

INSIDEOUT

The Newsletter of Blind Friends of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
(BFLAG)
SPRING 2005

BFLAG is affiliated with the American Council of the Blind and is dedicated to facilitating the free exchange of ideas, opinions and information relative to matters of concern to blind people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

Visit us at www.bflag.org

INSIDEOUT is published in, October, March, and June. Material to be published of interest to the membership is welcome. All material to be included must be received prior to the first of the month of publication. Items for publication should be sent to inside--out@earthlink.net.

IN THIS EDITION:

- From The President's Desk
- Convention 2005: Update Report
- Come To Vegas To Cast Your Vote
- Newsom Rips N.Y. Mayor On Gay Marriage/Bloomberg To Fight Ruling Allowing
- Same-Sex Unions
- California Court Rules Same-Sex Marriage Ban Unconstitutional
- Same-Sex Marriage In The Burbs
- Treasure Trove Of Gay And Lesbian Artifacts/'Queer Smithsonian' In S.F. Celebrates Its 20th Anniversary
- Change In One Policy At Nation's Largest Employer Expands To Include Workers' Same-Sex Partners
- BLIND PHOTOGRAPHER IS A MAN OF VISION
- Ask Dottie
- We Bet You Want To Know This: The ABC's of Surviving In Las Vegas
- Meet BFLAG's Board Of Directors – Part II
- On A Personal Note
- BFLAG's Convention Registration Form

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK: Not Just For Gays

By Connie David

It seems as though the subject of gay marriage is not going away any time soon. There is a move to bring the topic back for discussion in the Minnesota legislature, and Minnesota is probably not the only state facing its resurgence. In view of the fact that there are those out there who want to deny us rights we don't even have, it might be a good idea to take a look at how we can protect the rights we do have. Many of the things gay couples need to do would also benefit others considered to be domestic partners.

By definition, domestic partners are two adults of the same generation sharing the same living situation and sharing expenses. That could be two sisters, two friends, a brother and sister or even a heterosexual couple who think they have a common law marriage. So this kind of protection isn't just for gays any more.

My partner and I have taken steps to protect our rights. Neither of us are lawyers, but her father is. That has helped us get our ducks in a row, or our papers in the safe as it were.

First of all, we formed revocable trusts. We appointed trustees, and our major financial accounts have our trusts as the beneficiaries. This simply means that when one of us dies, the trustees of that trust account will make sure that our wishes for the distribution of those funds are honored. We also have living wills, which spell out the kinds of medical treatments we want and don't want, should we be unable to speak for ourselves. To that end, we also have powers of attorney, which give us, or our trustees with input from us, the permission to make necessary decisions. It also makes it possible for visitation to be granted to one of us, should the other become ill. The trustees would be in charge of saying who has visitation, which fixes the problem.

As I said before, I am not a lawyer. Is there more that should be done? Probably. For a domestic partnership that involves children, there are definitely other things that should be done. Is society going to help us protect ourselves and each other? Probably not, but we can do it for ourselves. It does take thought and planning. It isn't something that should keep getting put off for another day. The Scarlet O'Hara way of thinking may catch you unaware, and leave you with no rights at all.

To do this right, you will need the services of a lawyer. Yes, you can go on the internet and download the forms, or get software that will help you. When you get to the bottom of the forms however, you will still need the signature of a lawyer to make them legal and binding.

BFLAG is working on a workshop for the July convention that will address these and other issues. We have lawyers lined up to help us understand what we can

and should do, and I encourage all of you who attend the convention to come to this workshop. In addition, drag a friend or two with you. If you are not in a domestic partnership now, it doesn't mean that you won't be in one some day down the road. Why not prepare now?

Resources:

The following two books are available from RFB&D. The listing contains all the necessary information for ordering these books.

From RFB&D

A legal guide for lesbian and gay couples

Curry, Hayden.

Nolo Press, 1999 10th ed

RFB&D Product#: AB-GN385

Cassette

Orderable

Legal affairs: essential advice for same - sex couples

Hertz, Frederick.

H. Holt and Co, 1998

1st ed

RFB&D Product#: AB-GN386

Cassette

Orderable

EDITOR'S NOTE:

The word "Escort" as used in this newsletter and other BFLAG convention information is defined as, a personal guide, information source and or companion with whom events and activities can be experienced.

CONVENTION 2005 UPDATE REPORT:

The program is now set and for the first time, BFLAG is offering a full program for our 2005 convention in Las Vegas at the Rivera Hotel, July 3-10 2005.

This year we will again have our suite open in the morning and evening so people can drop in, have some refreshments and chat. We will also have our welcome party on Sunday afternoon and a farewell party on Friday evening in the suite. Purchase the "BFLAG PASS" as part of our ACB convention registration and save money on the week's events.

BFLAG will host a dinner/cruise on Lake Mead, which is about 30 minutes from the hotel. We will have volunteers with us and it will be a great night. You can save on this ticket by buying it from BFLAG by May 15th.

For the first time BFLAG will have a Roller coaster Extravaganza Which will let you ride at least 3 of the best roller coasters in Las Vegas with a personal guide and VIP treatment. This is only \$25 if you get your ticket from

BFLAG and get it early. The cost of each roller coaster on its own is about \$12 if you were to just do it on your free time.

We will also be having a picnic by the pool at "The Blue Moon Resort" on Thursday afternoon. This will be a time to relax and simply have some fun. We will have a private room, a private picnic area and use of all the resort facilities, which include the pool and steam room. Again, we will have volunteer escorts and plenty of food and drinks for all.

