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## Party's not over

Gay New Orleans club owners, promoters say Hurricane Katrina won't spoil the party this Mardi Gras season.

Page 12

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FEBRUARY 3, 2006

**ENDORSED:** Local GLBT Caucus releases endorsements. **Page 4**



**IN MEMORY:** Groups recall a gay-rights advocate. **Page 4**



**INTERNET:** Online gamers upset over gay policy. **Page 5**



Ray Buckley, vice chair of the New Hampshire Democratic Party, says he is unsure whether DNC Chair Howard Dean's plan to eliminate minority outreach positions will succeed.

## Democrats abolish gay outreach for more 'integrated' approach

By LOU CHIBBARO JR.

WASHINGTON—Democratic National Committee Chair Howard Dean has abolished the Democratic Party's constituent outreach desks, including the post of director of lesbian and gay outreach.

A DNC spokesperson said Dean replaced the outreach director positions with a new program called the American Majority Partnership, which integrates efforts to address the concerns of minorities into all of the DNC's departments and offices. The little noticed move took place last year.

"It's an expansion of what we had before," said Damien LaVera, the DNC spokesperson assigned to discuss gay rights issues.

But the former chair of the DNC's Gay & Lesbian Americans Caucus doesn't see it that way. Gay

Democratic Party activist and fundraiser Jeff Soref of New York City said he resigned from the DNC and from his position as chair of the gay caucus in August largely because of Dean's decision to eliminate the gay outreach desk.

"It took us many years to win that position, have it funded and make it effective," Soref said.

Soref said he told Dean "it was not credible" to simply assume that combining all constituent groups into one program without a specific gay coordinator or director would be effective because it would likely result in less attention to the specific concerns of gay Democrats.

"I thought this system could lead to us being re-marginalized by the party," Soref said in an e-mail

Please see **OUTREACH**, on Page 1



Ken Malone, associate executive director of Legacy Community Health Services, said local HIV/AIDS service organization must press lawmakers to renew the Ryan White CARE Act.

## Local HIV group 'encouraged' by Bush's speech

### President calls on Congress to reform, reauthorize Ryan White Act

By ERIC ERVIN

A local HIV/AIDS service and prevention organization is responding to President Bush's State of the Union address, in which he vowed to fight the disease that has claimed the lives of millions of people, including gay Houstonians, with renewal of the Ryan White CARE Act.

The Ryan White legislation funded primary care and support services for people living with HIV/AIDS that don't have any other health care alternatives or financial ability to pay for

Please see **ADDRESS**, on Page 3



**local life**  
Emily Langdon advocates gay rights and assumes new role at Houston Equal Rights Alliance. **Page 6**

**news**  
Gay-themed movie 'Brokeback Mountain' leads nominations for this year's Academy Awards. **Page 5**



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## cover story

# Ryan White CARE Act now temporarily funded

ADDRESS, continued from Page 1

treatment. It was originally passed by Congress in 1990 and expired on Sept. 30, 2005. Funding has continued to be appropriated under a temporary congressional resolution.

"A hopeful society acts boldly to fight diseases like HIV/AIDS, which can be prevented, and treated, and defeated," Bush said in his televised speech Tuesday night. "More than a million Americans live with HIV, and half of all AIDS cases occur among African-Americans.

"I ask Congress to reform and reauthorize the Ryan White Act and provide new funding to states, so we end the waiting lists for AIDS medicine in America," he said.

The president said the federal government would work closely with black churches and faith-based groups to deliver rapid HIV/AIDS tests. He said the government will work to end the stigma of the disease and "come closer to the day when there are no new infections in America."

"We are encouraged by the president's call for the renewal of the Ryan White CARE Act," stated Ken Malone, associate executive director of Legacy Community Health Services. "For the second year in a row, the president has used his annual address to the nation as an opportunity to highlight the need to renew and to improve legislation that serves low income people living with HIV/AIDS in the United States. We must turn the president's calls into action and press lawmakers to immediately tackle this critical issue."



In his State of the Union address Tuesday, President Bush vowed that the federal government would work to end the stigma of HIV/AIDS and decrease the number of new infections. (Photo by AP)

"After essentially five years of flat funding for HIV/AIDS medications, we are in desperate need of increased funding for HIV/AIDS drugs," Malone said. "I applaud the president's proposal to eliminate the waiting lists for medications, but it must not come at the cost of other key services provided in the CARE Act."

