



Trip to Tuna

The Voice does Tuna before 'A Tuna Christmas' does Galveston Island

Page 15

Court date draws near for Marc Kajs civil suit



The draped body of Marc Kajs lies on the pavement near the restaurant where he was gunned down on March 28, 1998.

Gay activists say case has changed police handling of gay domestic violence

By BINNIE FISHER

As February draws near, attorneys on both sides of a murder case that rocked Houston's gay and lesbian community are notifying witnesses and preparing last-minute details.

The defendant in the case is not the man who murdered 28-year-old Marc Kajs on March 28, 1998 in front of the Montrose restaurant where he worked.

After pumping eight bullets into Kajs that Sunday morning, the killer, 32-year-old Ilhan Yilmaz, turned the gun on himself and fired. The murder of Marc Kajs would never be tried in criminal court.

The defendant in the civil case scheduled next month is the City of Houston.

Gloria Swidriski, the mother of Marc Kajs, alleges in her suit that although her son sought help from police several times during the months he was stalked by Yilmaz, police offered him no help that might have preserved his life.

The lawsuit almost died in 2001 when a federal judge ruled that the family did not have a case. A decision handed down later in the year by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the decision.

The court ruled that the only

Please see **KAJS** on Page 8

With sadness, Birch counts down final days at HRC

Executive director steps down on Monday to spend more time with family

By JOE CREA

With few regrets, some serious anger at a proposed constitutional marriage amendment and even some acknowledgements of professional weakness, Elizabeth Birch will step down as executive director of the Human Rights Campaign on Jan. 4 to spend more time with her two 4-year-old twins and her partner, Hillary Rosen.

"I'm very sad," Birch said. "It's really hard and very emotional to leave. I love this staff, and it's just been the highest privilege to work

at this organization."

Birch said that the organization is presently "very wide-ranging" and demands a tremendous amount of travel. Due to her children, Birch said she could no longer make the job "work anymore."

"The organization I'm leaving is in very solid condition," Birch said. "Financially it is in very good shape, the building campaign is complete and it just seemed like a time to transition to a new leader."

Birch praised the selection of

Please see **BIRCH** on Page 9



Elizabeth Birch (left) praised the woman who will replace her as the executive director of the Human Rights Campaign, Cheryl Jacques. Birch said Jacques' legislative experience will be an important — and new — arsenal for HRC's future leadership.

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS: Christians, Jews align with Islamic group vs. gay marriage. Page 6

SO LONG MR. MAYOR: Bid farewell to Houston's gay-friendly Mayor Lee. P. Brown, Jr. Page 3



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local news

Brown: Everybody's mayor

Lee Brown was first mayor to ride in Gay Pride Parade, appoint community liaison

By BINNIE FISHER

If Houston residents remember him for nothing else, former mayor Lee P. Brown, Jr. said, he hopes they will remember him as a city leader who truly celebrated diversity.

"I've worked hard to stress the fact that this city must be one of inclusiveness," he said a few days before leaving office. After six years as Houston's mayor, Brown was prevented from seeking another two years in office by term limits.

Early in the New Year, Brown took a ride on the Houston METRO Light Rail Line that he fought for, and he left office Jan. 2 after the inauguration of Mayor-elect Bill White.

Gays and lesbians concur that Brown reached out to all segments of the city, including the gay and lesbian community.

Janine Brunjes, the mayor's liaison to the community, said, "He has tolerated nothing less than a diverse city. He was the first mayor to appoint a GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender) community liaison. I would hope that the role will continue."

Brunjes said the appointment of a liaison was a monumental moment in Houston's history.

"I think that was an important step toward getting clear representation in city government," she said. "Cities the size of Houston ought to be responsive to the GLBT community."

Brown said having a liaison was helpful to him as mayor, and he praised Brunjes for her contributions.

"She brought to me the issues before they became issues in the gay and lesbian community," he said. "A dynamic gay, les-



History was made in 2001 in Houston when Mayor Lee P. Brown, Jr. (seated) signed the city's non-discrimination ordinance into law. He is surrounded by gay and lesbians leaders (from left) political consultant Grant Martin, former city councilwoman and new City Controller Annise Parker, transgender activist Vanessa Foster and Janine Brunjes, liaison to the gay and lesbian community.

bian, bisexual and transgender community is part of what makes Houston a great city."

Ken Jones, president of the Houston Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus PAC, said Brown's contributions have been many.

"He's been very gay friendly," Jones said. "He's been in every Gay Pride Parade, and he pushed the non-discrimination ordinance for city employees."

Jones said it is possible that one of Brown's most significant contributions won't be found on any document he signed or any ordinances he supported.

"His most important contribution is he showed that he could be supportive of the gay community and still get elected," Jones said.

Over the long haul, Jones said, Brown's supportiveness of gay and lesbian issues even in election years will speak to future city leaders.

"By his showing that it didn't hurt him to support us, that is a very important step," Jones said. "We are very grateful for that."

If he finds any fault with Brown, Jones said, it is perhaps that he made an issue of domestic partner benefits before timing was right. Jones said conservatives mobilized against the idea, and it was defeated.

Brunjes said she commends Brown for his support of the measure, that became known as Proposition 2.

"He stood behind us on Prop. 2," she said. "He stood with us on our issues when others would not."

Brown explains his support of gays and lesbians in this way, "I was elected to be mayor of all of Houston. No one should be left out."

As far as his accomplishments are concerned, Brown said he hopes he left behind a little something for everyone.

"If you like the arts, we lifted up the cap on the hotel and motel taxes so that more

goes to the arts," he said, adding that the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts was opened during his tenure as mayor.

For those who like transit, he said, "We have light rail."

Those who are drawn to a city by its downtown should appreciate Houston, Brown said. "We have a vibrant downtown."

The sports minded should recognize a few new landmarks on Houston's horizon, Brown said, including Reliant Stadium, Minute Maid Park and Toyota Center.

In addition, lest anyone forget, Brown reminds Houstonians that the city is hosting the Superbowl in a few weeks.

If he could give any advice to gays and lesbians, Brown said it would be, "Be a part of the structure of our city. Vote. Pick the people who will look out for your interests."

Jones echoed those sentiments. "What the gay community needs to understand is that it (city politics) is a process. You have to build fences and build bridges and build support."

As gays and lesbians vote for candidates who will support their issues, Jones said, in time they will get domestic partner benefits for city employees. Eventually, he said city contractors will be required to offer those benefits to their employees as well.

As for the outgoing mayor, he isn't going far. Brown will return to Rice University as the Herbert A. A. Visiting Scholar in the School of Social Sciences.

Robert M. Stein, dean of the School of Social Sciences, said Rice University welcomes Brown.

"After six years of service to the City of Houston, Mayor Brown has a wealth of experience that he can share with the Rice University community," Stein said. "Mayor Brown will be available to students and faculty and plans to write on several topics including community policing."



Mayor Lee P. Brown, Jr. answers media inquiries during a recent event at City Hall. (Photo by Dalton DeHart)

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SYPHILIS & INTERNET: The Center for Disease Control and other organizations are using the internet to inform gay men regarding an increase in syphilis cases. Page 4



NO LOVE BOAT: Two members of a gay travel club who were assaulted aboard a Royal Caribbean cruise vessel say the ship's crew failed to assure their safety. Page 12



GAY GLOBES: Actress Charlize Theron received two Golden Globe nominations, among many gay-related 2003 Globe nominations. Page 20

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national news

STD prevention efforts turn to Web hook-ups

Syphilis rise among gay men tied to sex partners met online

By RYAN LEE

Health advocates want to turn the Internet into a tool in their prevention efforts against syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases that gay men are increasingly getting through sex that began with Web-based hook-ups.

The federal Centers for Disease Control & Prevention on Dec. 19 highlighted the Web-based approaches of the San Francisco Department of Public Health in delivering safe sex messages in response to a four-year syphilis outbreak within the city, concentrated in heavy numbers among gay men.

"Because a majority of new syphilis cases are from men who have met online, we had to bring our staff up to speed on how to use the Internet to reach people," said Jeffrey Klausner, director of the STD Prevention & Control division of the San Francisco Health Department.

In 2002, gay and bisexual men with early-stage syphilis accounted for 88 percent of the 495 reported cases in San Francisco, a spike from 22 percent of the 41 cases reported four years earlier.

To determine what role the Internet



STD prevention efforts among gay and bisexual men must adapt to address the greater use of the Internet for sex hook-ups, according to Jeffrey Klausner, director of the STD Prevention & Control division of the San Francisco Health Department. (Photo by AP)

played in feeding the rise of syphilis among gay men, researchers collected information from 415 of the gay and bisexual men who were diagnosed with early syphilis in 2002.

Those men reported a combined 6,482 sex partners during the period in which they may have acquired syphilis. The Internet proved to be the most common venue for meeting sex partners: Nearly 33 percent of hook-ups resulted from online meetings. Bars accounted for about 21 percent of hook-ups among the men, with bathhouses and sex clubs ranking

third and fourth, respectively.

Of those gay and bisexual men in San Francisco who have syphilis, some 37 percent met sex partners online in the last half of 2002, compared to 12 percent during the first six months of 2000.

Data from January through April of 2003 showed that 44 percent of the gay and bisexual men with early syphilis sought sex partners online.

But just as the Internet facilitates easy sexual hook-ups, it also establishes a new paper trail of a person's sex partners, Klausner said.

The San Francisco Department of Public Health created a set of guidelines to help health agencies use the Internet to contact potential sex partners. The guidelines are intended to ensure prevention messages protect confidentiality and aren't discarded as spam or junk mail, two impediments to online prevention, health officials said.

Also on Dec. 19, the National Coalition of STD Directors called on Internet service providers to help curb the spread of STDs through online hook-ups.

"The internet has the potential to increase the spread of HIV and STDs, but also has unique characteristics which, if we take advantage of them, can help reduce transmission," Theresa Raphael, executive director of the National Coalition of STD Directors, said in a prepared statement.

The degree to which service providers

participate with health researchers varies, according to Klausner, ranging from Gay.com being "very cooperative and supportive" to AOL being "quite obstructive and not so helpful."

On Tuesday, an AOL official took exception to the company being labeled "obstructive." The company has posted CDC banners in chatrooms and includes STD prevention information in its health section, according to Nicholas Graham, an AOL spokesperson.

"I vigorously dispute [Klausner's] assertion," Graham said. "We feel we have done what is necessary, what is appropriate and what is possible for us to do. It's important to know that we have worked with the CDC with issues relating to public health."

In late 2001, Klausner was criticized after a Congressional aide said he urged Virginia to use its "public health powers" to shut down the on-line chat rooms of Virginia-based AOL.

Klausner denied asking AOL to close gay chat rooms.

Gay health advocates said it is vital that public health funding follow current trends.

"The Internet is extremely powerful tool, and we have to target it," said Connie Smith, director of social marketing for the Atlanta-based National AIDS Education & Services for Minorities. "It is the new dating service for a lot of individuals who find technology gives them the freedom to speak openly about sex."

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national news

Mich. governor bans anti-gay bias in state employment



Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm came under fire from conservatives for issuing a new order that bans discrimination against gays in state employment.

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Gov. Jennifer Granholm, a Democrat, has issued an order banning discrimination against gays in state government employment, a move critics condemned as a first step toward legalizing gay marriage. The order issued last week covers the executive branch, which has about 55,000 employees — about 95 percent of all state workers. "The employment practices of state government should promote public confidence in the fairness and integrity of government and should reflect a commitment to equal employment opportunities," Granholm spokeswoman Liz Boyd said in a news release. Gary Glenn, president of the American Family Association of Michigan, told the Detroit Free Press the move "is simply the first step in a stepping stone strategy for legalizing homosexual marriage." The order bans discrimination based on sexual orientation. Michigan is the 10th state to adopt such a gay rights policy, according to the Triangle Foundation, a gay rights advocacy group.

Poll: Most Americans support gays serving openly in military

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Despite the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy, a new survey shows that most Americans support allowing gay men and lesbians to serve openly in the military, according to a Gallup poll news release. Conducted Dec. 5-7, the CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll questioned 1,004 adults. They were asked: "Do you think people who are openly gay or homosexual should — or should not — be allowed to serve in the U.S. military?" according to media reports. Overall, 79 percent said gays should be able to serve openly. Some 91 percent of those surveyed who are age 18-29 said gays should be allowed to openly serve in the U.S. military. In the age range of 30-49, some 81 percent of respondents agreed; 74 percent of those ages 50-64 agreed; and 68 percent of those ages 65 and over agreed, according to the release. The new poll shows more support than previous surveys. An August Fox News survey found that 64 percent of Americans supported gays serving openly in the military, while a 2001 survey by MIT Press showed support at 56 percent.