Fundraising continues to be a major need to pull such a convention program off at an affordable price. The following fund raising activities are underway:

CLUB WET in Washington DC will be holding a benefit dancers' underwear auction to benefit BFLAG on Saturday night, April 9th. If you know of anyone in the DC area it would be great to have them stop by. We hope to raise more than \$1,500 with this event.

THE DRINKERY in Baltimore will be selling our BFLAG RAINBOWS in hopes of filling the slack with the sale and loss of the Club Atlantis. We don't know how much this will raise but if you want to buy a BFLAG Rainbow, you can contact Auggie Dorsett via our web site. Tax-deductible checks can be sent to Larry or Butch with a note to buy Rainbows. 100% of all money taken in comes directly to BFLAG.

THE RAINBOW LOUNGE in Las Vegas is going to host a "BEER BUST FOR BFLAG" on Friday July 1st. There will be a \$5 door charge and free beer for 2 -3 hours with the entire door charge coming to BFLAG. The BFLAG board will be holding our meeting at The Rainbow Lounge on July 2nd to get ready for the convention.

Also, Many members of the Lambda Business and Professional Association of Las Vegas are working to raise funds and collect material donations, which will benefit all of us at the convention.

SAVE MORE MONEY ON THE CONVENTION by getting your plane ticket from Terry Wilsey, the owner of "A ANSWER ON TRAVEL". Terry's phone number is 702-731-2114 or can be reached by email at AAnswerTravel@Hotmail.com Terry is BFLAG's point man in Las Vegas and has already spent numerous hours and made numerous positive contacts for us.

Food in Las Vegas is affordable and plentiful. 2 people can get a great dinner for less than \$12 each and this is in the hotel. There are literally hundreds of places to eat and you can pay almost any price you want for a meal. Service at all of the restaurants I ate at was far above the normal convention standards. The restaurants are large enough and staffed well enough to handle any crowd that the ACB might send them. This will be a pleasant difference this year.

We will be going to "An Evening at La Cage" as a group. This will be a 50% savings to us and we will get some special attention at the show. You will laugh and the comments made by the cast and if we can get the audio description I have asked for you better wear rubber pants to the show. If we

can't, we will have escorts to do personal descriptive narration. Can you beat that?

We are working on a streaming web feed for our annual meeting and will be recording the 2 program offerings for broadcast at a later time.

Our Programs will be facilitated by professionals in the fields that understand the subjects and the audience. These programs will be of interest to all at the ACB convention and in fact, National Alliance of Blind Students (NABS) is going to co-host our program on "Safe Sex"

BFLAG'S PROGRAMS AND EVENTS REGISTRATION

BFLAG REGISTRATION can be done by phone or email and followed up with a check payable to BFLAG. If you register for all events and payment is received by May 15th, the entire event package including dues will cost \$130.00. This is a fantastic price for what you will get. The registration form can be found at the end of this newsletter.

A PRESS release will be sent out by April first and we will be getting plenty of good press in Las Vegas. The press release will also be posted on our web site for you to access and distribute freely.

Let's make this year's convention not only the best but the biggest BFLAG has ever had.

If you have questions or want additional information, call Butch at 410-254-1972 or he can be reached by email at ButchArnold@BFLAG.org.

Respectfully submitted
2005 convention Committee
Butch Arnold
Convention coordinator

Come To Vegas To Cast Your Vote

By: Connie David

Well, it is almost spring, although you couldn't prove it by me. I came very close to taking a tumble on the ice this morning. I don't know why people think it is ok to not clean the sidewalks that run along the sides of their houses. Oh well. It is only another few days until spring officially arrives.

And right on the heel of spring comes summer!!! That means it is time for another convention. I don't know if Las Vegas is ready for us, but I am certainly getting ready for Las Vegas. I hope many of you are planning to attend this convention. Our program is looking really great, and it should be a whole lot of fun.

In addition to fun things, we will hold our BFLAG annual meeting. That means that we have elections to hold. This year we will be voting for a secretary and all 3 of our at-large positions. As of right now, we have nobody running for

secretary, and although we currently have people in the at-large positions, not all decisions have been made as to whether all of them want to run for those spots again. If you are interested in any of the positions, please let me know. If you are unable to attend the convention, but would still like to serve on the board, please send a short bio, along with your qualifications and experience, and we will put your name out there.

What does serving on the board involve? Well, you must be able to attend monthly meetings. These are held on Sunday afternoons right now, and last an average of an hour. You will also be given other tasks to do. For example, depending on who is elected and their qualifications, you could be in charge of fund-raising. Or, you could be in charge of membership. Who knows? It depends a lot on who is running, what their specific skills are, and the needs of the board. So, if you have some time, please consider lending your talents to our already talented group of people. Remember. Just send your bio, qualifications, and the position you are seeking to me, and the rest will be done for you. My contact information can be found at the end of this newsletter.

Get ready for a great time in Las Vegas. I hope to see many of you there.

Newsom rips N.Y. mayor on gay marriage/Bloomberg to fight ruling allowing same-sex unions

Friday, February 11, 2005 (SF Chronicle)

San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom lambasted New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg on Thursday for deciding to appeal a court ruling that would allow same-sex marriage in the Big Apple.

Newsom called Bloomberg's decision inconsistent, suggested it was politically motivated and said it reinforced cynicism among the American people.

"People don't like politicians, and now I know why," he said.

