

Update METRO

SAN DIEGO FROM HILLCREST TO NORTH COUNTY

Dems Host Noted Speakers Panel on Domestic Partners, Changing Families

Wednesday, Sept. 20, 1989

SAN DIEGO — On Thursday, Sept. 28, the San Diego Democratic Club features two noted community leaders speaking on "Domestic Partners" and related issues of "The Changing Family."

Featured are attorney Thomas F. Coleman of Los Angeles, a nationally recognized authority on the subject, and Jean Harris, aide to San Francisco Board of Supervisors President Harry Britt. She is a leader in the campaign to preserve the city's Domestic Partners Ordinance, which faces a ballot repeal. Britt is the ordinance's principal author.

"This program is of interest to singles and groups as well as to couples and would-be couples who consider themselves as constituting a household," says Democratic Club Program Co-Chair Herb King. "We are so accepting of the status quo that we frequently fail to recognize that we are unfairly being deprived of certain rights, privileges, and opportunities simply because we may not be part of a legally sanctioned marriage or an 'Ozzie and Harriet' type family."

California households today are as different from the "Father Knows Best" stereotype as Gay and Lesbian homes are from commonly-held homophobic stereotypes. Today's households vary widely in character and structure. They may consist of dual career married couples, childless couples, single-parent families, extended families, blended or step families, foster families, domestic partners, interracial, inter-religious, and cross-cultural families.

"June Cleaver would never recognize today's families, and too often, would refuse to accept them," King said.

California has long been in the forefront in flexibly defining "family." A 1921 state Supreme Court decision, reaffirmed a few years ago, said "Family may mean different things under different circumstances. The family, for instance, may be a group of people related by blood or marriage, or not related at all, who are living together in the intimate and mutual interdependence of a single home or household."

Studies have established that the traditional concept of family is all but obsolete. The changing family may have strong ties, but new arrangements. Unmarried domestic partners, Gay and non-Gay, and including seniors and disabled people sharing households, are common today. A new family may even consist of a single individual. While all these changes have taken place, laws and regulations have been slow to meet the new circumstances.

Some communities, such as Berkeley, have for several years had domestic partners ordinances granting some rights to non-traditional households. Last March, the Los Angeles City Council passed a law giving unmarried city employees sick leave to care for a partner and leave benefits if they have filed a "domestic partnership" affidavit. However, these limited benefits apply to city employees only.

Another small step toward equal consideration was the recent decision by the Commonwealth of New York's supreme court that the surviving member of a 10-year Gay relationship is entitled to the right to retain the lease on the apartment the two men shared, under government rent control guidelines.

The most timely issue is the fate of the Domestic Partners Ordinance that was unanimously passed by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in May and signed by Mayor Art Agnos. This law, for the first time, would allow unmarried partners, both Gay and non-Gay, to register their relationships with a city bureau in much the same way that a couple applies for a marriage license. Other rights which may be available under this law are not so clear.

The city-county of San Francisco was ready to start registering domestic partners, and people were actually lined up, when the process was stopped by a group of right-wing religious leaders who gathered sufficient numbers of signatures to put the issue on the November ballot.

Coleman and Harris will speak about the ramifications of the entire domestic partners and changing family issue and discuss the campaign to stop the repeal of the San Francisco law. Community leaders there are raising a campaign budget of \$250,000 to retain the law.

Coleman is a member of the Joint Select Task Force on the Changing Family and has served as principal consultant on the Los Angeles City Task Force on Family Diversity. He is an adjunct professor at USC Law Center where he teaches a course on "Rights of Domestic Partners." He has made frequent radio and TV appearances as an authority on domestic partnerships, including an appearance on the nationally televised program "Nightline" with Ted Koppel.

Harris, in addition to being an aide to Britt, is a long-term political activist as well as being a board member of Lesbian Agenda for Action and chair of the Lesbian and Gay Caucus of the California Democratic Party.

The San Diego Democratic Club meeting will be held in Fulton Hall at Metropolitan Community Church of San Diego, 4333 30th St. in North Park, on Thursday evening, Sept. 28. Doors open at 7 p.m.; a brief business meeting starts at 7:30 p.m.; and the program follows. All are welcome and there is no charge, however donations are accepted.