Boy Scouts ask Supreme Court to review case over anti-gay policy

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. Supreme Court has a chance to review a new case brought to them by the Boy Scouts of America, according to a news release by the youth organization. The Boy Scouts want justices to consider whether its rights were violated when Boy Scout councils were excluded from a charitable fund-raising campaign by Connecticut state employees, the release said. The Boy Scouts appealed the case after a federal court in New York City ruled that the group's rights were not violated when the state of Connecticut took the Scouts off of a list of charities that civil servants may contribute to via payroll deductions. Complaints over the Boy Scouts' anti-gay policy led to the move by the state. The state's Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities said that including a group that excludes gays would violate anti-discrimination laws, but the Boy Scouts said their group should not have to "pay a price" for "exercising its First Amendment rights," the release said.

Calif. lesbian resort accused of discrimination against men

PALM SPRINGS — A lesbian resort in this liberal tourist town is being sued for allegedly discriminating against two potential guests because of their gender, the Desert Sun reported. Casitas Laquita is one of two resorts in Palm Springs that courts lesbians, according to the Sun. Los Angeles residents Michael Cohn and Greg Lewis are suing the resort, alleging that they were denied reservations in August because they are male. The two women who operate the business, Denise Roberson and Joanna Funaro, said they do not recall talking to either man but that they rent to gay men, straight men, nudists and transsexuals, in addition to their core market of lesbians, the Sun reported. Their attorney, Jeff Thomas of Los Angeles, told the Sun that the lawsuit is "the thinnest supposed complaint I've seen in 14 years of practice. It's just an excuse to get a lawsuit started."

Yankees prevail in gay-bashing lawsuit by clubhouse worker

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — The state's highest court ended a case last week in which a New York Yankees' clubhouse worker accused the team and some of its players of gay bashing, physical abuse and playing cruel practical jokes. The Court of Appeals declined to hear an appeal sought by Paul Priore, who sued the Yankees and three players in state Supreme Court in the Bronx in 1998, each for \$50 million. Priore contended that after he began working for the team as an assistant equipment manager in 1996, several players made anti-gay remarks and played cruel pranks on him because of his sexual orientation. He also claimed he was fired in August 1997 because he was HIV-positive. "I'm shocked," said Priore's lawyer, Edward J. Pavia Jr. He said the Yankees knew of the harassment, contrary to the appellate division's finding. Pavia also said that even if the club didn't know, the players should have faced the lawsuit separately, with his client claiming they violated the city human-rights laws.

From staff and wire reports

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international news

Opposition to gay marriage unites former foes: Christians, Orthodox Jews, radical Muslims

Alliance For Marriage includes Islamic group with possible terrorist ties

By LOU CHIBBARO JR.

The anti-gay Alliance For Marriage, which is coordinating efforts to pass a U.S. constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage, has come under fire for allying itself with an Islamic group that critics accuse of being sympathetic to terrorist causes.

A heated debate over the Alliance for Marriage's decision to include the Islamic Society of North America into its coalition of conservative Christian, Catholic and Jewish organizations surfaced in a recent article in the conservative Jewish publication, *JewishWorldReview.com*.

The writer, Evan Gahr, criticized prominent Jewish and Christian leaders for working with ISNA through the Alliance for Marriage, calling it an unholy alliance in which they put their hostility toward gay marriage above the interests of the Jewish people, Israel and the United States.

Citing published reports and testimony before Congress by experts on terrorism, Gahr asserts in his Dec. 2 article that ISNA, while portraying itself as a mainstream group, uses its resources to help Islamic terrorist organizations and related causes. He also points to statements by

ISNA members and supporters at ISNA-sponsored conferences that have denounced the United States and Israel as enemies of Islam.

Gahr and others who monitor the ISNA's activities accuse ISNA of fomenting anti-American views among Muslims living in the United States, with the potential that U.S. Muslims could be recruited for domestic terrorist activities.

"What better way for the ISNA to maintain its 'false veneer of moderation' than by working side by side with prominent religious figures that also bring the prestige of their institutional association?" Gahr asked in his article. "How can critics plausibly depict the organization as extremist if it boasts the company of so many prominent Jews and Christians?"

Controversy simmers

Among the founding members of the Alliance for Marriage is former D.C. Congressional Delegate Walter Fauntroy, a Baptist minister who has said allowing gays to marry would contribute further to the weakening of the black family. Former Boston Mayor Ray Flynn, the U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican during the Clinton administration, also serves with Fauntroy on the AFM's board of advisers.

Criticism by Gahr and others surfaced after the alliance named Sayyid M. Sayeed, the ISNA's secretary general, to the board of advisers and welcomed ISNA into its fold.

The Alliance For Marriage has responded



Journalist Steven Emerson claims an Islamic group aligned with Christians and Jews to fight gay marriage has supported terrorists in the past.

ed to reports by Gahr and others on the ISNA by calling the criticism unfounded and pointing to Middle East experts who characterize the ISNA as a mainstream, moderate group that has no ties to terrorist organizations.

Officials with the Alliance for Marriage cite literature on ISNA's Web site, which describes the organization as an umbrella group for the American Muslim community and U.S. and other North American Islamic organizations and mosques.

Paul E. Rondeau, senior vice president of the Alliance for Marriage, responded to a *Blade* inquiry about his organization's association with the ISNA by sending an e-mail message containing comments defending the ISNA by three university professors, one from Georgetown and two from the University of Maryland. All three were written in July 2000.

"You ask my opinion on the legitimacy of ISNA and whether [its member groups] 'can fairly be described as hate groups or groups with ties to terrorist organizations,'" said University of Maryland professor Charles Butterworth three years ago, in comments cited by Rondeau. "The answer is very simple: they are legitimate groups that have no ties to hate groups or to other groups that have ties to terrorist organizations," Butterworth stated.

"ISNA is one of the largest and best-known Muslim organizations in North America," stated Middle Eastern studies professor John Voll of Georgetown University, in another of the statements from 2000 sent by Rondeau. "For people who want to deal with representative Muslim organizations, they are the best one to deal with. Most Muslims in the United States see ISNA as the national organization for their community."

A State Department spokesperson told the *Blade* this week the ISNA is not included on any U.S. government list of terrorist organizations or terrorist front groups.

Gahr responds by pointing to U.S. terrorism experts, including investigative journalist Steven Emerson, author of the 2002 book "American Jihad: The Terrorists Living Among Us," who claim that ISNA assists anti-American and terrorist causes indirectly through its programs and conferences.

"It serves as an umbrella group for hundreds of Islamic organizations in North America, some of which promote the Islamic fundamentalist doctrines of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad," Emerson wrote. "ISNA publishes a bimonthly magazine, *Islamic Horizons*, which often champions militant Islamist doctrine, and it convenes annual conferences where Islamic militants have been given a platform to incite violence and promote hatred," Emerson said in his book.

Comments at rally spark concern

Emerson said Muzammil Siddiqui, the president of the ISNA's board of directors until 2001, has repeatedly "made statements supporting the violent ideology of radical Islam," including statements supportive of the elimination of Israel.

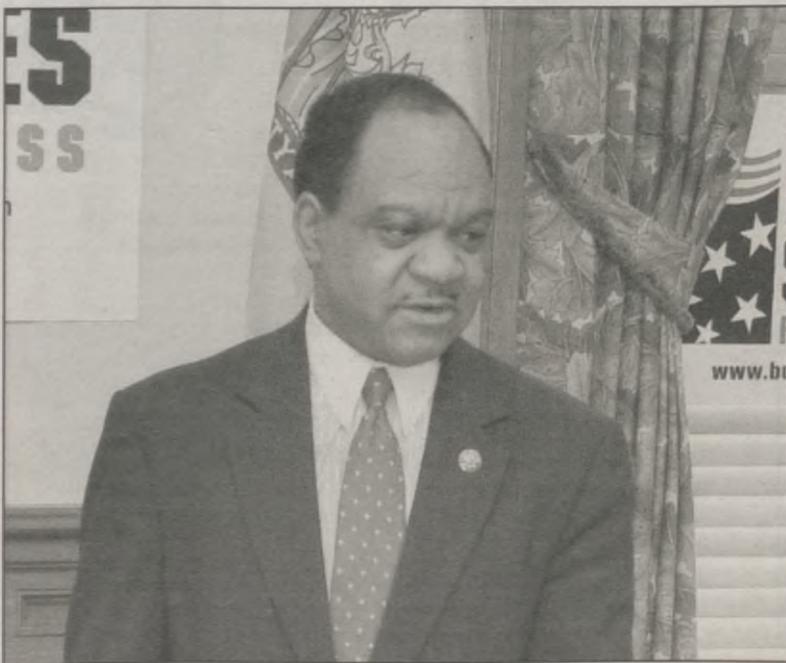
"[Y]ou will see, in a few years, we will be celebrating, insha'allah, the coming victory of Islam in Palestine," Emerson quoted Siddiqui as saying in his role as president of the Islamic Society of Orange County, Calif. "We will be celebrating, insha'allah, the coming of Jerusalem and the whole land of Palestine, insha'allah, and the establishment of the Islamic state throughout that area."

According to Emerson, Siddiqui's comments at a recent rally in Washington, D.C. took on the tone of a warning to the United States for its support for Israel, which Siddiqui called unjust.

"We want to awaken the conscience of America," Emerson quoted him as saying. "America has to learn that. Because if you remain on the side of injustice, the wrath of God will come. Please, please all Americans, do you remember that, that Allah is watching everyone. ... If you continue doing injustice, and tolerating injustice, the wrath of God will come."

"I am not going to accuse ISNA of being directly involved in terrorism," Emerson told WTHR-TV, an NBC affiliate in Indianapolis, which has investigated the ISNA. "I will say ISNA has sponsored extremists, racists, people who call for Jihad against the United States," he said.

In an investigative report broadcast earlier this year, WTHR said it confirmed through independent sources that about a dozen charities, organizations or individuals "under federal scrutiny for possible



Former D.C. Congressional Delegate Walter Fauntroy is a founding member of the Alliance For Marriage, a group of social conservatives lobbying to limit marriage to heterosexual couples. (Photo by Brian Branch-Price/AP)

international news

Belgium to debate allowing gay couples to adopt



Karel De Gucht, president of the Flemish Liberal Democratic Party in Belgium, this week led introduction of a new bill that would allow gay couples in the nation to adopt children.

BRUSSELS — A new law sparked debate over the right of gays to adopt children in Belgium, a nation that legalized same-sex marriages in January 2003, News24, South Africa, reported. The Flemish Liberal Democratic Party, the political affiliation of Belgium Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt, is set to unveil a draft law that would allow gay couples to adopt children, News24 reported. Party President Karel De Gucht and Martine Taelman, the lawmaker behind the bill, officially presented the measure this week. Belgian media reported that two other major political parties are likely to support the law, while one is expected to oppose it. If so, the measure likely would achieve a small majority in its favor in federal parliament, News24 reported. After the Netherlands, Belgium is only the second country in Europe to allow gay marriage, and gay Belgian couples already have most of the same rights as heterosexual married couples, the report said.

Tasmania first in Australia to register gay couples

HOBART, Tasmania — On Jan. 1, Tasmania became the first state in Australia to register same-sex couples and give them legal recognition and benefits as a couple, the Australian newspaper in Sydney reported. First to legally register are Michael Carnes and Bob Lavis, who now gain medical, career, parental and other entitlements once reserved only for heterosexual couples, the newspaper reported. "What these changes do is send absolute alarm bells to all those who have been discriminatory in the past that those days are well and truly gone," said Carnes, a gourmet chef forced to leave a job 12 years ago because of his sexuality. "Tasmania now has it all — the natural beauty, the fantastic people and now reforms that show we are no longer a backwater, but a wonderful, open society." The Relationships Act includes sweeping reforms approved in 2003 and eclipses Tasmania's reputation as a state with little tolerance, where homosexuality was a criminal offense until 1998, the Australian reported.

Gays in Taiwan protest 'empty promises' for rights

TAIPEI, Taiwan — In the largest gay rights protests ever in this country, more than two-dozen gay activist groups demonstrated in Taipei to demand that the Democratic Progressive Party push gay rights legislation, according to a report by eTaiwan News. The groups held the rally in front of the offices of President Chen Shui-Bian, whom the activists criticized for failing to pass gay rights that he promised to advocate, the Web site reported. The president and his Democratic Progressive Party announced a same-sex marriage bill in October, but nothing more has been done on the measure. Protestors also want Shui-Bian to rebuke a lawmaker in his party, Ho Shui-sheng, for a comment that same-sex unions would cause the end of Taiwan because gay couples cannot independently produce children, eTaiwan News reported. Shui-sheng later apologized. Taiwan's president has spoken for gay rights many times, according to Ashley Wu, spokesperson for the Taiwan Tongzhi Hotline Association for gays. "But so far they are just empty promises with no sign of concrete action," Wu said.

