

# National study is tracking spread of AIDS

By KATHI DOBSON  
Collegian Science Writer

Throughout the country, 5,000 gay men are participating in a study to help researchers track the development of AIDS to gain an understanding of why some people develop the disease and others do not, one study leader said.

Robin Fox, director of the Johns Hopkins University branch of the study, said the research is sponsored by the National Cancer Institute and the National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases — both part of the National Institutes of Health.

Lawrence Kingsley, an epidemiologist with the University of Pittsburgh's department of medicine who leads the Pittsburgh branch of the study, said researchers are looking at factors that increase a person's risk of contracting acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

The study will also examine how the disease is transmitted, how AIDS spreads through the population, how the disease affects victims and people around them and how society is coping with the fear of AIDS, said Kingsley, who leads the Pitt men's study.

The NIH is collecting the final information and dispersing it to researchers throughout the country, Fox said.

**'The time to interrupt transmission is now, while the risk level is low.'**

— Lawrence Kingsley, University of Pittsburgh epidemiologist.

The information is used by other researchers to analyze specific groups of individuals within the study, Fox said. One such group is men who have been infected by the HTLV-III virus — which has been linked to AIDS — since the study began.

Johns Hopkins, in Baltimore, calls its phase of the study SHARE — the Study to Help the AIDS Research Effort, she said.

The national study — called the Multicenter AIDS Cohort Study — began in 1983. Researchers are surveying gay and bisexual men at four centers: Pittsburgh, Johns Hopkins, the University of California at Los Angeles and Northwestern University in Chicago, Kingsley said.

The MACS study was founded by the National Institute of Health to study the life cycle of HTLV-III virus. The HTLV-III virus is only one factor causing AIDS. The study focuses on why some people infected with the HTLV-III virus develop AIDS while others do not, Fox said.

Fox said the four groups in the study use the same interview questionnaires and run very similar lab tests. That enables the group to survey about a thousand people in each area and still have a total survey of about 5,000 people.

Interviewers ask questions from a standard questionnaire focusing on the medical history, drug use, psychology and sexual practices of the participants, she said.

The participants also receive a physical examination and laboratory tests including blood and semen, Fox said. If a man later develops HTLV-III infection or AIDS, the specimens can be analyzed to trace the development of the virus, she said.

The specimens are also used by the researchers to search for AIDS precursors, she said. Kingsley said gay men from Pittsburgh, Ohio and northern West Virginia are participating in the Pittsburgh study.

Kingsley said only 23 percent of the men participating in the Pitt Men's Study are infected with the HTLV-III virus, making Pittsburgh the lowest risk area of the four centers. Los Angeles has the highest percentage of infected men with 55, Chicago has 45 percent and Baltimore has 39 percent.

"The time to interrupt transmission is now, while the risk level is low," Kingsley said, adding that Pittsburgh has a low occurrence of AIDS because it is not located near the original high-risk areas — New York City and Los Angeles.

The disease has not yet "taken off" in Pittsburgh, he said, adding that a total of 50 AIDS cases have been reported in Pittsburgh and 305 in Pennsylvania.

Fox said Baltimore has seen a recent increase in HTLV-III infection because many people from Washington, D.C., are being included in the study.

Kingsley said the first reported AIDS cases occurred in the United States in both New York and Los Angeles in 1981. However, evidence shows AIDS has been in Africa since 1981 and a type of monkey in Central Africa suffers from an HTLV-III-like virus, STLV-III.