Bloomberg, who has said he personally favors same-sex marriage, announced over the weekend that he would challenge the ruling of a judge in Manhattan earlier this month that gay couples have the right to marry under the state's Constitution. Bloomberg has said he believes New York state law forbids the practice.

Newsom said he did not want to pick a fight with the mayor of the nation's largest city, but he said he was stunned by Bloomberg's decision to appeal.

"I think if you believe something, you've got to act on it," the San Francisco mayor said. "If you don't believe in it, don't act on it. But don't say you believe something and then do everything to stifle that belief."

Newsom made his remarks after being pressed by reporters on the issue at a

San Francisco press conference about his new anti-litter initiative.

Bloomberg's office did not respond to requests for comment on Newsom's comments.

A legal brief submitted to the court by New York City discussed the tradition of marriage going back to the Book of Genesis in the Bible. Newsom said denying blacks citizenship and the right to vote were traditions in the United States at one time.

"Well, if you want to talk about tradition being codified in this country, tradition was codified in the (1857) Dred Scott decision by the U.S. Supreme Court to deny blacks citizenship," Newsom said. "That was tradition. It was wrong. ...

"So when Mayor Bloomberg or others say its tradition -- marriage between a man and a woman -- I hearken back to those days where the tradition was challenged because it was the right thing to do, and I wish that the mayor (of New York City) would challenge the tradition of bigotry as it relates to same-sex marriages. I think that would be courageous."

Newsom said he was motivated to speak out by statements from a Bloomberg spokesman in the New York Times on Wednesday that it was the mayor's responsibility to see that the law was followed instead of "grandstanding and possibly causing real pain by allowing marriage licenses to be issued that later could be nullified."

"He talked about, almost referred to the chaos in San Francisco," Newsom said. "That's what Gov. Schwarzenegger said. Where was the chaos in this city? It's just wrong to say that." Newsom added that hundreds of same-sex couples scheduled to attend a Saturday event at City Hall commemorating their marriages were not "gravely disappointed" by the nullification and were continuing to fight.

Newsom drew both international criticism and praise a year ago when he instructed the city clerk to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. Nearly 4,000 couples were married, but the California Supreme Court nullified those marriages six months later.

The city, along with several couples, sued the state in an attempt to overturn that decision and argued their case in Superior Court in late December. A decision from that court is expected any day.

Additionally, some have argued that Newsom's actions, combined with legal same-sex marriages in Massachusetts, motivated social conservatives to turn out in force for the November election. Voters in 11 states passed amendments to their state constitutions banning same-sex marriage.

Newsom said he believed that in the same-sex marriage issue, politicians should act out of conviction, not concern for their careers.

"We need more champions," he said. "We can't do it alone out here. If you believe in something, act on it, even if your political career ends. At least you can look back and say, 'I tried.' "

Bloomberg, a moderate Republican, is running for re-election in November in liberal New York, but he must first survive the GOP primary, which is likely to bring out more conservative voters.

California Court Rules Same-Sex Marriage Ban Unconstitutional: New York Times

March 14, 2005

A California judge ruled today that the state's ban on gay marriage violated the state constitution, despite social traditions and historical definitions that "marriage" is a union between man and woman.

Judge Richard A. Kramer of San Francisco Superior Court held, in an opinion that will surely be appealed, that "no rational purpose exists for limiting marriage in this state to opposite-sex partners."

While many aspects of history, culture and tradition are properly embedded in the law, Judge Kramer wrote, the prohibition against same-sex marriage is not. "The state's protracted denial of equal protection cannot be justified simply because such constitutional violation has become traditional," he wrote.

Today's ruling came in a lawsuit brought against the state by the City and County of San Francisco and a dozen same-sex couples who had been married there. The suit was filed after the State Supreme Court ordered San Francisco to stop issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples because the practice violated state law.

That law is contrary to the spirit of the state constitution, the plaintiffs argued, and today Judge Kramer agreed.

"Simply put, same-sex marriage cannot be prohibited solely because California has always done so before," the judge said

Attorney General Bill Lockyer has said he expected the case to reach the California Supreme Court, The Associated Press said. It may first go to the State Court of Appeals, or it is possible the high court will bypass the appeals court and take the case directly. In any case, Robert Tyler, a lawyer with the conservative Alliance Defense Fund, which joined the case in support of the ban on same-sex marriages, told The A.P. his group would undertake an appeal. Two bills are pending before the California Legislature that would put a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage on the November ballot, The

A.P. said. If California voters approve such an amendment, as did those in a dozen other states last year, the issue would largely be out of the reach of legislators and the courts.

Several trial judges around the country have ruled that bans on same-sex marriages violate state constitutions. But despite the intense interest in the

issue nationwide, there is no obvious path - yet - for it to reach the United States Supreme Court, since state courts have the power to interpret their own respective state constitutions. But those bans could be put to a federal constitutional test if one state refused to grant legal recognition to same-sex couples who were legally married in another state.

Judge Kramer swept aside the State of California's argument that it was all right to define marriage strictly as a union between man and woman as long as same-sex couples enjoyed virtually the same rights as married couples.

"The idea that marriage-like rights without marriage is adequate smacks of a concept long rejected by the courts: separate but equal," he wrote, alluding to the doctrine long used to justify racial segregation that the United States Supreme Court ruled in 1954 had no place in public schools.

The judge also dismissed the state's argument that marriage has long been recognized as existing primarily for the sake of producing children. Judge Kramer said it was an "obvious natural and social reality that one does not have to be married in order to procreate, nor does one have to procreate in order to be married."