Judge: Organization didn't discriminate against transsexual

VANCOUVER, B.C. (AP) — A rape crisis center in British Columbia did not discriminate against a transsexual when it denied her work as a volunteer counselor, a Supreme Court judge ruled. Justice E.R.A. Edwards overturned a Human Rights Tribunal decision that said the Vancouver Rape Relief Crisis Center breached the human rights code by barring Kimberly Nixon from counseling women. "This is quite a different case from, say, Ms. Nixon being excluded from a restaurant because of her transsexual characteristics," Edwards said. "Unlike a for-profit business providing services or recruiting employees from the general public or a volunteer organization open to all, Rape Relief defined itself as a women-only organization." That's the only reason Nixon was attracted to the society, Edwards wrote, adding her participation had a political dimension. Nixon said she was humiliated and even contemplated suicide after she was removed from a training program by Rape Relief in 1995 because she was not born a woman.

Uzbek authorities: No pardon for jailed gay journalist

TASHKENT, Uzbekistan (AP) — Uzbek authorities said last week that a gay journalist jailed in a case that drew international criticism was ineligible for a wide-ranging amnesty declared by President Islam Karimov this month. The chief of staff of the prisons system, Mikhail Gurevich, said Ruslan Sharipov could not be pardoned because his crime was grave. The amnesty covers those convicted of minor crimes, women sentenced for the first time and elderly, minor and foreign convicts. Surat Ikramov, a human rights activist and one of Sharipov's defenders, said the decision was "unacceptable" and that the amnesty should apply because an appeals court had cleared Sharipov of the most serious of the three charges on which he was convicted in August. Sharipov, who is openly gay, was convicted of sodomy, having sex with minors and involving minors into anti-social behavior and sentenced to 5 1/2 years.

From staff and wire reports

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local news

Activist: 'Social services are lacking' for battered men

KAJS, continued from Page 1

legal basis of the suit is that police violated Kajs' right to equal protection by discounting his claims of domestic violence.

A police investigation into the case determined that officers followed department procedure in handling the complaints of Kajs. However, an expert witness commissioned by the Kajs' family is expected to testify that the police investigation itself was flawed.

Though the suit is more than a month away from going to trial, gay and lesbian activists say, it already has changed the way police deal with cases of gay domestic battery.

"The whole community policing has been affected by this case," said activist and radio host Ray Hill. "The whole idea of community storefront policing is that citizens can get direct access and services at a convenient location."

The first visit Kajs made to the Montrose police community storefront operation did not help him find peace and security.

"Mr. Kajs was the worst case scenario," Hill said.

Co-workers at Urbana, the trendy Montrose restaurant where Kajs worked, were aware that Kajs was being stalked by his former partner. Yilmaz, who delivered pizzas, often drove by the restaurant and appeared at nightspots where Kajs and his friends went after work.

His friends say what started as a case of emotional harassment escalated over a period of months to clear incidences of domestic violence. They say they felt helpless at times because Kajs had difficulty admitting that his former partner might intend to do him serious physical harm.

Friends had begged Kajs to report threats and battering from Yilmaz to police. When threats from Yilmaz escalated to violence, Kajs finally consulted officers about a restraining order. His friends remember that he was turned away.

Hill said the lawsuit filed by the survivors of Kajs started having ripple effects as attorney Robert Rosenberg began preparing his case.

"Robert Rosenberg's deposition schedule has opened some eyes," Hill said. "In thoroughly preparing the case on behalf of the Kajs' survivors, he has certainly gotten

people's attention regarding some pretty glaring errors in community policy."

Were Kajs to walk into the Montrose Police Storefront on Westheimer today, Hill said, the results would be far different.

"If somebody were in the exact same situation, there would be greater attention paid," he said. "I don't think that person would be encouraged to leave that storefront without some investigation."

Now, Hill said, police would do their best to make certain victims of gay domestic violence were safe before escorting them to the door.

He said a short walk home on a recent evening after attending a community event more or less confirmed that assumption.

Hill said he couldn't help but overhear a cell phone conversation that a young gay man was having as he stood on the street. He listened as the young man told the person on the other end of the conversation that his partner was on probation for assaulting him.

"That tells me that somewhere, gay domestic violence is being prosecuted," he said. "I'm glad to know somebody is on probation for assaulting that young man."

Lawsuit brings attention to needs

For lesbians reporting domestic violence, Hill said, they not only will get help from police, but they may also be eligible to seek refuge at Houston Area Women's Center.

For men who are battered by their partners, Hill said, there is no such haven.

"The only place a man can go who is in that situation is among their friends," he said. "There are endearing friendships that help them in their socialization."

Where social services are lacking, Hill said, "There are informal networks to take up the slack."

Lawsuits like the one filed by the family of Marc Kajs will help bring attention to the fact that gays and lesbians who are in domestic partnership situations have many of the same needs as heterosexuals in marriages.

In time, Hill said, there will be resources available to deal with cases like that of Marc Kajs.

In the meantime, he said, gays and lesbians will have to wait until the case goes to court to learn whether the legal system agrees that Kajs was denied equal protection because he is gay.

national news

MTV revives plans for gay cable channel

By BRYAN ANDERTON

For the past several years, Viacom Inc., the media giant that owns such networks as CBS, MTV and Showtime, has volleyed around the idea of producing a gay-themed premium cable network. Just as that idea appeared dead, a report surfaced that the company is resurrecting plans for the network.

According to reports by Reuters and the Hollywood Reporter, Viacom is renewing plans to launch the all-gay network, known as Outlet. The channel is to be revived by MTV, according to the reports, which had worked on the project for several years with its corporate sibling, Showtime Networks.

Showtime first developed the idea a decade ago, but plans for the network were placed on the back burner indefinitely last year. Viacom officials cited "the current economic climate" in shelving the idea.

A source at Showtime said they had not heard anything new regarding the project, but directed inquiries to MTV instead. Officials at MTV and Viacom did not return calls seeking comment by press time.

But an independent media company apparently beat Viacom to the punch.

In December, Palm Springs, Calif.-based PrideNation Networks launched the coun-

try's first 24-hour gay-themed TV network — at least in a manner of speaking.

For \$5.95 a month, people anywhere in the world with a broadband computer connection can access the network through their computer. For a separate fee, they can purchase hardware that transmits the network to their TV.

But Allen Edwards, the president of PNN, said the fact that the network wasn't on cable was actually a benefit, not a hin-

drance.

"Basically what we're able to do is we really have no limits, because we're not on cable, we're not on satellite or mainstream television, so we can really present the community in reality form," Edwards said. "Not what the mainstream wants to present us as, but what the actual community really is."

Currently, the network only offers a limited schedule that includes movies, doc-

umentaries and celebrity interviews.

Currently, only one other all-gay network is available to American audiences. Last July, the gay Canadian cable channel PrideVision began broadcasting through Largo Communications, a satellite distributor in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

A U.S. version of PrideVision was originally scheduled to launch in late 2002, but has since been stalled due to contractual problems.

Troubled history for gay cable channel efforts

APRIL 2000

The Palm Springs, Calif.-based Gay Television Network says it will debut Oct. 1 with a 12-hour-a-day programming schedule and offerings to include gay-themed films, a morning talk show, music videos and a program on early gay activism in Los Angeles and New York. The debut moves to November when GTN-parent company Triangle Multi-Media can't reach an agreement with a satellite provider to offer the channel on a subscription basis.

NOVEMBER 2000

Launch plans for Gay Television Network again delayed.

JANUARY 2001

Officials with the Gay Television Network reschedule the channel's launch to Jan. 23, then move it again to Feb. 2, on the Dish Network. Dish later says the announcement of an agreement with GTN is premature. GTN called the digital satellite provider "homophobic."

MARCH 2001

The Gay Television Network changes the name of its gay cable channel to Triangle Television Network and reworks its advertising campaign after company officials say its satellite provider raises concerns about using the word "gay" in the channel's name.

SEPTEMBER 2001

Triangle Television Network misses its Sept. 5 launch, the fifth one the network has announced since November 2000.

Canadian broadcast regulators order Show Communications to offer PrideVision, a new digital specialty channel launched by Headline Media Group making it that nation's first gay-themed television channel. Network offerings include a sports comedy, a call-in sex advice show, a fitness and lifestyle show, and late-night erotica.

JANUARY 2002

Viacom properties Showtime and MTV announce they will research the viability of a gay-oriented network. Later, informal advisory panels met in several U.S. cities, including Atlanta. Panel members say a spring 2003 launch date is discussed, and an internal Viacom memo leaked on the Internet says the channel has the working name Outlet. Viacom officials refuse to comment.

PrideVision announces plans to expand into U.S. markets. Canadian subscribers reach about 20,000 later in the year, though the network says it needs 200,000 to become profitable.

APRIL 2002

Triangle Television Network apparently inks an agreement with Dish Network to carry the channel, but a launch date is not announced and the effort again stalls.

DECEMBER 2002

Headline Media Group, the parent company of PrideVision, slashes the network's staff amid budget problems. The company says it has reached an affiliation agreement with a U.S. cable operator to allow the negotiation of carriage agreements.

JULY 2003

PrideVision, a gay cable channel based in Canada, announces July 12 that it is available through Largo Communications, a satellite distributor in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.

DECEMBER 2003

Viacom resurrects plans for Outlet, its proposed gay-themed channel, after placing plans for the concept on hold earlier in the year.

Compiled by Matthew A. Hennig

national news

Birch: proposed federal marriage amendment 'scary'

BIRCH continued from Page 1

Cheryl Jacques as the organization's new executive director, saying that she will bring legislative experience to the 25-year-old group, something Birch never had.

"It is something I was lacking," Birch said. "I had not spent time on the Hill. I never was a staffer. I never had pure legislative experience, but I did have good legislative instinct. Cheryl has lived in that world for 13 years. She's a good strategist in the sense of how to block legislation and work with committees."

That 'scary' amendment

Birch called the proposed federal marriage amendment, which defines marriage as the union of one man and one woman and includes language that some say wipes out any form of legal recognition for gay couples, including civil unions and domestic partnerships, a "very scary thing" that could possibly be "narrowed even further" to become more acceptable to legislators unwilling to support the amendment in its current form.

"The strategy [by the social conservatives] has always been to go broad brushed, which seems very cruel. But some might chose to narrow the language down until it is palatable to gain a broader array of support," Birch said.

Birch noted that conservatives are

engaged in their own debate over what type amendment they can support and said she hopes the infighting continues.

"One camp would like to be very practical and sweep this thing through and the other side ... they are so obsessed and such zealots, would like to go for everything they can get," Birch said. "I hope they keep fighting and never come to a definitive strategy. The truth is their entire enterprise is one large lie because they are only using it for politics and they will never admit it."

President Bush has been ambiguous about his support for such a constitutional amendment, and Birch said he is likely to continue being vague throughout the entire election.

"He will never fully commit," Birch said. "In his interview with Diane Sawyer, he gave what appeared to be a mumbled mess of partial phrases. He parsed the issue out and gave a bit to everyone. The ambiguity will continue throughout the campaign and dirty politics [against gay men and lesbians] will play a role but the Bush administration won't be anywhere near it."

"It will be the fringe groups, under the radar, engaging in the nasty politics by smearing the opposition," she said.

Birch said that to defeat the proposed amendment, gay activists should not "discount the House," which she called an "important vehicle" to block the amendment. She added that despite the assertion by some social conservatives, the federal marriage amendment would not be the dominant issue of the 2004 election.

"It will only be the dominant issue in a handful of 'red' states, very close states," Birch said, citing states that voted for Bush in the 2000 election, which were coded in red on the networks' election news coverage. "And it could be used effectively, in order to drive in a marginal num-

ber of votes."

Birch said that to block such an amendment, it is important for HRC to continue "humanizing our families" and to tell the public that the proposed amendment is attempting to "socially engineer" the culture.

'Colossal disappointment' of Clinton years

Birch said some of the darkest days of her tenure came in 1996, when President Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act, which banned federal legal recognition or benefits for gay married couples and guaranteed that no state is required to recognize a same-sex marriage performed in another state.

"What was so frustrating about that period is that we were coming out of the most intense years of HIV," Birch said. "We were working so hard to build for our own dead and dying, coming out of that and the whole Reagan/Bush era which was so silent and stony for so many gays. And the Clinton years were nothing but bright light and hope and yet the legacy of that era is DOMA and 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell.'"

"It just ended up being a colossal disappointment," she said.

Birch said that in the future, it will not be enough for Democrats to have "motivation" on gay issues, but that they will "have to pay a price and stand up and do what's right."

"So far they've been unwilling to do so," Birch said. "In budget negotiations, when they had the chance to put something like [the Employment Non-Discrimination Act] and hate crimes on the table saying, 'This is a part of the package or the bill dies,' they have not done so."

"We must move beyond the era of platitudes and nice words," she said.

"[Democrats] must come into an era of deliverables."

And as far as Republicans go, Birch said they appear to be "in an era of do no harm and everything will be fine."