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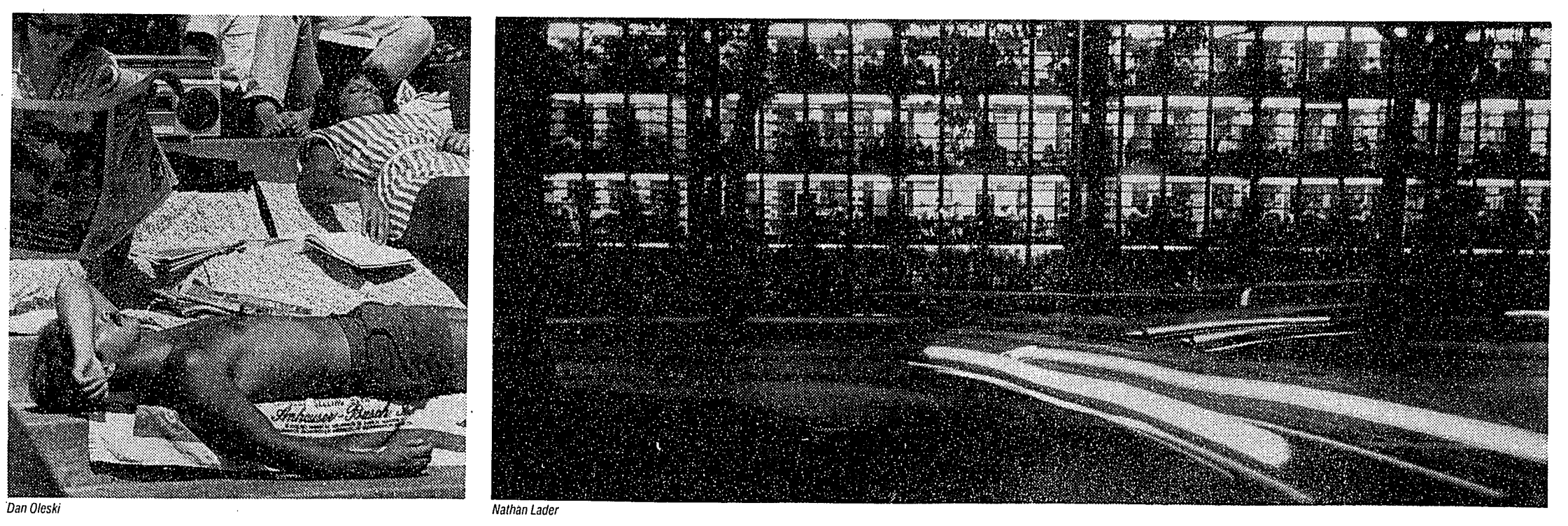
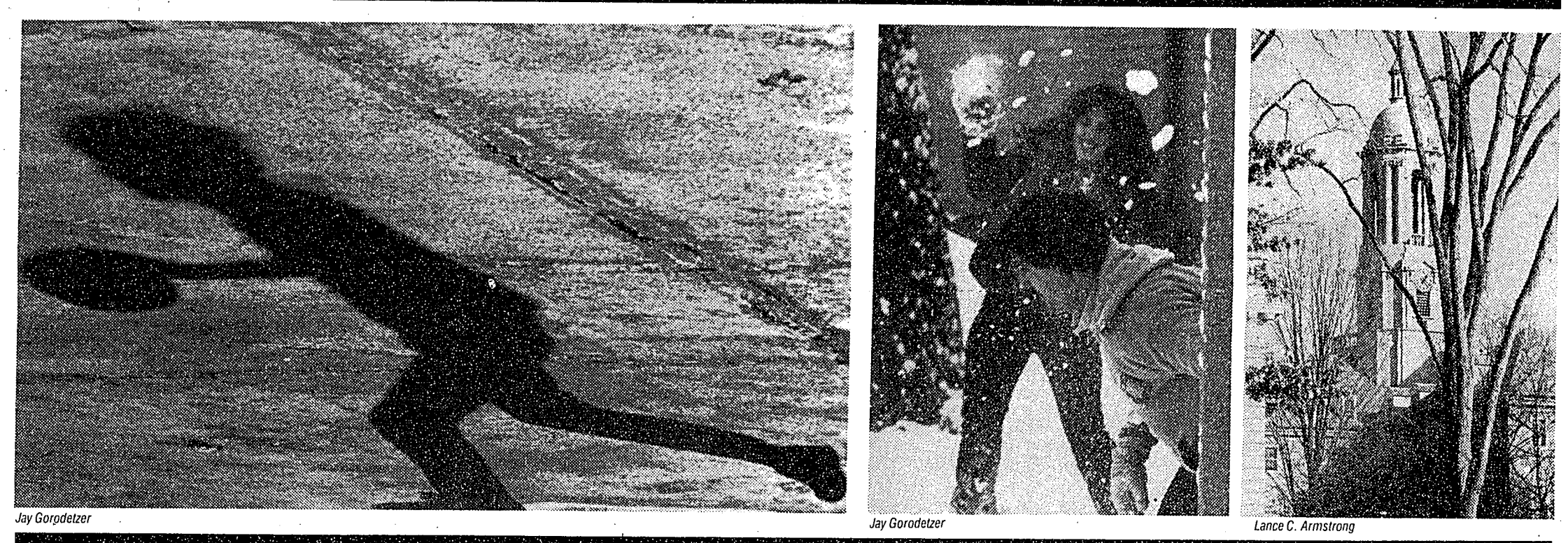
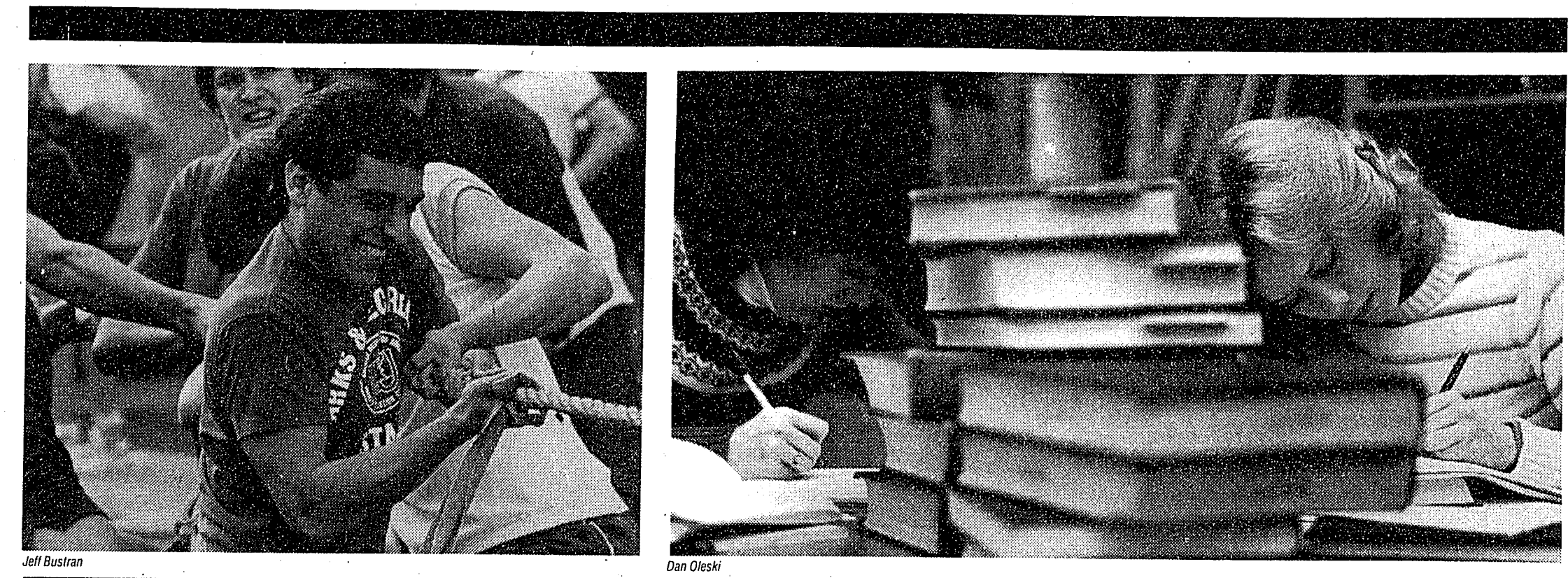
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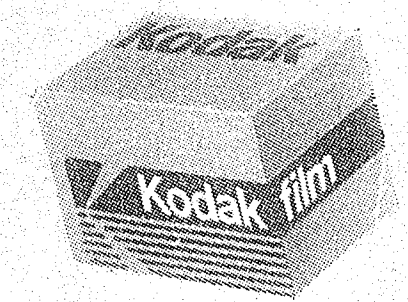
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