## Quality care and services

Malone said quality health care and social services are the key components in treatment of the disease. He said the organization is awaiting the release of Bush's budget to see how much funding has increase for the CARE Act.

Earlier this month, the Senate Health Education Pensions & Labor Committee, along with the House Energy & Commerce Committee, held joint meetings in Washington, D.C. to allow groups and individuals the opportunity to comment on the CARE Act. Officials with Legacy Community Health Services were invited to attend and provide comment.

"Recent events in the Gulf Coast underline the need to improve the mechanism by which the CARE Act provides life saving HIV/AIDS drugs," said Randall Ellis, director of government relations for Legacy, who appeared before the committees. "After Hurricane Katrina struck Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana, thousands of evacuees were transplanted to Houston.

"Legacy reached out to HIV-positive evacuees, but often initiating treatment was delayed because of fundamental flaws in the prescription drug assistance program of the CARE Act," Ellis said.

## Flaws with CARE

Ellis pointed out flaws with the current CARE Act, including patient's inability to automatically carry prescription benefits from one state to another, different income requirements and lack of accessible medical information. He said Congress has the chance to address these issues.

According to the AIDS Action Council, an organization of around 100 groups who work to combat HIV/AIDS, advances in treatment have helped those affected live longer, more productive lives. The organization estimates that around 1.2 million people are living with HIV.

# Soref wasn't satisfied with council hiring move

OUTREACH, continued from Page 1

message. "I have seen or heard nothing since that makes me feel that is not happening," he said.

Soref said Dean's decision to hire gay Democratic activist Donald Hitchcock in September as director of the DNC's Gay & Lesbian Leadership Council, which raises money for the party from gay donors, was not the same as hiring a full-time outreach staffer to address gay issues.

Hitchcock said he could not comment on the DNC changes or his work at the DNC because new DNC rules put in place by Dean prohibit him from speaking to the news media.

Chris Owens, director of the DNC's American Majority Partnership program, insisted that Hitchcock works with her on gay constituent outreach efforts in addition to his fundraising work.

"I would argue that we have more than one full-time person in place," Owens said. "One of the goals of the American Majority Partnership ... is to make sure we are working across constituencies so we can use issues

in a way to unify constituencies," she said.

Until last week, when contacted by this newspaper, the DNC Gay & Lesbian Americans Caucus and the National Stonewall Democrats, a group representing gay Democrats with affiliated chapters throughout the country, had not publicly acknowledged or expressed an opinion on Dean's decision to eliminate the gay outreach desk position.

In a telephone interview last week, gay Democratic activist Rick Stafford of Minnesota, who replaced Soref as chair of the DNC gay caucus, said he is willing to give the new approach a chance to work before passing judgment.

"Nothing is cast in stone," Stafford said.

## Bringing out the vote

At stake, according to gay Democratic activists, is whether gay voters will turn out in force in the 2006 congressional elections to help Democrats win back control of the House and Senate. Exit poll data has shown that between 75 percent and 80 percent of the gay vote goes

to Democratic candidates in presidential and congressional elections, but that the size of the gay vote varies from election to election.

Eric Stern, executive director of the National Stonewall Democrats, would not comment on Dean's changes.

"I see it as a restructuring because that's the chairman's prerogative when he or she comes in to take over the DNC," Stern said.

Stern said that while Hitchcock was doing a good job in helping the DNC reach out to gay voters, the NSD believes he needs at least one additional staff assistant to help him.

He said the Stonewall Democrats also have asked the DNC to hire more gay field workers to help with Dean's initiative to more aggressively support all 50 state Democratic Party operations during the 2006 election.

Stern held the DNC gay outreach director's position from 2004 — during the presidential campaign — until February 2005, when he resigned to take the Stonewall Democrats director's post.



Gay Democratic Party activist Jeff Soref says he resigned from the Democratic National Committee and his position as chair of the gay caucus because of party leader Howard Dean's decision to eliminate the gay outreach desk.