Setting aside the bar on same-sex marriage will not intrude on the state's legitimate regulation of marriage, like setting a minimum age for effective consent, the judge said. "Thus, the parade of horrible social ills envisioned by the opponents of same-sex marriage is not a necessary result from recognizing that there is a fundamental right to choose who one wants to marry," he wrote.

Same-sex marriage in the 'burbs

Tuesday, February 15, 2005 (SF Chronicle)

For an issue that is supposed to be fracturing the country, the gay marriage debate caused barely a ripple Monday when it landed in downtown Martinez.

Two gay couples, nicely dressed just in case a wedding unexpectedly broke out, strolled up to the window at the office of the clerk-recorder for Contra Costa County. Erica Martin, with her partner, Melissa Stoddard, and son Gabriel, politely requested a marriage license. County Clerk Steve Weir just as politely turned her down, then refused a similar request from Denis Paul and his partner, Seph Paul.

This surprised absolutely no one. In fact, everyone knew it would happen, since Weir has made it clear that he believes California law does not allow him to issue a license to a gay couple, and he wasn't about to change his mind just because it was Valentine's Day.

So was it the same old story? A hide-bound public official refusing to

acknowledge the gay lifestyle?

Actually, no.

As it turns out, Weir is not only openly gay, he's also been in a committed relationship for 15 years. In fact, as he told Martin, he and his partner are proud to say that they were the 49th couple in the state of California to register as domestic partners.

Those who expect to see gay couples in leather chaps roar up on motorcycles probably wouldn't have given Martin and Stoddard or the Pauls a second look. They are not only mainstream suburban types -- from Richmond and El Cerrito, respectively -- but both Martin and Denis Paul are deeply religious. Martin is a PhD student in biblical studies at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, and Denis is a graduate student at the Starr King School for the Ministry in Berkeley.

"As our rabbi says, I can't believe people are afraid of gay people getting married," says Martin. "They are the most conservative gay people there are."

Now, frankly, it wasn't all balloons and happiness. There were a few mutters of disapproval from spectators in the back of the room as the same-sex marriage license pageant was playing out. Martinez, like many cities and towns in Contra Costa County, is a small and conservative enclave.

After all, this wasn't the gilded City Hall in San Francisco, where Mayor Gavin Newsom could take a stand on the national stage. This was a typical county office with brown, fake wood paneling and industrial gray carpet.

In some ways that made what happened Monday an even bigger deal.

It is one thing to debate gay marriage in the Castro district. But the 'burbs had better get ready. The issue is headed out here -- quietly and politely, but on its way nevertheless.

It is no longer a shock to see a gay couple at parents night at the public school or on the pool deck at a local swim meet. Martin, the birth mother of Gabriel, a blue-eyed, towheaded 10-month-old baby, refers to herself as "a soccer mom," and she's not kidding.

It is one thing to oppose gay marriage based upon nothing more than a television news report, but it is something else entirely when the example is that nice couple next door.

"My sense is that people are really curious," Denis Paul says. "What makes you go out into the rain in Martinez to ask for a marriage license when you knew you weren't going to get one?"

Both couples stressed that Monday's theater was more about legal rights than a philosophical stand for same-sex marriage. Martin says she and Stoddard have spent more than \$4,000 so far this year so Stoddard could adopt Gabriel. Although the domestic partner law granted more rights than ever before, gay partners do not share family health coverage, for example, or insurance payments.

Denis Paul, who knows how to craft a media sound bite, came up with a beauty for the cameras. When Weir declined Martin's request for a license,

Denis Paul had a question.

"Let's see," he asked Weir, deadpan, "I've known Erica for 30 seconds. How about if we get married right now?"

Weir, playing his part perfectly, agreed that they could be married that moment. And yet, Denis Paul continued, he'd been in a relationship with Seph for 12 years and "we had to legally change our names" to get approximately equal legal rights.

"And we have a baby," chimed in Stoddard.

"A point well taken," admitted Weir. "And if marriage were possible, I would be the first one in line."

It isn't, of course, and isn't likely to be soon. But this ritualized moment -- being formally turned down in a government office for something more than a dozen heterosexual couples received Monday -- could be a step toward putting the issue before the court in a lawsuit. It is not impossible that a change could result.

But it didn't happen Monday. So what were they going to do to celebrate Valentine's Day?

"Well," said Martin, "we were going to get married, but that didn't work out. I guess we will have to go out to dinner."

Treasure trove of gay and lesbian artifacts/'Queer Smithsonian' in S.F. celebrates its 20th anniversary

Saturday, January 29, 2005 (SF Chronicle)

They've got Frank Jordan's shoe.

Tucked away in an archive that some refer to as the "queer Smithsonian," among boxes labeled "Matthew Shepard Memorial," "plaques and trophies" and "sex toys and safe sex barriers" is a slightly scuffed, black leather size 10 shoe with tassels.

The lonely loafer gained historical status during the 1991 San Francisco mayoral campaign, when -- in an attempt to soften his image as an ultraconservative police chief -- Jordan journeyed to the Castro to participate in a protest.

But his tactics backfired. Activists, apparently still angered by police behavior during Jordan's tenure as chief, began taunting him, shouting "go home." Eventually, a crowd chased him out of the neighborhood. Jordan lost a shoe in the process and left behind his campaign manager, who was exchanging blows with at least one leather-clad protester.

The shoe ended up on display at A Different Light bookstore and later with a police watchdog group. Around 1995, the shoe's shadowy guardians forwarded it to what may well be its final resting place -- in a humidity- and temperature-controlled room at the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society.