"If they can look just less mean than people expect them to look, things are great," Birch said. "So as long as no one is bashing Mary Cheney or they are not supporting no affirmative language that appears to be harmful to gays, they get this image that they are not that bad."

"The challenge going forward will be to have moderate Republicans stand up, and have the guts to say, 'When we do nothing, it rips families apart.' They'll need to stand up for the Mary Cheney's of the world who has silenced herself for her father," she said.

And Birch dismissed criticism from some gay men and lesbians who have publicly argued that HRC should not fund Republican lawmakers, saying that HRC "absolutely must do it" as it is the "only approach that will work."

"I have become more bipartisan after nine years of this work, and there is no long term way to make public policy progress and not have a bipartisan approach," Birch said.

The future is families

Birch said that the next stage of the gay movement must be about "our families."

"It will take revealing the facts that this movement is about people," Birch said. "We will have to humanize and strategize and do way more than we've ever done before as a movement. There's an inevitability to us making progress because we are what we are. And we are on a path that is inevitable. And because it is inevitable, it will be born."

i MORE INFO

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Report: Anti-gay alliance includes 'radical' Islamic group

TERROR TIES continued from Page 6

ties to terrorism" have some links to ISNA. The station noted, for example, that ISNA provided convention booth space and helped raise funds for Islamic charities later linked by the government to terrorist groups, such as the Holy Land Foundation.

The Justice Department has said the Holy Land Foundation allegedly "funneled dollars to support suicide bombings carried out by the militant group Hamas," the station reported. The U.S. government has since frozen the assets of the Holy Land Foundation pending an investigation into its activities, the station reported.

Sayed, the ISNA's secretary general, and other officials with the ISNA could not be reached by press time.

Sayed told WTHR-TV in Indianapolis that ISNA had no knowledge of any links by Holy Land Foundation or other groups it has supported in conferences to terrorist

organizations.

"We were donating money according to the claims they were making," he said. "We will condemn anywhere there is hate, whether they are Muslim, Christian, Jew or whatever."

ISNA leadership 'homophobic'

The ISNA is located in Plainfield, Ind. The group describes itself on its Web site as "an association of Muslim organizations and individuals that provides a common platform for presenting Islam, supporting Muslim communities, developing educational, social and outreach programs and fostering good relations with other religious communities and civic and service organizations."

Faisal Alam, one of the founders of the gay Muslim group al-Fatiha, said he disputes allegations that ISNA assists or supports Islamic terrorist groups.

"The Muslim community is mostly conservative, so it's not surprising that a Muslim group would join a coalition to oppose gay marriage," Alam said. "I have attended ISNA conferences. The leadership is homophobic, but not all members are."

Alam said ISNA's decision to join the Alliance For Marriage is the first time, to his knowledge, that a U.S. Islamic group has officially participated in an anti-gay organization.

"The person who wrote this article is trying to put a wedge between mainstream gays and mainstream Muslim groups," Alam said, in referring to Gahr's articles.

Gahr said his aim is to alert the conservative and mainstream Christian and Jewish communities that homophobia among many of the nation's religious leaders has prompted them to align themselves with a group that is clandestinely working against the interests of the United States and Israel.



Faisal Alam, a founder of the gay Muslim group al-Fatiha, disputes charges that ISNA supports Islamic terrorist groups.

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Issue 1210

Forum

editorial

The only thing we have to fear

No group ever dined and danced their way to civil equality, however sweet sounding the idea. If we are afraid of the fight ahead, we will not win it.

By CHRIS CRAIN

tHEY SAY WE'RE AFRAID TO fight. It's the latest argument raised by conservatives against full equality for gay Americans, and it's one that has an ugly tradition, dating back to opposition to the civil rights movement fought by African-Americans. The difference this time around is that "they" may be right.

After the Supreme Judicial Court in Massachusetts ruled in November that gay couples were entitled to all the "rights and benefits" of marriage, conservatives complained that unelected, life-tenured "judicial activists" were acting like a "super-legislature," deciding a controversial question of social policy that was in mid-debate among elected legislators. Even as the court ruled, they pointed out, the state assembly was already considering competing bills that would have banned gay marriage, enacted gay marriage, or adopted civil unions.

Conflicting polls notwithstanding, these conservatives were probably correct that a bare majority of the Massachusetts court was in fact imposing its will on an elected majority of state representatives (and the state's governor).

Certainly, history is on the conservatives' side. The highest courts in Hawaii and Alaska issued rulings in the mid-'90s similar to the one handed down in Massachusetts, but "the people" had other ideas. Through the democratic process, a whopping majority — nearly 70 percent — in both states overwhelmingly backed ballot initiatives that amended state constitutions to ban gay marriage.

Similar story in Vermont, where its Supreme Court decided in 1999 that the state constitution's guarantee of equality meant that gay couples were entitled to marry. But Vermont's elected representatives, led by a Democratic governor named Howard Dean, chose a more prag-

matic route, enacting civil unions legislation that is not only separate from real marriage but also unequal.

Even without the direct threat of judicial intervention, majorities in 37 state legislatures, backed by their democratically elected governors, have enacted laws banning gay marriage. So did the federal government, passed by a bipartisan majority Congress and signed by a Democratic president in 1996.

SO ARE WE AFRAID TO FIGHT? EVERY time the issue of gay marriage has gone before "the people," we lose. Even now, our elected representatives in Congress are considering a constitutional amendment that would ban gay marriages, civil unions and maybe even government-issued domestic partnerships, and our barely-elected president has hinted that he just may throw his weight behind the effort.

We don't need a majority to defeat the Federal Marriage Amendment — only enough support to bottle it up in a committee of either house of Congress, or more than one-third of the votes of either house if it goes to the floor, or just 14 states if the amendment is submitted to the states for ratification.

But are we afraid, even, of that relatively easy fight?

The year 2003 will go down in the books as a fantastic year of progress for the gay rights movement, but our wins were not in the hearts and minds of "the people," as depressing year-end polls confirmed. We can, of course, win some version of equality by having it imposed by judges, but we need look no further than the tortured history of abortion rights to see that the ultimate prize may be an entrenched and angry opposition, always threatening to undo our gains.

The story of the black movement for

HOUSTON VOICE

JANUARY 2, 2004

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civil rights has a different ending, with a much more successful resolution. Courtroom wins were backed up in state legislatures and the halls of Congress, where elected representatives gave much needed legitimacy to the idea of equality by casting their votes without a gun to their head of the type held now by the Supreme Judicial Court in Massachusetts.

Those legislative victories didn't happen by accident. African Americans from around the country took to the streets and marched and lobbied until the prize was won.

THAT'S NOT THE WAY WE GAYS HAVE fought our movement, at least not in recent years.

We much more prefer dressing up in tuxedos and fancy dresses and going to fancy dinners over marching in the streets. And we're less likely to boycott than we are to strip down for a dance party, a miniscule portion of which may or may not be donated to a group that may or may not effectively be lobbying for our civil rights.

Perhaps with the dawn of a new year, we can face the cold hard reality that no group ever danced and dined its way to equality, however sweet sounding the idea. It will take more from us, and it's not at all clear that we have the fight in us to do the job.

Of course, not everyone takes an interest in politics, and many people are not the "activist type," and that's fine. But there is more each of us can do, and it doesn't even cost any money.

If every queer in America added just two items to their New Year's resolutions, and then followed through, this coming year would make the gains of 2003 seem paltry. What are these two things? Both are free, and one is relatively painless.

The easiest is voting. The year 2004 is an election year, of course, and to win the battle fought by those duly elected representatives, we need to make sure we duly elect the right ones. There are lots of issues at stake this year, but if we acted more like we were in the middle of a civil rights movement, we'd vote according to which candidates respect our equality and our place at the table.

The harder is coming out, but it's arguably even more important. Poll after poll shows what we all know instinctively to be true: Fair-minded people are far more likely to support our equality if they know one or more of us. And if we can't swallow our shame long enough to introduce our lives to all of our friends, families and coworkers, then the opposition is right.

We are afraid to fight.

@ Chris Crain is executive editor of the *Houston Voice* and can be reached at ccrain@houstonvoice.com.



viewpoint JOHNNY HOOKS



When friends insisted,
Marc Kajs went to police,
but they turned him away

Police weren't there for Marc Kajs

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT YOU ALWAYS remember the firsts in life: your first kiss, your first love, your first friend who was murdered.

Marc Kajs was his name, the name of my friend who was murdered. It was March 28, 1998, and I'll never forget it.

I met Marc while we were both working as waiters at Urbana Restaurant and Bar, a sleek new space where ladies lunched, boys brunched and the dinner wait averaged two hours.

Marc had a wicked sense of humor, a devilish laugh and a stalker, an ex who at times made his life a living hell.

When you work as a waiter, you tend to remember the big tippers. I remember Ilhan from the first encounter I had with him. One late lunch shift, he sat down alone and ordered the ribeye, a top-dollar item on the menu. He was polite, ordered a beer along with his iced tea and paid in cash. He left me \$20, a more than 50-percent tip. I memorized his face and asked him to come by again and ask for me.

He simply answered "Oh you'll see me again."

Sure enough, Mr. \$20 Tip came in frequently. He always sat alone, usually when I was by myself in the restaurant, almost always during a weekday afternoon.

One night, as Marc and I cleaned tables on the patio facing Montrose, I heard my friend say, "Ilhan, just made the block, I know that's his car".

Marc had made many references to his stalker, Ilhan before.

As a blue Honda Prelude with a pizza delivery sign rounded the corner and continued south on Montrose, I asked Marc, "Ilhan delivers pizzas?"

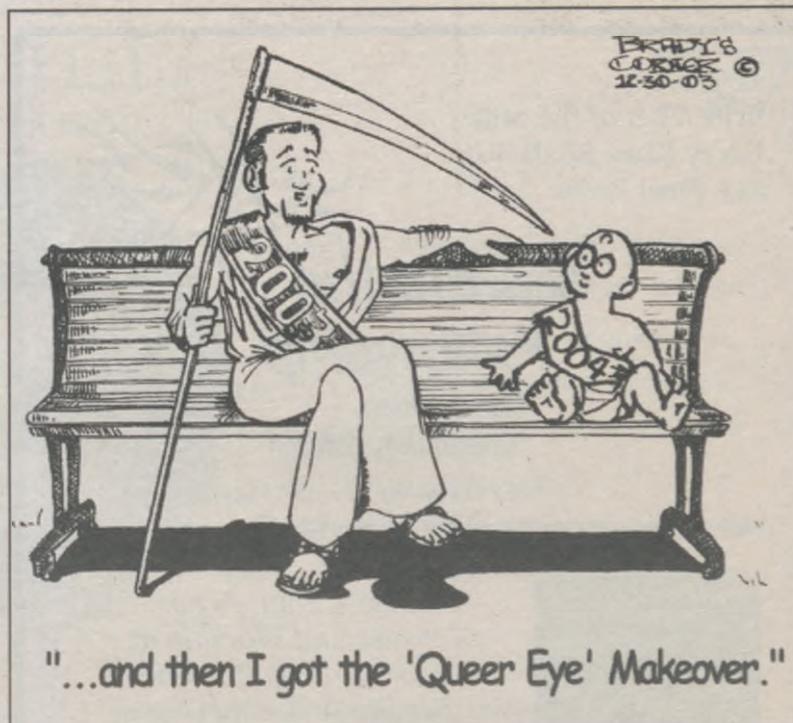
Marc was matter-of-fact. "Yeah, then he can keep tabs on me while he's working." It was as though having a stalker was nothing out of the ordinary.

After work, at J.R.'s, Marc pointed him out. Suddenly, coming towards us was the \$20 tip guy from all those afternoons at Urbana. Now, I was creeped out.

As stalkers usually do, Ilhan became more and more aggressive. Those of us who feared for Marc's life did our best to convince him that instead of laughing off each incident, he needed to do something to protect himself.

One day Ilhan walked into Urbana, threw a bullet-riddled target at Marc and said, "That's going to be you."

That was the last straw for me. I begged Marc to call the police. "Like they'll do anything about a couple of fags," he laughed. "You just wish you had



a stalker, girl."

From that moment on, Ilhan became a constant presence in Marc's life, always circling the restaurant, hovering in the corner of seemingly every bar or club.

Eventually, Marc did go to the police. Just as he had predicted, he was turned away because he was told, Ilhan had done nothing illegal.

On March 26, Marc and I went to a movie at the Odeon. When we walked out of the theater at about 2 a.m., Ilhan was there, swearing and grabbing Marc by the neck.

I begged Marc, "Get a restraining order." He would, he promised, tomorrow.

The next evening, Saturday, Marc and I worked together. On Sunday, I slept late. When I awoke, I heard references to a shooting at Urbana. Everything clicked. I jumped in my car and drove to the restaurant.