## national news

# Coretta Scott King dies at 78

## 'Mother of civil rights movement' championed gay rights

By DYANA BAGBY

As some anti-gay black clergy are likely to recall the legacy of Coretta Scott King and her contribution to the civil rights movement during sermons on Sunday, gay activists hope they will also heed her call for equal rights for all people.

"Ministers today need to sit back and realize what Dr. and Mrs. King were all about — they don't honor her legacy when they spew homophobia and hatred," said Keith Boykin, an author and activist who serves as board president of the National Black Justice Coalition, a group that advocates gay rights issues.

Mrs. King, wife of slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., died overnight on Jan. 30 at a holistic hospital in Mexico.

She suffered a stroke in August and was afflicted with late-term ovarian cancer. The King family had not announced funeral arrangements by press time.

"She was a legend. She influenced many people," Boykin added. "And she was one of the few people who got it — that racism, sexism and homophobia are discrimination — like few others did. [Ministers] would do well to call her name and recall her words."

### 'Champion of human rights'

While her legacy includes being the wife of Martin Luther King Jr., Mrs. King forged a history of her own that included speaking out against a proposed federal constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage. In numerous speeches she publicly advocated for gay rights as well as raising awareness about HIV/AIDS.

In Atlanta, where she created the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Non-violent Social Change to honor her late husband, she worked alongside state legislators to try to defeat the state constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage.

"She was a champion for human rights," state Rep. Tyrone Brooks (D-Atlanta), a plaintiff in a lawsuit seeking to throw out Amendment 1, which was approved by voters in 2004, placing a ban on same-sex unions in the Georgia Constitution.

"She opposed discrimination in all forms and she remained consistent with



Coretta Scott King, who spoke out against bans on same-sex marriage as well as homophobia, died overnight Monday in her bed at a holistic health center in Mexico, her family announced Jan. 31. She was 78. (Photo by AP)

her husband's vision," he added. "Her legacy will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with her husband's legacy."

State Sen. Vincent Fort (D-Atlanta), who also worked to defeat passage of Georgia's same-sex marriage ban, praised King as the "mother of the civil rights movement."

"I respected her not only for her grace and dignity under pressure, but her courage," he said.

Zandra Conway, spokesperson for In the Life Atlanta, which organizes the country's largest annual Black Pride event, praised King for being a "woman of grace and justice."

"She advocated equal rights for the LGBT community and she publicly opposed the Georgia amendment to ban same-sex marriage. One of my favorite quotes from her is, 'I still hear people say that I should not be talking about the rights of lesbian and gay people and I should stick to the issue of racial justice. But I hasten to remind them that Martin Luther King Jr. said, injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,'" Conway added.

### AIDS activist, too

The timing of news of King's death — on the day of President George W. Bush's State of the Union Speech as well as the confirmation of Samuel Alito as an associate justice on the Supreme Court — is particularly poetic, said Craig Washington, a black gay activist who works for the HIV advocacy group Positive Impact in Atlanta.

"I'm hoping her death serves as a clarion call for people in this country to call for the rights of LGBTQ people and that it also serves as a call to LGBTQ people to realize that liberation is not fully achieved until we focus on matters affecting us all," Washington said.

"We lost an amazing matriarch and lost our most well-known and consistent ally — she spoke out against homophobia and was very active in AIDS prevention mobilization," he said.

# Houston GLBT Political Caucus issues endorsements

## Seven candidates endorsed by gay political group for March 7 primary

By ERIC ERVIN

The Houston GLBT Political Caucus endorsed seven candidates for next month's primary election, specifically pointing out one ally of gay Houstonians and encouraging them to cast their vote for other gay-friendly candidates.

Members of the caucus meet Wednesday to release the list of the seven candidates it had endorsed for the two

upcoming elections. The March 7 primary election sets the stage for the Democratic and Republican candidates who will be on the ballot for the general elections in November. Texas voters will go to the polls to elect a governor, along with judges, district attorneys and seats in the legislature.

"The Houston GLBT Political Caucus will offer all of our resources to support these candidates in their primary races," said President Maria Gonzalez. "It's critical that the GLBT community support pro-equality candidates."

Gonzalez specifically pointed out Rep. Garnet Coleman (D-Houston) for his support of gay rights issues. Coleman was one of several state and local politicians who opposed last year's constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage.