One of the largest gay and lesbian collections in the country, the archive includes hundreds of manuscript collections, thousands of periodicals, tens of thousands of photographs and hundreds of thousands of pieces of

ephemera, from matchbooks to posters. The archive, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, is a point of pride in the gay and lesbian community and a hallowed treasure trove for scholars and researchers who have turned yellowing letters and old film reels into dozens of doctoral dissertations, books and documentary films.

Connecting to the past

"There's a disability we're constantly trying to overcome: a lack of connection to our past," said Martin Meeker, a historian at UC Berkeley, who estimated that three-fourths of the material in his forthcoming book about gays and lesbians in the 1940s to 1970s came from the archive.

Someone like Willie Walker, a Historical Society founder who recently died, might not be a conventional social activist, "but in seeking to recover and preserve those parts of the past, he in fact becomes a very important activist. Because a people without a past are not a people," Meeker said.

On a recent morning, the GLBT Historical Society's executive director, Terence Kissack, led a reporter on a tour of the organization's 8,000-square-foot space on Mission Street, which houses the archive, office space and a gallery. (An exhibit about the life of the late San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk will be replaced soon with a show about gays and lesbians in competitive and recreational sports.)

Kissack began with the oral history stash, a set of filing cabinets that are filled with transcripts of hundreds of interviews, with both famous figures and ordinary people. He plucked out a few favorites: Francine Logandice, a transgender merchant marine who owned a string of gay bars in the city, and Bill Jones, who was the first gay man in San Francisco to adopt a son.

Then he pushed through a door and into the 4,000-square-foot archive. "This is really cool," he said, walking toward the massive collection of ephemera -- business cards, matchbooks, flyers and postcards -- carefully organized in folders and plastic sleeves.

"Individually, it might not seem like much," Kissack said. "But when you have thousands, you can map out a whole social network."

He continued wending his way through the stacks, pointing out the sewing machine Gilbert Baker used to sew the first rainbow flag in 1978, vinyl albums of 1970s women's music and the statue that used to stand post outside Phoebe's, an old leather bar. There are mugs, ashtrays, old signs, a condom collection and the home videos of one Hal O'Neal, a gay man who obsessively filmed San Francisco in the 1950s and '60s.

200 boxes from Lyon, Martin

The 200 manuscript boxes longtime activists Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin donated are among the archive's most popular collections, Kissack said. They include precious records from the early days of Daughters of Bilitis, the national lesbian organization they founded in 1955, and several

complete sets of the group's journal, "The Ladder," which was published from 1956 to 1972.

In the photography room, Kissack flipped through a set of anonymous photographs from a private Halloween party, circa 1959. The men in the pictures smile and strike poses in bikinis and glittery drag costumes.

"People weren't all cowering in the dark, fearful to leave their homes. That's an important piece of information," Kissack said. "It breaks down the myth that we've only just achieved the basics for a happy life."

Recently, someone dropped off two photo albums that had been recovered from the trash. The albums document two commitment ceremonies between Cora

Latz and Etta Perkins. The first was held 25 years ago; the second took place in their senior center shortly before both died recently.

Historical archives are not just repositories of the past, Kissack said carefully. An old photo album, for example, can shed light on the current conversation about the boundaries of marriage.

"If Cora and Etta's story" -- and stories like theirs -- "had a broad audience, the debate about the issue would have been different," he said.

The GLBT Historical Society was founded in 1985, when around 50 people showed up for a public meeting organized by several independent collectors. The timing was not an accident: The AIDS crisis was starting to devastate the community, and gay history increasingly was being recognized as a legitimate field, Meeker said. "With all that, there was this pressing need to preserve materials."

For the first five years, the archives were stored in Walker's apartment. Twenty years later, the organization is still struggling financially, but now it has a \$240,000 annual budget, four staff members and a flotilla of devoted volunteers.

Hopes for a museum

Historical Society die-hards have long harbored dreams of using the collection to anchor a San Francisco lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender museum. Recently, supporters went before the San Francisco Library Commission to float the idea of expanding the Eureka Valley/Harvey Milk Memorial Branch Library -- which is scheduled for renovation -- to create a combination museum, research center and home for the archives.

"To me, creating a permanent home and high visibility for the historical society is a great goal," said Supervisor Bevan Dufty, who spoke before the commission. "Thousands of people come to the Castro, and they want to know about our history."

The society's plan is ambitious and might not happen. But in the meantime, two archivists are processing papers about the early response to the AIDS crisis, researchers come and go, a volunteer is culling material for the sports exhibit, and people keep donating.

As much as they dislike to, staff members sometimes turn down items because they're redundant or because the organization doesn't have the

resources to process everything. Other times, people wander in with historical gems -- like the donation someone dropped off during Kissack's stacks tour.

Kissack excitedly pulled out a blue-and-white T-shirt that had been sold to raise money for Dan White, the supervisor eventually convicted of manslaughter in the slayings of Milk, one of the country's first openly gay elected officials, and San Francisco Mayor George Moscone.

The shirt bore an image of a scale of justice and read, simply, "Dan White Legal Defense Fund."

It was, Kissack said, definitely a keeper.

The GLBT Historical Society

The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society is at 657 Mission St., Suite 300. The gallery is open 1-5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday. The research room is open 1-5 p.m. Saturday and by appointment. Call (415) 777- 5455 for information, or go to www.glbthistory.org.