Outside the restaurant, a friend con-

firmed, "I'm sorry buddy, it was Marc". I crumpled onto the sidewalk. Later my Mom told me she saw that piece of video on two different channels. I ran inside and threw up in the bathroom.

Ilhan had attacked Marc as he was leaving the restaurant with his friend, Donna.

After chasing Marc down the sidewalk and pumping bullets into him, Ilhan turned the gun on himself. He fell almost on top of Marc. It was all over in a matter of minutes. For those of us left behind it will never be over.

We tried to persuade him that stalkers were serious business. The trouble is, when we finally convinced him to go to the police, they didn't take it seriously either.

@ Johnny Hooks is a columnist for the Houston Voice.

Dykes To Watch Out For by Alison Bechdel



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No love boat for gays

Gay passengers say Royal Caribbean did little to ensure safety after bashings

By ANDY ZEFFER and BRYAN ANDERTON

FORT LAUDERDALE, FLA. — TWO members of a gay travel group who said they were assaulted aboard a Royal Caribbean cruise ship said officials from the cruise line failed to take proper precautions to ensure their safety.

Steve Garrod, 27, of Seattle and J. Gardner, a 34-year-old lesbian from California, said they were attacked by two straight couples while aboard Royal Caribbean's Monarch of the Seas cruise ship for a three-day Halloween cruise Oct. 31 to Nov. 2 with the gay travel group Outcruising.com. Garrod said he suffered bruises, lacerations and a broken facial bone, while Gardner said she sustained damage to her eyesight from being kicked in the face and the eye.

According to Garrod, he and several other members of the travel group were in one of the ship's bar following a masquerade party, when two straight couples began harassing group members, calling them "fucking faggots." He said he asked the bartenders to call security officers, who arrived several minutes later.

In that time, Garrod said, he was pushed to the ground by two women who kicked him in the face and head. Their male partners then began assaulting Garrod as well, he said.

"I just thought to protect my head and hoped that it would stop," Garrod said.

The two straight couples ended their attack after security arrived and escorted them out of the bar to question them. At that time, Gardner said, she went outside to see if security needed any statements from the group. In the presence of the ship's security staff, Gardner said, she was hit in the face and pushed to the ground by one of the women, and that one of the men then kicked her in the face and eye.

Garrod and Gardner charged that the ship's crew failed to keep them safe and never detained or confronted the assailants.

Michael Sheehan, a spokesperson for Royal Caribbean International, declined to comment on the situation, citing an "ongoing investigation," but a company statement sent via e-mail said, "We take very seriously any behavior on board our



Three people claim they were assaulted while on board Royal Caribbean cruise ships, and that in each incident the ship's crew failed to detain their assailants. (Photo by AP)

ships that breaches the rights and safety of any guest or any crew members."

The statement said the company was cooperating with officials, including the FBI, to investigate the assault.

Pattern of ignoring assaults?

Following published reports about the assault, a third man came forward to say he had also been the victim of an anti-gay assault aboard a Royal Caribbean ship in June 2002, and that the company also failed to detain his assailant in that case as well.

Craig Combs, of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., said he was aboard Royal Caribbean's Enchantment of the Seas on June 4, 2002, when he was assaulted by another passenger. According to Combs, he and a friend were in one of the ship's bars when another passenger approached them in a hostile manner. When Combs tried to brush the man off, Combs said he replied, "What are you going to do now, sissy?"

The man then grabbed him by the neck and pushed him against a wall while calling him several anti-gay epithets, Combs said. There were no security guards in sight, and the man eventually let go of Combs after several seconds. When Combs ran to a bartender to report the assault, he said the bartender at first ignored him altogether, and then told him to call security himself.

Combs said the security officers who responded to his call caught up with his assailant, but only questioned him briefly and did not detain him. He said he filed a report with the purser's desk, but nothing was ever done. He said his assailant never faced any consequences for his assault and was allowed to enjoy the rest of the cruise.

Sheehan, the cruise line's spokesman, said he was not aware of the Combs incident, but that he would look into it.

Combs, meanwhile, said he won't make the same mistake again.

"Honestly, I don't see myself ever going on a Royal Caribbean again," Combs said. "And if somebody told me they were going on Royal Caribbean, I would tell them to rethink it, unless there is going to be a large group of gays on board."



ACTION! INFO

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www.royalcaribbean.com

ABOUT ACTION ALERT: Action Alert is a Forum section feature that informs readers of issues for response and lobbying. Send suggestions and comments to forum@washblade.com.



Roni Hulin

(11/23/42- 12/21/03)



During the morning of Sunday, December 21, our brightest star went out when Roni passed away suddenly and unexpectedly at her home.

What a beautiful caring spirit she had. Her career in special education with HISD, her love of basketball, her care and concern for animals, her activism, and her contribution to the HIV/AIDS community were her passions.

Roni celebrated life and filled the lives of others with love and joy. She taught us to love life, live it to the fullest, and always find the silver lining. She was first and foremost a mother, friend and soulmate to her daughter. She had a chosen family of many, many friends.



Roni nurtured her relationships, and sprinkled us with loving glitter, each sprinkle brighter and brighter. Life was always larger, happier, and campier when she was present. She is preceded in death by her daughter, Angie, and loved ones left to cherish her memory are her girls, Lara and Michele, her brother Dan, her cats Beau and Tina, and her chosen family of friends, Renee, David, Jerry, Cheri, Judy, and many more. Roni will be cremated with no accompanying service, per her request.

A celebration of her life will be scheduled at a later date. In lieu of usual remembrances and for those who so desire, memorial donations may be directed to: **PWA — Holiday Charity**, P.O. Box 66849, Houston, Tx 77266



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Out on the Bayou

HOUSTON VOICE
JANUARY, 2 2004
PAGE 15

A Christmas visit to Tuna

Before visiting Galveston, the ladies of Tuna, Texas talk about more than Tuna

By BINNIE FISHER

a

nybody who grew up in any of the dusty little towns that dot those black ribbons of highway winding through West Texas will recognize it when they see it: Tuna, Texas.

Joe Sears and Jaston Williams created Tuna and its inhabitants, and although they have never revealed much of Tuna's infrastructure: the main drag, the drug store, the five and dime, the pictures are there in the heads of those who have been there.

The creations of Sears and Williams: "Greater Tuna," "A Tuna Christmas" and "Red, White and Tuna," are vivid portrayals of the people who inhabit every small town in



Didi Snaveley's take on the new Medicare drug bill: aim for the head and you don't need it.



Vera Carp will forever be Tuna's most renowned fashion plate and socialite.

West Texas, the center of the universe to everyone who lives there.

The Tuna plays make you want to go home, pull up to a table in the local drive-in restaurant and spin a yarn or two with Helen Bedd and Inita Goodwin, the underpaid, overworked but effervescent waitresses who work for the Tastee Kremer's overseer, Vernon.

The Houston Voice recently was granted the rare opportunity to visit Tuna in advance of the Jan. 6 opening of "A Tuna Christmas" at the Grand 1894 Opera House in Galveston.

It was obvious from the outset, that conversation at the Tastee Kremer should stay on the light side. If talk veers toward jobs and the economy, the girls could get worried.

Too late. Someone mentions that a friend is losing his job because the work is being sent to India, where workers will do three times the work for a sixth of the pay.

"Oh good Lord," says Inita, her bouffant frontal wisp collapsing in a salutatory wave over her forehead. "Don't ever let



Bertha Bumiller is all decked out for Christmas and ready for her upcoming visit to Galveston.

Vernon know that the Indians will take a sixth of what the Americans were gettin' for a third 'a the work!"

Helen shudders a bit as she bows her head and whispers, "Oh no. Don't ever let Vernon know that."

Quick, somebody order a double

bacon chili cheeseburger with fries and a vanilla Coke.

Time to walk on down the street. Is that Didi's "If we can't kill it, it's immortal" Used Weapons and Knives

Please see TUNA on Page 19



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television BRIAN MOYLAN



In 2003, HBO and Bravo ruled the tube, fighting to provide high-quality, high-profile shows featuring gay sensibilities.

Tale of two channels

IN 2002, THE BIG GAY TELEVISION news was the shift of gay characters and shows from network television, where they had a surprisingly safe home after Ellen DeGeneres came out, to even bigger and better shows on cable.

Now that gay television is booming on cable, it's time for the Battle of the Non-Network Stars, most notably Bravo and HBO.

Of course, Bravo is home of the year's biggest gay hit — and perhaps one of the biggest mainstream hits — "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy." The show garners an average audience of 2 million viewers for new episodes and is taking over the cultural landscape with book deals, spin-offs, and spokesperson deals for its stars.

There was also "Boy Meets Boy," the gay dating show with the cruelest twist since "Joe Millionaire" revealed he was a humble construction worker. Regardless of tactic, the show was still a modest hit, a great lead in for "Queer Eye," and the subject of much buzz.

"Boy" may not come back for another season, but Bravo is always a little bit fey. With its annual "Broadway on Bravo" special, the cast of "Will & Grace" on "Inside the Actor's Studio" and plenty of Cirque du Soleil.

But programmers should beware. With Cirque du Soleil under fire for alleged HIV discrimination, Bravo should be careful about how the gay audience reacts to its constant repeat performances and reality shows about the performance troupe.

2003 in REVIEW

HBO DOESN'T NEED TO WORRY ABOUT its gay demographic as much as how to get some new hit shows on its roster. Bravo was a brave gay upstart, but HBO continued to wow and woo viewers with "Six Feet Under" and the final season of "Sex & the City" — as well as a host of other quality gay programming, including the Emmy-nominated transgender drama "Normal."

"Sex & the City" is done after its eight new episodes beginning in January, and gay favorite "Oz" wrapped its six season run earlier this year. Still, the network has "SFU" and "The Wire," which features two gay characters of color and is a much underappreciated show.



The runaway gay hit of the year in television was "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy," starring Ted Allen, Jai Rodriguez, Carson Kressley, Thom Filicia and Kyan Douglas.

This year's two new HBO shows, "Carnivale" and "K Street," included gay characters, but both suffered from mediocre ratings. At press time, "Carnivale's" fate is still undecided, and "K Street" will not be back for another season.

Then, of course, there is "Angels in America," HBO's two-part adaptation of gay playwright Tony Kushner's Pulitzer Prize winner about the early days of the AIDS crisis, which hit a home run for the channel. Superbly acted (by the likes of Meryl Streep, Al Pacino, and Emma Thompson) and shot (by Mike Nichols), the film adaptation was the highlight of a very gay year, rounding up more than 4 million viewers for HBO.

It was a little long, but with big movie stars, a great script and widespread acclaim, "Angels" is sure to clean up come Emmy time.

HBO RIVAL SHOWTIME. THE MOST blatant pursuer of gay audiences, just doesn't offer the caliber of programming that is found on HBO or Bravo. "Queer As Folk" is definitely the gayest Showtime offering, but more people would be excited about tuning in if the hour wasn't so trite.

The network introduces the lesbian counterpart to "Folk," "The L Word," in January.

As far as the networks were concerned, there were a few baby steps worth mentioning in 2003. "ER's" resident lesbian simmers on the backburner, and "Will & Grace" still relies too heavily on the power of guest stars, but ABC's "It's All Relative" scored with primetime's first committed, normal and funny gay male couple.

Fox's "A Minute with Stan Hooper" also has a committed gay couple, but in a much smaller role.

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dine J.A. CHAPMAN

The menu's been tweaked, and with a touch of fine-tuning, this could be a destination

Ragazza hits a high note

AFTER TAKING OVER THE SPACE previously occupied by The Rivendell Bar and Grille, there was work to be done. The menu needed updating. The décor needed an overhaul. And most of all, the restaurant needed focus.

The previous tenants couldn't decide if they wanted to be a sports bar or a restaurant. Now open a few months, Ragazza offers a casual, Italian-inspired menu in a relaxed atmosphere.

Ragazza has kept some of the design elements from The Rivendell, like the long bar that lines one side of the room and features a stone wall backdrop and columns. Gone, however, are the dart boards and pool table. Ragazza is aiming more squarely at the restaurant side of the business.

Ragazza feels spacious, with a high, exposed ceiling and open floor plan, broken up only by low dividing walls topped with glass panels. A few booths offer intimate seating, and tables can accommodate groups of various sizes. The lighting needs to be rethought, however, as several tables are in shadow from poorly placed spotlights. The lack of diffuse lighting makes the restaurant seem dark.

ON A RECENT SATURDAY NIGHT, WE found Ragazza about half full. Live piano music provided a soothing backdrop as we were shown to our table. And then we waited. And waited. And waited some more.

Three different servers visited tables near us, while we waited for someone—anyone—to acknowledge us. Finally, I got up from our table and tracked down a waiter. To his credit, once we were on his radar, the service was excellent. But, the whole system could do with a closer look.

Ragazza starts diners off with a bread basket containing an acceptable farmhouse white. A robust dipping sauce with an olive oil base, parmesan, fresh basil, red pepper, garlic and goat cheese provides a substantial start to the meal.