Coleman called Proposition 2 a "proposition of hate."

"Constitutions, both our national and state ones, are supposed to protect rights, not deny rights," Coleman said. "It goes against the very grain of what a constitution is about."

Gonzalez said Coleman "has been an ally of this community for many years in the Texas State Legislature."

"He now has challengers in the primary and it's our responsibility to do the work necessary to insure he wins the primary," she said.

The incumbent faces Democratic challengers Cheryl Armitage and Herschel Smith in the March 7 elections.

"We need every member of the community stepping up to help raise funds, block walking, and phone banking," Gonzalez



Maria Gonzalez, president of the Houston GLBT Political Caucus, said it is critical that gay Houstonians support candidates who are pro-equality during the March primary and November general elections.

said. "As one of our biggest supporters in the Texas State Legislature, Coleman is working hard for all Texans and not a certain few."

"He has not let this community down and we shouldn't let him down now. We invite everyone to join our efforts to elect these pro-equality candidates."

### Gammage for governor

The caucus endorsed Bob Gammage for the Texas governor's position. Gammage joins a pool of candidates which includes incumbent Republican Gov. Rick Perry, who is a well-known opponent of gay-rights issues, gay-friendly former Houston City Councilmember and Democratic U.S. Rep. Chris Bell, Texas Controller Carol Keeyton Strayhorn, and musician and writer Kinky Friedman, who said he supports gay marriage because "they have the right to be miserable just like the rest of us."

Strayhorn and Friedman are both running as Independent candidates.

Gammage, a former state legislator, congressman and Texas Supreme Court jus-

tice, recently made a stop in Houston for a campaign rally.

"I support Bob Gammage because he's the strongest Democrat in this race and has the most progressive platform for the people of Texas," said Wesley Clark, who unsuccessfully sought the 2004 Democratic presidential nomination.

"He is a proven leader who will fight for the needs of all Texans, not the lobbyists, the special interests or the powerful partisan elites. He's grown up with Texas values of independence, integrity and commitment to family and neighbors and he will carry those values into the governor's office. I look forward to helping him in his fight to build a better Texas."

### Other picks

According to Jack Valinski, vice president of the caucus, the candidates seek endorsements by the organization. He said before the endorsements are made, candidates must pass a screening process. Valinski said there have been times when endorsements are denied.

"We only endorse where it makes sense," he said.

Other candidates endorsed by the caucus include, Kevin Baily for the state representative District 140 seat; Al Bennett, state representative District 146; David Murff, District 7 U.S. representative; Ted Ankrum, District 10 U.S. representative; and Zinetta Burney for Justice of the Peace, Precinct 7.

All of the endorsed candidates are Democrats.

### **i** MORE INFO

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### March Primary Endorsements

Governor: Bob Gammage (D)  
State Representative, District 140: Kevin Baily (D)  
State Representative, District 146: Al Bennett (D)  
State Representative, District 147: Garnet Coleman (D)  
U.S. Representative, District 7: David Murff (D)  
U.S. Representative, District 10: Ted Ankrum (D)  
Justice of the Peace, Precinct 7: Zinetta Burney (D)



## news in brief

### 'Brokeback Mountain' leads with eight Oscar nods

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. (AP) — The cowboy love story "Brokeback Mountain" led the Academy Awards field Tuesday with eight nominations, among them best picture and honors for actor Heath Ledger and director Ang Lee. With key prizes at earlier Hollywood honors, the film heads into the March 5 awards as the best-picture front-runner, potentially the first film with explicit gay themes to claim the grand prize at the Oscars. "Capote," based on the life of late gay author Truman Capote, was also nominated for best picture, along with the ensemble drama "Crash"; the Edward R. Murrow chronicle "Good Night, and Good Luck"; and the assassination thriller "Munich." Along with best-actor contender Ledger, and directing nominee Lee, "Brokeback Mountain" scored nominations for Michelle Williams as supporting actress, Jake Gyllenhaal as supporting actor and Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana for their screenplay adaptation of Annie Proulx's short story. Philip Seymour Hoffman, who portrays the title character in "Capote," joined Ledger in the best-actor category. Felicity Huffman, who portrays a transgender woman about to undergo sex-change surgery in "Transamerica," was nominated for best actress.