Change in one policy at nation's largest employer expands to include workers' same-sex partners

Friday, January 28, 2005 (AP)

The nation's largest employer is expanding the definition of "immediate family" in its ethics policy to include an employee's same-sex partner.

The Wal-Mart Stores Inc. policy change -- disclosed in a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission on Wednesday -- accounts for the laws in some states that recognize domestic partnerships and civil unions, officials said.

Company spokesman Gus Whitcomb on Thursday declined to say if the change would affect employee benefits, or whether it meant Wal-Mart was taking a position on the issue of same-sex marriage or civil unions.

A national lobbying group for gay and lesbian issues, nevertheless, praised the move.

"We are encouraged by this sign showing America's heartland employer understands same-sex couples share the responsibilities that come with being a family," Daryl Herrschaft, deputy director of Human Rights Campaign's WorkNet program, said in a statement.

The revisions deal with sections of the company's ethics code that bar employees from using confidential information to benefit themselves or immediate family members, and from approaching Wal-Mart's suppliers about jobs for immediate family members, the company said.

"We updated our statement of ethics," Whitcomb said. "That brings us into compliance with state laws in terms of how they look at individuals with regard to policies" where a worker's immediate family would be a factor, he said.

For instance, in Massachusetts, where same-sex marriage is legal, Wal-Mart would expect its workers in that state to abide by the company's ethics policy as it pertains to families, Whitcomb said.

Wal-Mart, based in Bentonville, is the world's largest retailer.

BLIND PHOTOGRAPHER IS A MAN OF VISION

Sunday, February 27, 2005 (SF Chronicle)

It wasn't until after Pete Eckert went blind that he really started to see things.

"I can see lots of ... really weird things," Eckert says, slowly lifting his left hand toward his face and gazing directly at it. "I feel light so strongly that it allows me to see the bones in my skeleton as pulsating energy, or like in an X-ray. At times I can sort of see sound. Sometimes I can even see things from the back of my head."

With eyes in the back of his head, you'd figure Eckert might make a good schoolteacher. But that would be too easy.

Wearing jeans, a leather jacket and aviator sunglasses and standing more confidently than Uzu, his giant Bavarian shepherd guide dog, Eckert, 48, gives the impression that he likes a challenge. So after the former carpenter went blind from retinitis pigmentosa six years ago, he did the first thing he wasn't supposed to be able to do.

He became a photographer.

"The idea of a blind guy taking photos just cracked me up," Eckert says as he and Uzu visit Eckert's art photography exhibition at Varnish Fine Art studio on Natoma Street in San Francisco. The exhibition runs through Saturday and he's preparing for another in April at the Badé Museum in Berkeley next month.

About five years ago, when Eckert was still coming to terms with his loss of sight, he was cleaning out a drawer at his Sacramento home and found a camera with infrared settings. He thought about how invisible wavelengths might influence a blind person trying to use the camera. A light bulb came on in his head, and it made him smile.

"I'd have my wife and my friends take me out in the middle of the night so I could shoot photographs," Eckert says. "Of course, they thought I was crazy, which was fine by me."

It wasn't the first time someone took Eckert for a nut.

Eckert was 28 when he was deemed legally blind, meaning that, from 20 feet, he could see less than what a person with perfect vision could see from 400 feet.

"At first, I freaked out," Eckert says. "I had two immediate fears: that I wouldn't be able to take care of myself and that I wouldn't make any money."

Eckert spent the next decade earning several degrees, including one each

in sculpture and ceramics at the Art Institute of Boston and one in design and industry from San Francisco State. He also became a black belt in tae kwon do.

He was so good in the self-defense arts that he started to teach a class. When some of his students didn't believe that he could fight at full speed, Eckert picked a few of the more experienced troublemakers in the class and scheduled a day to spar. To prepare for the match, Eckert memorized the room. He took mental notes of how sounds bounced off each corner and where light and warmth entered into his blind picture. He kicked the students' butts.

"If I can learn this much about one room," Eckert says he thought, "why not do the same in the rest of the world?"

Eckert implemented that idea directly into his photography. With his brain rewired in a way that light allows him to see the skeletal structure of parts of his body, Eckert says, he paints with light and navigates through touch while listening to sounds.

"Imagination fills in the details," he says.

After completing a photo shoot, Eckert develops contact sheets, has friends give verbal feedback and then memorizes each print before choosing the final slide. Sometimes he draws on the film to add effects. He credits Time- Life Books on camera techniques and some very friendly and very patient experts at his local camera store for helping him fine-tune his craft.

He often returns to places that he frequented when he was younger and could still see well.

"Saloon" was shot at the old Saloon on Grant Avenue in North Beach, once a favorite hangout. Relying on his hazy memories of past drinking days, Eckert entered the Saloon, scoped out a spot in the back and waited for tourists to fill up the bar and create sounds of the room. He then snapped the pictures in about the same time it took to drink a Manhattan.

Blind photography is not a gimmick to Eckert.

"My pictures make you question the limits blind people face," Eckert says as gallery visitors admire the work without realizing that the blind man standing nearby is the artist. "Look. I'm competing with sighted artists."

So what's next? Driving a car?

"No way. I only ride motorcycles," he says seriously. "But just in my backyard."

PETE ECKERT is part of the photo exhibition showing through April 5 at Varnish Fine Art, 77 Natoma St., San Francisco. (415) 222-6131. www.varnishfineart.com.