The excellent shrimp bisque (\$4.95/cup) is a recent addition to the menu, which has already been updated in the short time Ragazza has been open. Sweet and creamy, it has a slight fiery kick at the end. The shrimp flavor is perhaps a tad too subtle, but it's a warming and comforting start.

The Italian nachos (\$8.95) sounded too intriguing to miss. A huge platter of multi-colored chips arrived topped with Italian sausage, tomato, green onion, black olive, banana pepper and an alfredo cream sauce. It's easily large enough to be shared by four.

While the dish shows admirable creativity, somehow it never takes off. The bland cream sauce lacks the oomph needed to serve as a base for the surprisingly sparse

toppings. I found myself wishing for some gooey cheese and a jalapeno to add some zip.

For main courses, the menu offers a selection of entrees and pastas. The pasta Ragazza (\$10.95—penne with grilled chicken, spinach, tomato, basil, feta in a white wine cream sauce—was nicely done, if not remarkable. Heavy on the pasta, it would benefit from a slightly more liberal hand with the rest of the ingredients.

The tuna Ragazza (\$16.95) was a treat. Perfectly seared slices of fresh tuna arrived atop a creamy parmesan risotto. A tangy pine nut balsamic ponzu sauce added just enough zing, while wilted spinach and grilled vegetables proved worthy accompaniments.

The dessert menu contained the usual suspects, along with a banana nut tres leches (\$5.95) that caught my eye. Exactly as you might suspect, a piece of banana nut cake is soaked in three milks. The result is moist, milky banana bread punctuated with crunchy walnuts. Ingeniously simple, this dessert was a true gem on a fusion-heavy menu.

Happy hours are available each weekday, and Thursday nights are hopping at the bar, which is large enough to accommodate good sized groups. Previously, the menu offered unusual signature drinks, but by this visit they were no longer available. However, the full bar should be more than adequate to accommodate most tastes.

Ragazza Italian Bar and Grill is settling into its comfort zone. The menu has been tweaked and refined and the décor has been revamped. It's a solid Italian style restaurant, with moderate prices, dependable food, and a welcoming bar. With a little more fine-tuning, it could be a destination.



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out on the bayou

Out and about on the streets of Tuna, TX

TUNA, continued from Page 15

up ahead? Current events and crime and punishment are always suitable conversation at Didi's.

And there she is, peering down the empty barrel of a .45 she's holding in one hand and taking a long drag on the cigarette she balances between the fingers of the other hand. The sleeve of her jungle camouflage dress peeps out from the cuff of her plastic raincoat.

It must be normal for people to unburden themselves when they cross Didi's threshold, because it all comes spilling forth: crime in the city, women traveling alone at night, assaults on gay men in Montrose.

Her attention is suddenly peaked. She puts down the .45, takes another long drag, and smoke wafts out with her words, uttered slowly, deliberately and in the raspy voice of someone who's smoked way too many unfiltered Camels for way too long.

"We had a gay basher in Tuna once," she says, "and we hanged him with his own pantyhose."

At once turning her attention to the folks who are thumbing through the purse-size canisters of mace and discussing the new Medicare drug bill, Didi takes aim and fires another verbal volley at point-blank range. "If you aim for the head, there's no need for Medicare."

Her voice drops another octave or two on "Medicare," and she cocks her head slightly to the side for effect. Ah, the wisdom of a woman who knows when to pull the trigger.

The streets of Tuna are portrayed as friendly places, but just up ahead, Bertha Bumiller and her aunt, Pearl Burras, take a sharp left when they spy

someone with a note pad.

"Yoo-hoo, Miz Bumiller, Miz Burras, a word or two for the Houston Voice?"

Bertha, in that lovely poinsettia-print blouse and green pantsuit that is her personal holiday greeting this time of year, replies over her shoulder, "No comment. No comment today."

"Hurry," she bids Aunt Pearl, who hobbles along with her cane and old lady high-top lace-ups. "I'm an old woman. Don't rush me." They disappear around another corner.

Mercy! What were we thinking? Of course Bertha shies away from interviews. That reporter from "Intellect" burned her pretty bad a few years ago.

Oh well, on to City Hall and a little chat with City Secretary Dixie Deberry.

It's Dixie who worries about Fidel (she pronounces it with a long "i," as in "Faydell") and his communists invading someday.

If she worries about the communists in this day without a cold war to wage, the Voice wondered whether she also considers the Gay Mafia to be a concern.

She gives it some thought. "I didn't know there was a Gay Mafia, she says. "I just can't picture Al Pacino with a purse."

The Voice tried to steer conversation to city government. You know, Houston just elected its first-ever lesbian city controller.

"Yes, well, lesbians are great control freaks," she says.

One might be inclined to ask how she



City Secretary Dixie Deberry and pal, Pearl Burras, are cooking up a little Christmas mischief in 'A Tuna Christmas.'

knows, but some things are best left unsaid.

Who should walk in about that time but la fashionista de Tuna, non other than Mrs. Vera Carp.

Dixie is thumbing through a copy of the Voice. Yes, that's Harvey Fierstein dressed as Mrs. Claus in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Gives a whole new meaning to the phrase, "donning gay apparel," don't you think?

Vera takes a look. Her eyes bead up behind her cat-eye specks as she tightens her shoulders and blurts out, "They obviously need a cavity search before the parade." She purses her mouth in that way that is oh so Vera and adds, "Wrong cavity and you're off the float."

The Voice left itself open for that one. Should have known better. After all, Vera does head up Tuna's Smut Snatchers of the New Order.

What brings Vera to City Hall on this day? She wants to be sure the light bill gets paid. Wouldn't want to end up in arrears when the winner of the holiday decorating contest is about to be announced. Want to keep those lights shining on the life-size statues of Bing Crosby and Natalie Wood in the nativity scene, not to mention those

live sheep.

She's put out with "that girl, Lupe," the one who cleans her house and waits on her hand and foot. Just out of curiosity, would a lady of Vera's stature give a Christmas bonus to undocumented hired help?

"I give them all my old shoes and swimsuits and tickets to Baylor football," she says with her Vera smile and her eyes glistening somewhere behind those cat-eyes.

She's out the door, and so is the Voice.

Williams and Sears, who wrote the "Tuna" Trilogy and who play all the characters, will bring the citizens of Tuna to Galveston for 13 performances Jan 6-11.

All will be revealed: the reason Helen and Inita are concerned about job loss, the name of the citizen who won the Christmas yard decorating contest and the identity of the infamous Christmas phantom.

Tastee Krewe waitresses Helen Bedd and Inita Goodwin will be looking for cowboys when they hit Galveston on Jan. 6.



i MORE INFO

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CALENDAR

Monday January 5th Eucharist 7:30pm	Saturday January 10th Breakfast 9:30am
Friday January 9th Movie Night 7pm <i>Pirates of the Caribbean</i>	Monday January 12th Eucharist 7:30pm
	Friday January 16th Morning Prayer 10am

dish There's a Fine Line Between Telling the Truth and Talking Trash

Gay-themed nominees for Golden Globe awards,

Jim Palmer is a pitcher for gay causes,

the Material Girl gets political on campaign trail.

The award goes to ...

WITH THE LATEST GOLDEN GLOBE nominations, there is nothing gayer than the nominees in the made-for-television movie category. In fact, five of the television categories are dominated by programming that is either gay-themed, gay-created, or has gay characters.

Nominees in the Best Mini-series or Made-for-Television-Movie category include the AIDS drama "Angels in America"; transgender drama "Normal"; the docudrama about the hate-crime-related death of **BARRY WINCHELL**, "Soldier's Girl"; and an adaptation of Tennessee Williams's "The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone." The only non-gay-related nominee was "My House in Umbria."

In the lead actress category, individuals who garnered Golden Globe nominations for Best Performance by an Actress in a Mini-series or a Motion Picture Made for Television were: **MERYL STREEP** for "Angels," **JESSICA LANGE** for "Normal," **HELEN MIRREN** for "Mrs. Stone," **JUDY DAVIS** for her role in the "The Reagans," and **MAGGIE SMITH** for "My House in Umbria." Nominees for Best Performance by an Actor in a Mini-series or Motion Picture Made for Television were: **AL PACINO** for "Angels," **TOM WILKINSON** for "Normal," **TROY GARITY** for "Soldier's Girl," **JAMES BROLIN** for "The Reagans," and **ANTONIO BANDERAS** for "And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself."

Every nominee in the supporting actress made-for-television categories is somehow affiliated with gay themes. For Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role in a Series, Mini-series or Motion Picture Made for Television, the nominees are: **KIM CATTRALL**, **KRISTEN DAVIS** and **CYNTHIA NIXON** for "Sex and the City," **MEGAN MULLALLY** for "Will & Grace," and **MARY-LOUISE PARKER** for "Angels."

The nominees for Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role in a Series, Mini-series or Motion Picture Made for Television are: **BEN SHENKMAN**, **PATRICK WILSON** and **JEFFREY WRIGHT** for "Angels in America," **SEAN HAYES** for "Will & Grace," and **LEE PACE** in the role of a transgender woman in "Soldier's Girl."

There were a few other nominations for "Six Feet Under," "Sex and the City," and "Will & Grace," but they'll have some competition from those pesky non-gay-themed shows.

The Golden Globes ceremony, scheduled for Jan. 25, is sponsored by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association and is thought to be a good predictor of Oscar



For her role as lesbian serial killer Aileen Wuornos, actress **Charlize Theron** was one of two gay-related nominees in the movie categories for the Golden Globes. (Photo courtesy of New Market Films)

winners. Oscar nominees are to be announced on Jan. 27, with the awards ceremony following on Feb. 29.

From the mound

THERE WAS MORE THAN ONE BASEBALL star at the Gay & Lesbian Foundation of South Florida's annual gala a few weeks ago, according to the Express, a gay newspaper in Florida.

Not surprisingly, **BILLY BEAN**, the gay former baseball player was there, but so was **JIM PALMER**, the former Baltimore Orioles pitcher most famous to some of us for those Jockey underwear ads.

Sorry to tell you, boys, Palmer is most definitely straight.

"He is very much a heterosexual man. The reason he was there is that we invited him and he wanted to show his support for the foundation and the community," said his friend Dan Pye, a gay man. Palmer has been to many parties with a predominantly gay attendance, Pye said, but this was his first gay public event.

New Duet

FOR ALL OF YOU CLUB QUEENS WHO couldn't decide how to cast your vote for the Democratic presidential nomination until **MADONNA** made her endorsement, the wait is finally over.

Madge is dressing Gen. **WESLEY CLARK** up in her love.

"I think he has a good handle on foreign policy, I think he's good with people, and I think he has a heart and a consciousness," Madonna told CNN. "He's interested in spirituality — I mean, those things mean a lot to me."

@ Send comments, suggestions to
Dish@sovo.com

community calendar

SATURDAY JAN. 3

All-Spanish Worship Service/Noche Espiritual 7 p.m. Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church, 2026 W. 11th. 713-861-9149.

After Hours. KPFT 90.1 FM. 1-4 a.m.

Dignity mass. 7:30 p.m. for gay Catholics. 713-880-2872.

Free HIV Testing. Montrose Clinic. 11 p.m.-2 a.m. at Viviana's. 713-830-3000.

Gay & Lesbian Breakfast Club. 9:30 a.m. 281-437-0636.

Lambda Center. Alcoholics Anonymous. 11:30 a.m. Eye Opener Group, 8 p.m. Saturday Night Live, 9:30 p.m. Willing Ones Group. 1201 W. Clay. 713-521-1243 or 713-528-9772. www.lambdahouston.org.

Montrose Soccer Club. 10 a.m. practice. Woodrow Wilson School, Fairview and Yupon. New players welcome, but beginners not currently being admitted. 713-862-9491. http://geocities.com/montrosoccer. E-mail: montrosoccer@yahoo.com.

Q-Patrol. Volunteers walk the streets to help prevent hate crimes. 9:30 p.m. Convene at community center. 713-528-SAFE. E-mail: qpatrol@aol.com

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. Rosary 8 a.m. 1805 W. Alabama. 713-528-6665.

Houston GLBT Community Center. Drop-in, noon-5 p.m. o CATS (Community Awareness for Transgender Support) board meeting, 2 p.m. 3400 Montrose, Suite 207. 713-524-3818. www.houstonglbtcenter.org.

SUNDAY JAN. 4

Front Runners Houston. Runners meet at Memorial Park at 8am for a three-mile run. http://home.swbell.net/lorathon/houfr.htm. E-mail: lorathon@swbell.net. 713-522-0899.

Bering Memorial United Methodist Church. Services at 8:30 & 10:50 a.m. Sunday school 9:45 a.m. 713-526-1017.

Center for Spiritual Living. Services at 11 a.m., for children at 10:50 a.m. 6610 Harwin. 713-339-1808. The center also has commitment ceremonies, metaphysical bookstore and classes.

