

News Briefs

Appeals Court Overturns Big Idea Ruling

A Texas appeals court has overturned a decision that helped push Big Idea Productions, creator of VeggieTales into bankruptcy. The Fifth District Court of Appeals ruled in August that Big Idea did not breach an agreement with Lyrick Studios, creator of Barney, over distribution of products. The reversal of the April 2003 decision means the \$11.5 million award Lyrick received will go to Big Idea's creditors. After the 2003 ruling, Big Idea's assets were sold in a bankruptcy auction to Classic Media, the New York distribution company that owns the rights to Lassie. Classic Media continues to produce new VeggieTales products through Big Idea. VeggieTales founder Phil Vischer said he had "total peace" with the outcome. "The great thing about the higher court's decision is that everyone who worked at Big Idea Productions in those dark days can rest now knowing that we did, in fact, act with integrity," said Vischer, who has launched a new company called Jellyfish.

Shariah Law Rejected in Ontario

The head of the Canadian province of Ontario said Ontario will not become the first Western government to allow Shariah, or Islamic law, the Canadian Press (CP) reported. "There will be one law for all Ontarians," Premier Dalton McGuinty said. The province has allowed Catholic and Jewish groups to use faith-based tribunals to settle family disputes since 1991. The Ontario government revisited the practice when Muslim leaders began demanding the same right. McGuinty has promised to outlaw the tribunals, CP said. "Ontarians will always have the

right to seek advice from anyone in matters of family law, including religious advice," he said. "But no longer will religious arbitration be deciding matters of family law."

California Governor to Veto bill that would have legalized Gay Marriage

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger planned to veto a bill that would have legalized gay marriage in his state, the Associated Press (AP) reported. The bill passed in the State Assembly Sept. 6 in a 41-36 vote, the minimum number needed for passage. However, Schwarzenegger said the legislation would conflict with the intent of voters when in 2000 they approved Proposition 22, which stated that "only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California," the AP reported. Gay-rights advocates accused Schwarzenegger of pandering to the right. Some conservative groups expressed concern that Schwarzenegger's decision to let the state appeals court decide the issue would invite socially liberal judges to legislate from the bench. Meanwhile, on Sept. 14, the Michigan legislature rejected a proposed constitutional amendment that would ban gay marriage and create civil unions, the New York Times reported. Last year, the ban received preliminary approval in a 105-to-92 vote. In September, it was rejected 157 to 39 by a joint session of the House and Senate. Observers say the turnaround reflected the fact that some legislators now consider same-sex marriage more acceptable politically.

Church Removes Sign Claiming Hurricane Was God's Judgment

A Massachusetts church was criticized in September for posting a sign suggesting Hurricane Katrina was divine judgment, the Boston Herald reported. New England Baptist Church in Medford removed the sign that read "New Orleans: Natural disaster? Or

God's anger with sin?" after a journalist questioned one of the leaders about it. "It's not supposed to be a slight against the people of New Orleans," said church Deacon Brian Codi. "All it is, is a wakeup call." Stephen DeFerrari, who escaped from New Orleans on a canoe, said he didn't know which God the church worshiped. "It certainly isn't mine," he said. "There's been a lot of churches down here, but they're all busy helping, not preaching."

Canadian Teacher Suspended for Views on Homosexuality

A Christian high school counselor in Canada who was suspended without pay in 2002 for stating "homosexual parents don't make a good fit to raise children" recently had his appeal to the Supreme Court of British Columbia overturned. The presiding judge said Chris Kempling, who made the statement in a letter he wrote to the Quesnel (British Columbia) Cariboo Observer, could jeopardize his need for impartiality as a public educator because of his views on homosexuality. A second three-month suspension was imposed in April after Kempling wrote a letter to the same newspaper describing homosexuals as promiscuous and objecting to Canada's gay marriage legislation. Kempling planned to appeal the decision.

Michigan Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Declared Unconstitutional

A federal judge ruled in September that a Michigan law banning partial-birth abortions is unconstitutional, the Associated Press reported. U.S. District Court Judge Denise Page Hood said the law was vague and placed an "undue burden" on a woman's right to choose. Hood said the act "does not describe any specific procedure to be banned ... [or] distinguish between induced abortion and pregnancy loss." The Michigan Catholic Conference said it would urge Attorney General Mike Cox to

appeal the decision.