ASK DOTTIE

Dear Dottie:

I met a man through the telepersonals and we have been conversing for the past month. During this time, I have not mentioned my blindness, thinking it would come up at some point. Lately, he has been rather persistent regarding our meeting face to face. The more persistent he becomes, the less I know how to raise the subject of my vision impairment.

How do I broach the subject without appearing to have been dishonest by omitting this essential piece of information?

Blind Sided in Birmingham

Dear blind sided,

You have to decide just how much of your blindness figures into the whole of the rest of your personality and character. There are arguments to be made on both sides of the fence, of course, and Dottie has heard and used them all. There is risk involved no matter what course you take. On the one hand there are those potential dates who would reject you out of hand the minute they know you are "blind." So, one might think to withhold the information, a bit, prolong it, in order to achieve a foot in the door, might be the better way to go. . Conversely, some of us feel we have to put our visual status right out there, right away; be done with the nasty job. "They can take us or leave us." Others of us try to get some sort of rapport going before we detonate the bomb--all the time praying the matter will come up gracefully.

Blindness is the third most feared thing in the U.S. after AIDS and Cancer. Odds are that the average able-bodied person is going to have a strong reaction to it whenever they hear it: sooner or later.

It's not a bad idea to let a person know something about your personality, sense of humor, interests, etc. before you let them in on your dark secret. It all depends on you're own "Chi."--you're own level of comfort and honesty with yourself.

The question then becomes how long do you wait. I would say, in your case, the time is come for you to tell him, now. Do not go another day without unloading this burden. You are already feeling guilty of withholding information, and that guilt has already begun

to impact on your relationship. You're a sensitive, warm person who has a lot of great stuff to contribute to a relationship, including blindness. Remember, though, Derling, always be graceful, and let Dottie know how it all turns out.

Dear Dottie:

Sara and I met on campus last semester and it was love at first sight, so to speak. Our relationship developed quickly and at this point we are all but inseparable. The holidays are nearing and with Sara's home within driving distance to the campus and mine in Mexico, she invited me to spend the holidays with she and her family. Based on the bits and pieces I've managed to gather, I understand that Sara's family is ultra conservative, and Sara is not out to them.

I am struggling with whether or not I should accept Sara's invitation. I do not relish the thought of being around a family, which would hardly be accepting of me as a person of color, a lesbian, and a person with a disability.

What should I do?

Dreading it in Detroit

Dear Dreading it:

Yes, Derling, we're saddled with the burden of two crosses. We are the defected, and the perverse. While, goddess knows, that can be onerous, it can also make us resilient. You might consider going home with Sara, if only to be around her, and for her. Yours is a young relationship; an adventure in discovery of selves. A tender, seedling exerts itself against the wind, in order to grow firm and supple.

Should you decide to accept Sara's invitation, remember, at an absolute minimum, be polite.

Dear Dottie:

I am a 43-year-old woman who, for the past 10 years, has struggled to come out of the closet. I work in a small town and live with my parents, both of which insist on viewing and treating me like a child. Among other things, they insist on buying my clothing (without any consideration as to my preferences), cleaning my bedroom, and cutting my food. Each time I get the nerve to come out to my parents a news story about gay marriage, gossip about the 2 men who live around the corner, or one of my father's homophobic jokes results in me losing my nerve.

How do I stay strong and stand up for myself?

Frustrated in Fargo

Dear Fargo:

The question is not how do you come out to your parents, but how do you come out of that house! The important thing here is not your parents knowing you're a lesbian, but you're getting out and breathing the air, tasting the freedom of choosing where you want to be and with whom and what to wear. Do you really think that your folks would even take your coming out to them with any degree of credulity? They would probably insist on therapy, and you would be too meek to resist.

Get out of that house now while you still know you have preferences about the clothes you wear and the way you like your room.

And, really, darling, Fargo ... ? Begin making steps to extricate yourself from your current environment. Dottie wants to hear from you in 3 months, and by then she hopes that you'll have made significant progress toward that goal. In the mean time, tell Mom and Dad what kind of flannel shirts you prefer. I mean, really, you know, a "meek dike" is, well, questionable at best.

Dear Dottie:

I want you to know that I came out last year as a Lesbian, and I've been very sad because I haven't had anyone to talk with about this. Since I broke up with my girlfriend last December, I have been feeling pretty bad about things and not having anybody to talk to certainly doesn't help matters.

I sometimes think there isn't another woman out there for me. I really need friends to help me, but I don't know any blind gay or lesbian people here in Houston Texas.

do you know of any people here in Houston that I can talk to?
If there are, please let me know I would love to hear from them.
Please write back.

Holding on in Houston

Dearest Holding:

Firstly, a great big Dottie smooch and hug goes out to you for acknowledging and confirming your self-worth by coming out.

Unfortunately, as millions of single people across the country can attest to, there isn't a formula for meeting Ms or Mr. Right. Obviously, the more people you meet, the greater your chances are for meeting the woman of your dreams.

Familiarize yourself with the GLBT resources in your area. This information can often be found on the internet. If you are a person of faith, some denominations have programs that attract parishioners who are GLBT. Don't discount tele-personals or on-line dating, many individuals, both gay and straight, are finding this an effective means of outreaching to a large number of potential mates.

Derling, before you go rushing off and plastering your picture and God knows what all, over the internet, dottie has a very important piece of advice for you. Use this time to get clear on the type of person you want to be with as well as developing your positive qualities that would attract your ideal mate to you. Smooches!