Community Gospel. Service at 11 a.m. & 7 p.m. Sunday School for children 10 a.m. 713-880-9235 or www.communitygospel.org.

Community of Kindred Spirits in Beaumont. Worship at 6 p.m. 1575 Spindletop Ave., Beaumont, Texas. 409-813-2055. E-mail: cksrev3@netzero.net

Covenant Church, Ecumenical, Liberal Baptist. Service 9:30 a.m. & education hour 11 a.m. 713-668-8830.

Emerson Unitarian Church. Adult education, 10 a.m. Service, 11 a.m. Lunch at noon. www.emersonhou.org.

First Congregational Church (Memorial). Service at 10 a.m. Christian Education, 11:30 a.m. 713-468-9543 or fcc-houston.org.

First Unitarian Universalist Church. Services at 9:30 & 11:30 a.m. Brunch at 10:30 a.m. 713-526-5200. church@firstuu.org.

Free HIV Testing. Montrose Clinic. 9 p.m.-midnight at Club Inergy. 713-830-3000.

Gay Bowling Leagues. 7 p.m. Palace Lanes, 4191 Bellaire Blvd. 713-861-1187.

Gay Catholics of St. Anne's-Houston. 5 p.m. worship service. Dinner and social. alexcam@wlnet.net. 713-623-0930.

Grace Assembly Church. Gay/gay-affirming congregation. 11 a.m. service. 567 Cedar Grove, Livingston, Texas. 77351. 936-646-7214. E-mail: leol@easttex.net.

Grace Lutheran Church. Sunday school for all ages 9 a.m. Service 10:30 a.m. 713-528-3269.

H.A.T.C.H. Houston Area Teen Coalition of Homosexuals meets 6-9 p.m. For meeting information, call 713-529-3590. www.hatchyouth.org.

Houston Tennis Club. 9 a.m.-noon. Memorial Park at the Tennis Center. houstontennisclub@aol.com

Lambda Center. Alcoholics Anonymous. 9:30 a.m. Came to Believe Group. 1201 W. Clay. 713-521-1243 or 713-528-9772. www.lambdahouston.org.

Maranatha Fellowship Metropolitan Church. 10 a.m. service. 3333 Fannin, Suite 106. 713-528-6756.

Northwoods Unitarian Universalist Church. Services at 9:45 & 11:15 a.m. Sunday school 9:45 a.m. 281-298-2780.

Resurrection MCC. Services, 9 and 11 a.m. Children and Youth Sunday School, 10 a.m. Children's service, 11 a.m. 713-861-9149.

St. Patrick's Reformed Catholic Mission. Sunday Mass at noon. Holy Unions available. Group meets at the Hair Express, 3310 DeZavala, Beaumont, Texas 77703. 409-781-8152. E-mail: bwatson1@gt.rr.com

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. Holy Eucharist, Rite I, 7:45 a.m.; Holy Eucharist, Rite II, 8:55 a.m.; Education hour, 10 a.m.; Choral Eucharist, 11 a.m. 713-528-6665.

Sunday Brunch. For HIV-positive men. 11 a.m. Riva's, 1117 Missouri St. Paul. 713-880-0690. e-mail: oznBuff@aol.com.

The Women's Group. Meeting and discussion. 10:45 a.m. 713-529-8571.

Thoreau Unitarian Universalist Congregation. Adult discussion, 9 a.m. Service, 11:15 a.m. 281-277-8882. www.tuuc.org.

Unitarian Fellowship of Galveston County. 502 Church St. Service, 11 a.m. 713-686-5876.

Houston GLBT Community Center. Some Transgenders are Guys (STAG), 7 p.m., 3400 Montrose, Suite 207. 713-524-3818. www.houstonglbtcenter.org.

MONDAY JANUARY 5

Free HIV Testing. Montrose Clinic. 1-7 p.m. at the clinic, 215 Westheimer and 3311 Richmond, Suite 100; 4-8 p.m. at Bricks, 617 Fairview; and 9 p.m. - 1 a.m. at O, 710 Pacific. 713-830-3070.

Free HIV Testing. 4-8 p.m. at All Star News, 3415 Katy Freeway. Health clinic with free testing for HIV and syphilis. 713-869-7878.

Gay Bowling Leagues. Women's league. 6:45 p.m. Dynamic Lanes, 6121 Tarnet Drive. 713-861-1187.

Gay Fathers/Fathers First. Support group. 8-9:30 p.m. Bering Memorial United Methodist Church. Tom. 713-726-8736. www.geocities.com/gaydadhouston/

Grace Assembly Church. Gay/gay-affirming congregation. 7 p.m. aerobics class. 567 Cedar Grove, Livingston, Texas. 77351. 936-646-7214. E-mail: leol@easttex.net.

Grief & Divorce Support Groups. 7 p.m. Bering. 713-526-1017, ext. 208.

Kolbe Project. Eucharist 7:30 p.m. 713-861-1800.

Lambda Center. Alcoholics Anonymous. 8 p.m. Beginners' Group. 1201 W. Clay. 713-521-1243 or 713-528-9772. www.lambdahouston.org.

Lesbians Coming Out. Organizational meeting, 7 p.m., 3400 Montrose, Suite 207. 713-524-3818.

Montrose Clinic. Offers weekly peer support groups for gay and bisexual men with HIV. Spanish speaking group meets, 6:30 p.m. 215 Westheimer. 713-830-3050. Grupo de Apoyo para Latinos gay y bisexuales VIH positivos. Lunes 6:30. Para mas informacion llama al 713-830-3025.

Queer Voices Radio Show. 8-10 p.m. KPFT 90.1.

Houston GLBT Community Center. American Veterans for Equal Rights, 7 p.m., 3400 Montrose, Suite 207. 713-524-3818. www.houstonglbtcenter.org.

TUESDAY JAN. 6

Bering Support Network. Lunch Bunch Gang, 11 a.m. 713-526-1017.

Free HIV Testing. Montrose Clinic. 1-7 p.m. at the clinic, 215 Westheimer and 3311 Richmond, Suite 100; 4-8 p.m. at The 611, 611 Hyde Park; and 8 p.m. - midnight at Club Houston, 2205 Fannin. 713-830-3070.

GLBT Pentecostals. Bible study, prayer, 7 p.m. in the Heights. For info: 936-931-3761; e-mail: www.Wgb1947@cs.com.

Houston Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus. Monthly meeting, 7 p.m., 3400 Montrose, Suite 207. 713-524-3818.

Houston Roughneck Rugby. Practice from 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. For more information, log on to www.roughneckrugby.org.

Houston Women's Rugby Team. No experience necessary. Practice, 6:30-8:30. Westland YMCA, Kay, 713-208-1529.

Introduction to Buddhism. All welcome at 634 W. Temple in the Heights. 7 p.m. Carlton, 713-862-8129.

Rainbow Ranglers. Free C&W dance lessons. Brazos River Bottom. No partner needed. Beginner 2 Step, Waltz, Shuffle & Swing. 8:30 p.m. 713-528-9192.

Houston GLBT Community Center. Lesbian Coming Out Group, 7 p.m., 3400 Montrose, Suite 207. 713-524-3818. www.houstonglbtcenter.org.

WEDNESDAY JAN. 7

Center for Spiritual Living. Meditation (drop-in), 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.; SOM Discussion & Exploration, 7 p.m. 6610 Harwin. 713-339-1808.

OutSkate. This roller Rink skate club hosts Gay Skate Night at Zenith Roller Rink, 8075 Cook Road every Wednesday from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. \$5 entry plus skate rental. 281-933-5818. Dobie367@aol.com.

Crystal Meth Anonymous (CMA). 8:15 p.m. meeting. Montrose Counseling Center, 701 Richmond Ave., Room 15.

Bering Memorial United Methodist Church. Support Network Pot Luck Dinner, 6:30 p.m. Various support groups, 7 p.m. 713-526-1017.

Bible Study. Noon & 6:30 p.m. St. Stephen's Episcopal. 713-526-6665.

Free HIV Testing. Montrose Clinic. 4-8 p.m. at Mary's, 1100 Westheimer; 9 p.m.-midnight at Ripcord, 715 Fairview; 10 p.m.-1 a.m. at E.J.'s, 2517 Ralph; 10 p.m.-1 a.m. at Midtown Spa, 3100 Fannin. 713-830-3000.

Free HIV Testing. Thomas Street Clinic. 9 a.m.-1 p.m. 2015 Thomas St. OraSure method. Call for appointment. Sharon. 713-873-4157.

Gay Bowling Leagues. 6:30 p.m. Palace Lanes, 4191 Bellaire Blvd. 713-861-1187.

Grace Assembly Church. Gay/gay-affirming congregation. 7 p.m. aerobics class. 567 Cedar Grove, Livingston, Texas. 77351. 936-646-7214. E-mail: leol@easttex.net.

Houston Pride Band. Open rehearsal, 7:30-9:30 p.m. 1307 Yale. 713-862-1488.

Houston Tennis Club. 7-9 p.m. Memorial Park at the Tennis Center. houstontennisclub@aol.com

Spiritual Uplift service. 7 p.m. Resurrection MCC. 713-861-9149.

Houston GLBT Community Center. 7 p.m., Houston Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus, 3400 Montrose, Suite 207. 713-524-3818. www.houstonglbtcenter.org.

THURSDAY JAN. 8

Community Gospel. Service. 7:30 p.m. 713-880-9235. www.communitygospel.org.

Free HIV Testing. Houston Area Community Services. 10 a.m.-2 p.m. at Joseph-Hines Clinic, 1710 West 25th St. Also 11 a.m.-3:30 p.m. at Gallery Medical Clinic, 5900 North Freeway, and Club Toyz from 9 p.m.-midnight. 713-526-0555, ext. 231, 227 or 226.

Free HIV Testing. Montrose Clinic. 8 p.m. - midnight at Brazos River Bottom (BRB), 2400 Brazos, atd at Cousins, 817 Fairview, and 4 - 8 p.m. at All-Star News, 3415 Katy Freeway. 713-830-3000.

Free HIV Testing. 4-8 p.m. at All Star News, 3415 Katy Freeway. Health clinic with free testing for HIV and syphilis. 713-869-7878.

FrontRunners Houston. Runners meet at Memorial Park at 6:30 p.m. for a three-mile run. http://home.swbell.net/lorathon/houfr.htm or e-mail: lorathon@swbell.net. 713-522-0899.

Gay Bowling Leagues. Luci Duos. 9 p.m. Dynamic Lanes, 6121 Tarnet Drive. 713-861-1187.

GLOBAL. Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual Alliance at the University of Houston-Central Campus. Weekly meeting, 6 p.m. e-mail: nguyent0223@hotmail.com.

Hep C Recovery. Support group, 6:30 p.m. Bering. 713-526-1017, Ext. 211.

Houston Roughneck Rugby. Practice from 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. For more information, log on to www.roughneckrugby.org.

Houston Women's Rugby Team. No experience necessary. Practice, 6:30-8:30. Westland YMCA, Kay, 713-208-1529.

Lake Livingston GLBT Support Group. 7 p.m. dinner and discussion. Grace Assembly Church, 567 Cedar Grove, Livingston, Texas. 77351. 936-646-7214. E-mail: leol@easttex.net.

Lambda Skating Club. 8 p.m. Tradewinds Skating Rink. www.neosoft.com/~lisc. 713-523-9620.

Montrose Clinic. Offers weekly peer support groups for gay and bisexual men with HIV. English speaking group meets: 6:30 p.m. 215 Westheimer 713-830-3050.

Rainbow Ranglers. Free C&W dance lessons. No partner required. Brazos River Bottom. 8:30 p.m. 713-528-9192.

Recovery From Food Addiction (RFA). Meeting for 12-step program open to all. Noon-1 p.m. St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, 1805 W. Alabama St. RFA: 713-673-2848. www.geocities.com/rfa77235/. E-mail: rfaworldservice@aol.com.

Spanish Charla Conversation Group. Café Ajora, 7 p.m. E-mail: charlahouston@msn.com. 713-416-7203.

Women's Clinic. Montrose Clinic. 713-830-3000.

FRIDAY JAN. 9

Free HIV Testing. Thomas Street Clinic. 9 a.m.-1 p.m. 2015 Thomas St. OraSure method. Call for appointment. Sharon. 713-873-4157.

Free HIV Testing. Montrose Clinic. 1-5 p.m. at the clinic, 215 Westheimer and 3311 Richmond, Suite 100; 10 p.m. to 1 a.m. at Rich's, 2401 San Jacinto; 10 p.m. - 2 a.m. at The Meatrack, 2915 San Jacinto; 10 p.m. - 1 a.m. at Midtown Spa, 3100 Fannin; 10 a.m. - 1 a.m. at E.J.'s, 2517 Ralph. 713-830-3070.

