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) bestowed their Equality Award to Michael Bisogno, a 16-year-old Teaneck High School student, for his work to ensure the safety and well-being of gays. The award was given in memory of Matthew Shepard and is the highest HRC gives. "We give it to those who show excellence in community leadership, to people who have created a better climate for other people in their communities," said Wayne Besen, an HRC spokesman.

#### Judge sends message

NITRO, WV—A 37-year-old man convicted of beating and robbing a bisexual traveling salesman who had befriended him has been sentenced to a 60-year prison term for the 1997

assault. Kanawha Circuit Judge Jim Stucky said he wasn't buying Robert Bowers III's argument that he was trying to protect himself from the victim's sexual advances. Bowers was convicted in January of the attack on 36-year-old William Wilder of Ohio. Bowers' co-defendant, 22-year-old Charles Frye, pleaded guilty to his part in the beating and testified for the state in Bowers' trial. Frye received a 10-year prison sentence.

#### High drag

KINGMAN, AZ—Richard Black, aka Celia Putty, decided to help raise money for Arizona Central Pride by hiking up Squaw Peak — in drag. Dressed in a miniskirt, covering just enough to be considered legal in the majority of states, a pink sweater with a fabric slightly thinner than paint, its tensile strength pushed to the limit by breasts that won't quit, a pair of glittering ruby-red shoes, and a dome of red hair teased to a size observable from space, Putty led 100 or so followers up the mountain.

#### Making a statement

SOUTH BEND, IN—A gay tenured professor says he resigned from the University of Notre Dame because the Roman Catholic school refused to ban on-campus discrimination against homosexuals. Mark D. Jordan, a professor of medieval studies, called school President Edward A. Malloy's response to demands for protection of homosexuals on campus a "moral failure." Since leaving Notre Dame, Jordan, an internationally recognized scholar of Catholicism, has accepted a job at Emory University in Atlanta as the Aquinas Chair in Catholic Studies.

#### Church offers gay marriages

DENVER, CO—After two years of debate, First Plymouth Congregational Church has agreed to sanction same-sex marriages and to form a support group for homosexuals. It also undertakes not to discriminate against gays in church employment. With 1400 members, First Plymouth is one of the largest in the United Church of Christ to take such action.

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