We Bet You Want To Know This: The ABC's of Surviving In Las Vegas

By: Marianne Sussman and Connie David

Las Vegas is one hot city, especially in the summer. Temperatures are usually above 100 degrees, and the sun shines bright and hot. The pavement is probably hot enough to fry an egg on; although that is one thing we don't think we'll try. One saving grace: low humidity.

If you are planning to come to Las Vegas in July, here are a few things about which you might want to know and/or think.

Due to the serious heat, dehydration for both humans and dogs is something to actively avoid. Always be sure to drink enough liquid. Water is a really good liquid to drink. Caffeine and alcohol may cause your body to dehydrate faster, so be sure to drink lots of water as well. If you are bringing a guide dog, it is very important to carry water and a water bowl for the dog. It is often a long distance between hotels, so be prepared to need water on what might be considered a short walk. Places may look close together on a map, but that is very deceptive.

Speaking of dogs, it is a good idea to bring booties for your dog. Even a few minutes on the hot pavement can cause damage to your dog's feet. Please keep that in mind, even when walking what may seem only a short distance. It's true that putting on and taking off booties can be a pain, but it is well worth the extra few minutes it may take to protect their feet.

Las Vegas Boulevard is known as The Strip. It is a very activity-filled place. There are always crowds of people. Many times those people are drinking out of cups and bottles as they walk. Yes, this is legal on the Strip. However, not

everyone disposes of his or her bottles appropriately. Broken glass from carelessly tossed bottles can be a hazard. Another reason for booties on dogs. It may not completely stop an injury, but it may help to minimize the damage.

In some places along the Strip, the sidewalks are very narrow. This is usually due to construction. In some places, the sidewalk may be no more than 3 or so feet wide and they have lots of traffic signs planted in the sidewalk. If one were to step off the curb, one would be immediately thrust into very busy traffic. This is not to scare anyone, but to help you plan. Just be prepared to take it slow and carefully at times when walking the Strip.

Be sure to allow plenty of time for checking out of the hotel to return home. The lines at the check out desks are usually long. Also, unless you are using the shuttle service, which you can schedule to pick you up, the wait for a taxi could be a long one.

If you are traveling alone through the airport and require assistance from airport personnel, there could be further delays. When you arrive at the airport, you will be assigned a number. This number places you in a queue for assistance. You will be assisted to your gate when your number comes up. The wait may be long, so allow for extra time.

There are tons of things to do in Las Vegas. If you are at all into gambling, be sure to find the Player's Club at each casino you visit. When you sign up for a free Club Card, you can earn points as you gamble. These points are redeemable for a variety of things. These may vary from casino to casino. Some clubs give free hats and other gifts just for signing up. And hey, if you gamble enough, who knows what freebies you might be able to get.

So as you pack your bags, remember the water bottle, dog booties and water dish, and don't forget the sun block. Bring a busload of patience, especially if you have a difficult time in crowds, and get ready to have a great time.

MEET BFRLAG'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS (part II)

Marianne Sussman

Marianne continues her life-long advocacy work for persons with disabilities as the Secretary for BFLAG. She also serves BFLAG in a variety of miscellaneous roles as a fully sighted member.

Butch Arnold Joined BFLAG at our 2002 convention in Houston where he was elected to our board. Butch is a Realtor and ADA consultant in Baltimore. He is a graduate of The Maryland School for the Blind and has a BA from Anderson University. Butch has been involved in many Service organizations such as "Boy

Scouts", Kiwanis and served for 10 years as the advisor to the Johns Hopkins University Circle K club. He spends most of his time now in advocacy work for the Disabled Community and BFLAG. Butch has written several articles which have been published across the country in regards to these issues. Has also works on implementation of the "Help America Vote Act" and the mandates of the "Americans with Disabilities Act" in Maryland.

ON A PERSONAL NOTE:

Our deepest sympathy goes out to Erin Cavin, who lost her mother suddenly on March 22nd. Erin has been very active in BFLAG in the Baltimore area and helped to raise a lot of funds for our past convention. She is now working hard to raise funds for this year's convention in Las Vegas. Our thoughts and prayers are with Erin and her family.

BFLAG 2005 CONVENTION REGISTRATION FORM:
Las Vegas, July 3-10, 2005

Mail to: c/o Butch Arnold
4802 Holder Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21214

To register by phone call Butch Arnold at: 410-254-1972

NAME _____ date _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE NUMBER _____

EMAIL _____

Membership Dues \$12 _____

BFLAG SUITE PASS \$30 _____

Covers morning & evening events in the suite as well as the Sunday and Friday parties

ROLLERCOASTER EXTRAVAGANZA \$25 _____

This is a one on one guided tour including 3-4 roller coaster rides on or near "The Strip". This will include VIP access to all rides, transportation and coaster fees which are normally \$12 or so each.

"An Evening at La Cage" \$25 _____

This is an extremely well done and funny "Drag" shows with great audience interaction. There is a link to it on our web site. The Headliner will be invited to meet with us on Tuesday evening if possible.

Picnic & Pool party at "The Blue Moon" \$25 _____

This will be held at a private resort where we will have food and drink will be served at the picnic area near the pool, as well as a private room and full access to the facility. Some volunteer escorts will be available to assist. We will also have a picnic area by the pool. There is a link to "The Blue Moon" on our web site.

BFLAG Dinner & Boat Ride \$25 _____

This will include transportation, the boat ride and the meal on the boat.
We will post more details as we get them. This will be a private event with escorts.

Discounted Total for Dues and ALL BFLAG EVENTS* \$130 _____

*if received by May 15th, 2005

Additional Donation to BFLAG \$ _____

Total amount \$ _____