Grace Assembly Church. Gay/gay-affirming congregation. 7 p.m. aerobics class. 567 Cedar Grove, Livingston, Texas. 77351. 936-646-7214. E-mail: leol@easttex.net.

H.A.T.C.H. Houston Area Teen Coalition of Homosexuals meets 7-10 p.m. For meeting information, call 713-529-3590. www.hatchyouth.org.

Houston Tennis Club. 7-9 p.m. Memorial Park at the Tennis Center. houstontennisclub.org

Kolbe Project. Morning prayer, 10 a.m. 713-861-1800.

Q-Patrol. Volunteers walk the streets to help prevent hate crimes. 9:30 p.m. Convene at community center. 713-528-SAFE. E-mail: qpatrol@aol.com

Houston GLBT Community Center. Women's Game Night, 7 p.m., In Our Own Write (Poetry Night), 8-10 p.m., 3400 Montrose, Suite 207. 713-524-3818. www.houstonglbtcenter.org.

@ To list an event, call 713-529-8490, fax at 713-529-9531, or e-mail editor@houstonvoice.com. Deadline is Monday at 5 p.m.

appts.

FRIDAY, JAN 2:



Who says there's no such thing as a free ride? Rides are absolutely free on METRO's new light rail trains through Jan. 4. When light rail service officially begins on Jan. 5, light rail rides will cost a dollar for a one-way trip and \$2 for an all-day pass. 713-635-4000.



An Inaugural Celebration to commemorate the swearing-in of Mayor Bill White, the city's first lesbian controller Annise Parker and newly-elected city council members is planned at 7:30 p.m. at the Hilton Americas-Houston, 1600 Lamar St., next to the George R. Brown Convention Center. 713-247-3500



The Museum of Fine Arts Houston has extended its hours for the final days of "The Heroic Century: The Museum of Modern Art Masterpieces." Houston is the only U.S. stop for the exhibit of 200 paintings and sculptures from the New York museum. New hours are: 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Jan. 2 and 3, and 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Jan. 4. 713-639-7540

SATURDAY JAN. 3

Radio Station KPFT takes its "Face for Radio" tour to Katz's Deli, 616 Westheimer at midnight.

MONDAY, JAN. 5

The Gay Men's Chorus of Houston welcomes new members during three open rehearsals at 6:30 p.m. Jan. 5, 12 and 19. Rehearsals are held at Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church, located at 11th St. and T.C. Jester Boulevard in the Heights. 713-521-7464.

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COMMITMENT CEREMONIES

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

EMERGENCY AIDS Housing Coalition Houston crisis need tax deductible donations. 501(c)3 non-profit. (713) 864-1795. <http://ahchinc.tripod.com>.

TRAVEL / INTERNATIONAL

GAY CRUISE FOR OLDER GAY MEN & THEIR ADMIRERS Leaves Ft. Lauderdale Feb 8, 2004 on a brand new luxury cruiseship. 7 days western Caribbean, visiting Key West, Progreso/Merida, Cozumel, Grand Cayman & a couple of fabulous days at sea. Come find your Valentine & join a great group of guys for a fantastic week of fun & friendship. For more info contact Norm at (954) 735-8055 or toll free (877) 469-8055.

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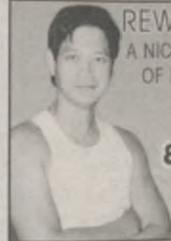
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♈ Aries (March 21 to April 20):
Your ruler, Mars, makes an irritating aspect to the Sun during the first half of January. Just make sure you take the ups and downs in stride. Life is beginning to go your way, so don't fall back into your old, impulsive ways. Give the New Year a chance. Share your hopes and fears with another Aries.

♉ Taurus (April 21 to May 20): The Sun's transit through your house of adventure should make this a rollicking time of year for you. While others are going back to work, you should give yourself a little getaway - or at least extend your holiday a tiny bit. A Scorpio wants to get you in bed and keep you in bed, preferably in an exotic locale.

♊ Gemini (May 21 to June 21): Mars is moving forward in your house of friends and inspiring you to be as direct as possible with your buddies. There's no reason to hide your feelings. Sarcasm is so 2003. Try cutting to the chase and letting pals know what your turn-ons and turn-offs are. An Aries is a quick study.

♋ Cancer (June 22 to July 22): Be careful whom you waste time on, Cancer, because time is one thing you don't have enough of these days. At work they want more of you. In your personal life it's time to settle down. Get serious with a Gemini or don't get involved at all.

♌ Leo (July 23 to August 22): Money matters go well as the New Year begins, so stop worrying about every last nickel and dime. Work you did last year will start to pay off soon, so don't panic. A Taurus gives you sound financial advice and some superb sweet talk to boot.

♍ Virgo (August 23 to September 22): The moon meets Jupiter in your sign on Jan. 11 and brings you close to a lover who can really make you happy. Or perhaps it is you who is finally open to having it all. Stop compartmentalizing your life and start believing that a Cancer can share every aspect of your existence. Love starts strong in the New Year.

♎ Libra (September 23 to October 22): The moon opposite Neptune on

Jan. 9 could stir up the contrary side of you. You may not believe anything anyone tells you. Before you sever any important relationships, count to 10. Or better yet, wait till the middle of the month before you make any serious decisions about a Scorpio.

♏ Scorpio (October 23 to November 21): Mercury conjunct Pluto in your money house could propel you into another tax bracket. The key is to stay there, Scorpio. Stop gambling with your future; play it cool and conservative for once. A Leo is a blue-chip stock; invest.

♐ SAGITTARIUS (November 22 to December 21): Money matters go smoothly as long as you remember to check all your facts. Get the concrete parts of your life on track and then you can return to the business of your personal life. A Pisces wants to get even more personal with you.

♑ Capricorn (December 22 to January 19): Moods may swing during the first half of January, but don't worry - you'll land on your feet. You need to take care of an impending crisis in your love life so that you can concentrate on business. Apologize to a Cancer if that will make your life easier. Be gentler with all your loved ones - even if they don't deserve it!

♊ Aquarius (January 20 to February 18): The full moon on Jan. 7 falls in your house of health and body issues. Give yourself a day of rest, relaxation, and pleasure - or at least plan one for the near future. Stop leading your life from the head up, and get back in touch with the earthy part of your nature. A Sagittarius can help.

♋ Pisces (February 19 to March 20): Don't get hysterical about matters that are out of your control, sweetie. Let a work situation unfold slowly. Time is on your side, and soon enough you will be in a position of greater authority. A Capricorn can help you get to where you want to be.

@ Jill Dearman is the author of the best-selling 'Queer Astrology for Men' and 'Queer Astrology for Women' (both from St. Martin's Griffin). For information on charts and consultations, call 212-841-0177 or e-mail QScopes@aol.com.

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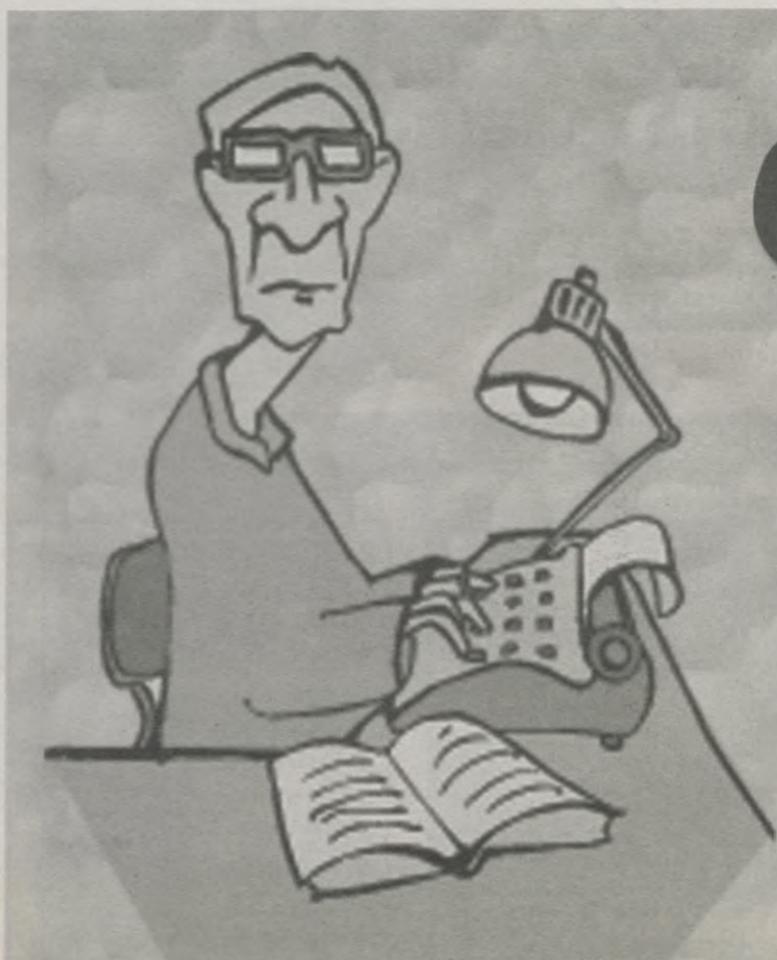
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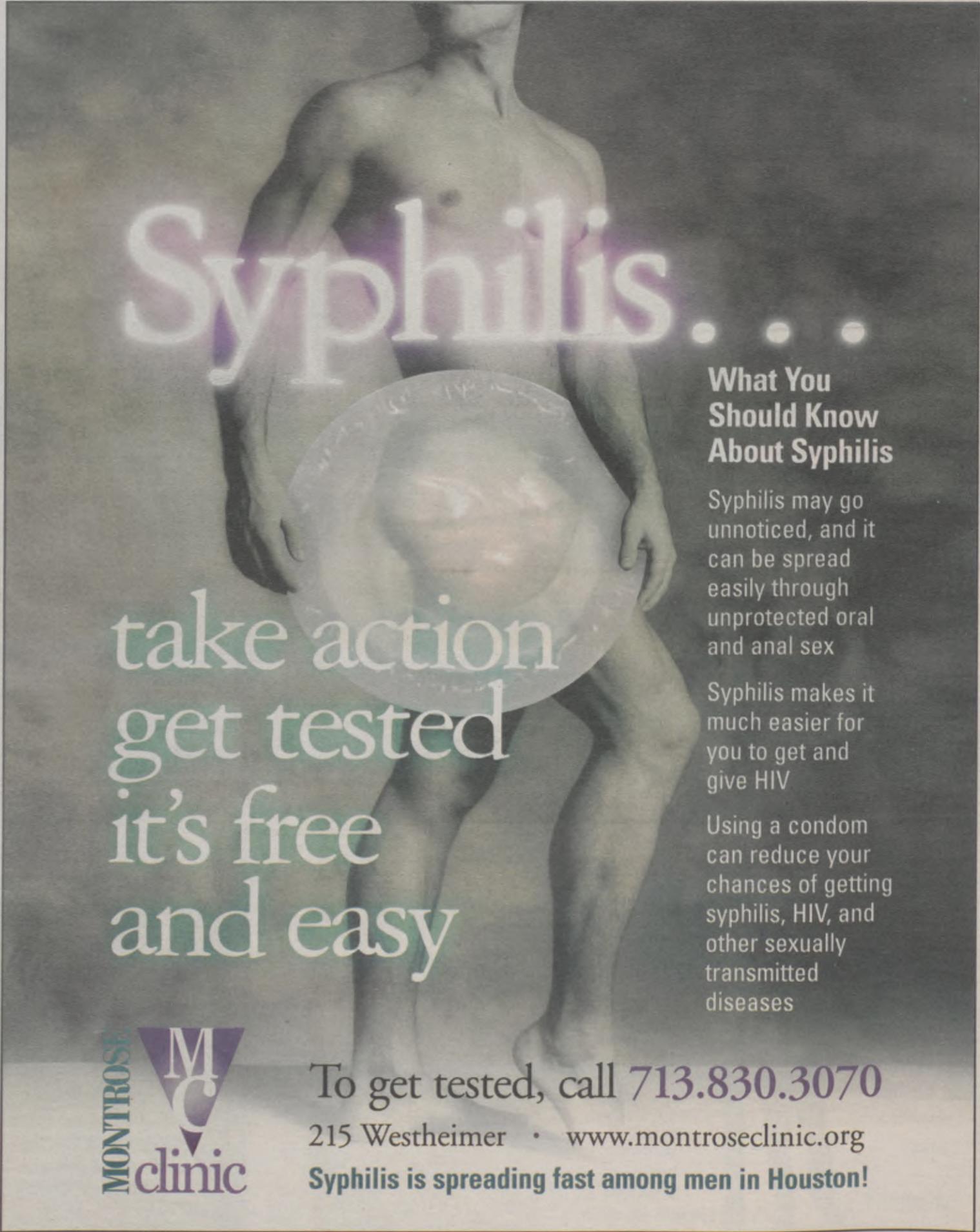
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