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The Wisconsin Light

PrideFest Negotiates to Move the June Festival to the Summerfest Grounds

Lesbian Appeals to Wisconsin State Supreme Court for Approval of Visitation Rights

(Madison)- A Madison woman seeking permission to visit her former Lesbian lover's child plans to make the request on Wednesday, October 12 before the State Supreme Court.

The state's highest court rejected a similar appeal in a split decision in 1991. The court's decision could set a national precedent.

Sandy Holtzman, 43, a UW-Madison law student, is seeking visitation rights to a 5-year-old boy Elsbeth Knott conceived by artificial insemination. Holtzman and Knott ended their 10-year relationship in January, 1993.

One of Knott's lawyers, Kelly Kinzel, argued that giving Holtzman visitation rights would illegally interfere with Knott's constitutional right as the boy's biological parent to decide what relationships were in his best interest.

The Supreme Court has given Holtzman visitation rights while the case is pending.

The court will consider a state law that gives courts the power to grant visitation rights to grandparents, great-grandparents, stepparents or others who have "maintained a relationship similar to a parent-child relationship with the child."

The law says judges should hold hearings on such requests and decide whether visitation is in the best interest of the child.

More than 10,000 children have been conceived by Lesbians using artificial insemination, said Barbara Cox, a San Diego law professor who wrote a brief in the case for the National Center for Lesbian Rights.

"The case is extremely important to other states," said Liz Hendrickson, executive director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights.

Holtzman's visitation of the boy was cut off in August, 1993 by Knott, who that March had told the boy that Holtzman was no longer his parent. "Elsbeth refused to allow them to say good-bye," wrote Holtzman's lawyer, Judith Sperling Newton.

Knott said in court depositions that she wanted no more contact with Holtzman because Holtzman had abused her emotionally. She said Holtzman hadn't played much of a role in raising the child after his birth in Boston.

The women moved to Madison in 1992 so Holtzman could attend law school. Knott, 46, has been a UW grad student in child and family studies.

Knott said she wanted to keep the boy from Holtzman because the women disagree about how to raise him and Holtzman has ignored her wishes.

Knott also said Holtzman had tried to turn her son against her. She said Holtzman would suggest an interesting thing to do and then tell the boy they couldn't do it because Holtzman had to return him to Knott.

Holtzman said she never abused Knott and the couple and the boy had had a close family relationship. She said she helped plan the artificial insemination and was a close parent to the boy since his birth.

In a petition filed by Holtzman's lawyer in Dane County Circuit Court, Holtzman accused Knott of being an unfit parent and asked for custody or visitation rights to the child.

Circuit Judge George Northrup ruled last October that Knott was a suitable parent and refused Holtzman custody.

The judge said he wanted to grant Holtzman visitation, but his hands were tied by the 1991 state high court decision in an almost identical case. The court said a Lesbian had no rights to her ex-partner's adoptive child because she wasn't a legal parent and the couple weren't getting a divorce.

Holtzman appealed Northrup's decision and the Supreme Court agreed last April to reconsider its 1991 ruling.

Governor Thompson's Chief of Staff Meets with Action Wisconsin Leaders

(Madison)- John Matthews, Acting Chief of Staff for Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson, met earlier this month with Gay and Lesbian leaders from Action Wisconsin, the Human Rights Congress, representing Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual citizens from across the state. Matthews relayed Thompson's position on sexual orientation issues, describing the Governor as "not concerned" with the bedroom practices of consenting adults.

Thompson was asked by several hundred citizens to proclaim National Coming Out Day as "Wisconsin Coming Out Day, in recognition of the positive contributions of Gay men, Lesbians and Bisexuals to the state."

Matthews explained that the Governor views sexual orientation as a "private matter" and therefore, felt it was not his place to issue such a proclamation. Thompson knows many Gay and Lesbian people, both in and out of the closet, and the respects their choice to live openly or not, Matthews said.

