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Subject: NEWS TELEGRAPH: KC STAR'S NEW POLICIES OF INCLUSION

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NEW POLICIES OF INCLUSION AT KC STAR

by Jon D. Barnett

KANSAS CITY--The only major daily newspaper in town, the *Kansas City Star*, has adopted two new policies that affect Lesbians and Gays. One affecting employees at the paper is the ability to include same sex "domestic partners" on an employee's health benefit package. The other--regarding more information in obituaries--will affect readers.

HEALTH CARE BENEFITS

Employees of Capital Cities/ABC, Inc., which owns the *Star*, received notice that same sex domestic partners are eligible to participate in their medical, dental and vision programs. "Each year the company reviews and reaffirms its commitment to a policy of equal employment opportunities for all qualified individuals," read a January 6 memo sent to all employees and obtained by the *News-Telegraph*. "This year that review process has resulted in a decision by management that our commitment to fair employment practices is further served by expanding eligibility under our healthcare programs to include same-sex domestic partners."

To be eligible the employee and domestic partner must have lived together for at least six months and be unable to legally marry. Candidates must also be of the age of consent and cannot be blood related or legally married to any other person.

The *Star's* open enrollment period ended January 31 and coverage to those who chose it was made retroactive to the first of the year.

According to a source the company expected about one half of one percent of the *Star's* 1,600 employees currently enrolled in a healthcare plan to take advantage of the new policy.

OBITUARIES

Also last month, the *Star* instituted new policies concerning obituaries? allowing family members to include additional information, including the cause of death, for a fee. As has been a long-standing policy, basic information will continue to be published free. Within days of the new policy an obituary was published citing AIDS related-complications as the cause of death, something the paper had not previously allowed in its free notices.

The paper does publish the names of same-sex surviving partners in their free notices at the request of the family.

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