State Representative Tammy Baldwin (D-Madison), a member of Action Wisconsin, expressed disappointment at the Governor's unwillingness to acknowledge publicly the contributions of the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual community.

"As Governor, Tommy Thompson represents all Wisconsin citizens, including Lesbian and Gay men. By failing to publicly acknowledge our contributions, he tacitly contributes to the discrimination many of us face each day," Baldwin said.

Although unwilling to proclaim "Wisconsin Coming Out Day," the posture of the administration was not hostile. Matthews exhibited a good understanding of the issues facing Wisconsin's Gay and Lesbian citizens, and expressed the Governor's view that discrimination and violence against Gay men and Lesbians is not acceptable.

Kevin Baird, a government affairs special-

ist and member of the Action Wisconsin Steering Committee, expressed the need to remain bipartisan and build a positive relationship with the Governor's office.

"Tommy Thompson has not publicly defined himself on the issue of civil rights for Gays and Lesbians. We have an opportunity to encourage the Governor to define himself as a protector of civil rights, an advocate of tolerance, and an opponent of violence and bigotry," Baird said.

Baird also stated that Lesbians and Gays must build coalitions with Democrats and Republicans alike if they want domestic partnership or any other civil rights legislation to succeed.

"If Tommy Thompson wins in November, we will be asking him to support and sign into law important legislation. We must foster an attitude of mutual respect, and build on our relationships in the Assembly and Senate. We cannot succeed without bipartisan support," Baird said.

Action Wisconsin has submitted questionnaires to candidates for state office and will report on the results before the election. Action Wisconsin encourages everyone in the community to get involved in a campaign and support LesBiGay candidates. Being involved and outspoken is the most powerful political weapon we have.

Action Wisconsin is a bipartisan network of individuals and organizations from across Wisconsin. They can be reached at P.O. Box 304, Madison, WI 53701, or ACT-WIS@aol.com on America Online.

By Bill Meunier

The rumors are true. PrideFest and Summerfest have been negotiating an agreement that would move the PrideFest celebration to the Summerfest grounds at Henry W. Maier festival park on Milwaukee's lake front on June 10th and 11th, 1995.

After five months of discussions, PrideFest has at last entered into negotiations.

The Lesbian and Gay community's reaction to the rumors has been completely positive. Wisconsin Light's phones and office have received numerous calls and comments from visitors asking in so many words, "Is it true?"

Informed sources within PrideFest told Light that there were some basic reasons why the festival decided it wanted to relocate. Among them are lower expenses, heightened community morale; and increased publicity.

PrideFest remains appreciative of the support lent to it by the Milwaukee County Parks and the War Memorial Center. Their help has enabled PrideFest to grow.

The discussions began prior to the last Pride Festival.

The contract was negotiated by Co-Chair Bill Meunier and attorney Steve Brondino, who donated his services.

Just three and half years ago the celebration, then called the Pride Parade and Rally, was deeply in debt and attracted just a few hundred people.

New leadership took over the event and began to build it up. By 1994, the celebration

was in the black and attracted over 15,000 people.

PrideFest is looking into the possibility of bringing in name entertainment for next year's event. It is hoping to find a sponsor for an opening night concert. The festival will use the northern third of the grounds, roughly the same area used by the Indian Summer and Asian Moon festivals.

Reaction from community leaders has been positive across the board. Joe Brehm, owner of Milwaukee's This Is It Bar, and a long time PrideFest supporter said "Its tremendous, it just shows that Milwaukee's PrideFest is one of the greatest Pride celebrations anywhere in the country."

Lesbian Activist and Hurricane Productions board member, Julie Kleppin called the move "A tremendous achievement."

At the Coming Out Day party, held October 11, for elected officials sponsored by the Human Rights League, Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist indicated his strong support for the move to several of those present.

Scott Stewart Director of the Cream City Chorus called the move "A dream come true."

Mary Messerlie, a board member of the Lesbian Alliance of Metro Milwaukee (LAMB) said it was a "strong statement that the Milwaukee Gay/Les/Bi community has a significant commercial presence."

Wisconsin Light will keep its readers informed as these negotiations reach their conclusion.

Senator Kohl Becomes a Co-Sponsor of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act

(Milwaukee)- Senator Herb Kohl (D-WI) has agreed to become the third member of the Wisconsin congressional delegation to sign on as a co-sponsor of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), the federal bill that would prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in employment. Kohl joins Senator Russ Feingold (D-Wisconsin) and Congressman Tom Barrett (D-Milwaukee) as a co-sponsor of this measure.

In a statement faxed to Wisconsin Light, Kohl said, "I believe that employers should not be allowed to discriminate against any group in our country. This bill [ENDA] will protect Gays and Lesbians from discrimination in the workplace and ensure that employers treat all their workers fairly and equally."

State Rep. Tammy Baldwin (D-Madison) welcomed the news of Kohl's sponsorship of this landmark federal legislation.

"I recently had the opportunity to join with other state Gay and Lesbian activists to urge Senator Kohl to sign on to this important federal legislation. I believe that Senator Kohl heard our message and responded to it. I am delighted that Senator Kohl not only pledged

his support for the bill, but decided to take a more prominent role as a sponsor of the legislation," Baldwin said.

Various civil rights measures protecting Gays and Lesbians have been introduced in Congress over the years. But prior to this session, they have not received public hearings or advanced out of committee.

ENDA, however, has more momentum than any of the previous bills. As of September, 1994, ENDA had 31 Senate sponsors and 136 sponsors in the House. Senator Edward Kennedy, the bill's author and Chairman of the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee, has held at least two hearings in the bill.

"The importance of grass-roots citizen activism in support of ENDA cannot be understated. It is not enough to have only 3 of our 11 member congressional delegation openly supporting this bill. All of our congressional representatives need to hear from Gays, Lesbians and allies regarding the importance of co-sponsoring and supporting ENDA," Baldwin said.

Philanthropist V. Duane Rath and Lover Frederick Hurdman Found Dead

(Milwaukee)- Millionaire philanthropist V. Duane Rath, 53, was found stabbed to death in his Janesville mansion. It what police have called a murder-suicide, Rath's lover Frederick "Ted" Hurdman, 48, was found dead on the floor of the couple's garage. Death, police say was caused by carbon monoxide poisoning.

Sources who knew the two men speculate that the tragedy may have been caused by Hurdman's jealousy over Rath's having found a new partner.

Rath's death will bring a severe loss to both the Gay and AIDS communities. Rath was the top national contributor to the Campaign for Military Justice which fought for the lifting of the ban against Gays in the military.

Rath was also the top contributor to Washington, D.C.'s Whitman-Walker Clinic's Elizabeth Taylor Medical Center.

At the recent AIDS Walk Wisconsin, Rath told a member of Light's staff and Dr. Karen Lamb that he was a regular reader of the paper and was aware that National Holocaust Museum did not sufficiently emphasize Gay

deaths at the hands of the Nazis.

Rath said that he had decided to contribute "a major gift" to the museum for the purpose of expanding the Gay section.

Rath was also one of the major contributors to the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin (ARCW).

According to Doug Nelson, ARCW's Executive Director, Rath was one of the top corporate givers to the AIDS Walk, giving \$25,000 for each of the last four years.

During the last AIDS Walk, Nelson said, Rath told him that he had decided to double his pledge to \$50,000.

"This is a terrible tragedy for Duane and Ted and an enormous loss for the Gay and Lesbian community," Nelson said. "Duane had emerged as one of the country's top contributors to the Gay and Lesbian civil rights movement and the fight against AIDS. He manifested a deep commitment to our issues and was truly a national hero in delivering resources to support our cause. I am very saddened by this tragedy. It is an immense loss to the community."