Heath Ledger's nomination for best actor was one of eight Oscar nods for 'Brokeback Mountain,' including best picture, best director and two other acting categories.

### Gay rights groups bemoan Alito confirmation vote

WASHINGTON — By a vote of 58-42, the U.S. Senate on Jan. 31 confirmed Samuel Alito to be the 110th justice on the court, drawing broad expressions of concern from gay rights groups. He was sworn in just hours before President Bush's annual "State of the Union" message. "The confirmation of Justice Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court seat of Sandra Day O'Connor is a devastating blow to individual rights, civil liberties and equal justice under law in America," said Matt Foreman of the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force in Washington, D.C. He blamed a deal made by moderate senators from both parties last year that made it more difficult for a filibuster to be mounted against the Alito confirmation. That deal was praised at the time by some gay groups, including the Human Rights Campaign, as necessary to preserve the filibuster option for Supreme Court nominees. HRC President Joe Solmonese issued a statement that made no mention of the filibuster effort but praised senators who voted against the nomination.

### Religious groups get nearly one-quarter of U.S. AIDS money

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Bush's \$15 billion effort to fight AIDS has handed out nearly one-quarter of its grants to religious groups, and officials are aggressively pursuing new church partners that often emphasize disease prevention through abstinence and fidelity over condom use. Award recipients include a Christian relief organization famous for its televised appeals to feed hungry children, a well-known Catholic charity and a group run by the son of evangelist Billy Graham, according to the State Department. Conservative Christian allies of the president are pressing the U.S. foreign aid agency to give fewer dollars to groups that distribute condoms or work with prostitutes. Secular organizations in Africa are raising concerns that new money to groups without AIDS experience may dilute the impact of Bush's historic three-year-old program. "The notion that because people have always received aid money that they'll get

money needs to end," Deputy U.S. global AIDS coordinator Mark Dybul said in an interview with the Associated Press. Most of the money in Bush's initiative goes to treatment programs, earning the administration praise for delivering lifesaving drugs and care to millions of HIV-infected patients. For prevention, Bush embraces the "ABC" strategy: abstinence before marriage, being faithful to one partner, and condoms targeted for high-risk activity. The Republican-led Congress mandated that one-third of prevention money be reserved for abstinence and fidelity. Condom promotion to anyone must include abstinence and fidelity messages, U.S. guidelines say, but those preaching abstinence do not have to provide condom education. Six congressional Democrats, in a letter last week to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, accused the conservatives of a distortion campaign that undermines a balanced approach to fighting AIDS.

### Wash. governor signs gay, trans rights bill

OLYMPIA, Wash. — A gay and transgender rights measure passed the state Senate Jan. 27 and was signed into law four days later by Gov. Chris Gregoire, a Democrat. The passage of the legislation was a major victory for gay rights activists who have watched the measure fail in the Legislature for nearly 30 years, including last year when it fell one vote short in the Senate after passing the House. This time around, the measure squeaked through the Senate on a 25-23 vote, with a lone Republican joining majority Democrats. The measure adds sexual orientation and gender identity to a state law that bans discrimination in housing, employment and insurance. With passage, Washington becomes the 17th state with a gay rights law and the seventh to pass protections based on gender identity. The bill passed the House the previous week on a 60-37 vote. The law is scheduled to take effect in June, 90 days after the end of the legislative session. Opponents are threatening to gather signatures to put the issue up for a ballot referendum. If they gather enough signatures by a June 7 deadline, the new law would be frozen until a November vote.

From staff and wire reports

## national news

# Gay gamers protest harassment policy

## Popular 'World of Warcraft' game bars term 'GLBT'

By ALEXANDER SLIWINSKI

Sara Andrews thought it was a misunderstanding when she received an e-mail from a game master in Blizzard Entertainment's popular online role playing game "World of Warcraft" citing her for harassment based on sexual orientation.

Andrews had posted a message that she was recruiting for a "GLBT friendly" guild in a general chat channel within the game. Believing that her notice had been accidentally flagged, she e-mailed Blizzard to correct the problem. Blizzard, to Andrews' surprise, upheld its decision.

Blizzard's policy on sexual orientation harassment, which is set forth in the game's terms of use and cited in the e-mail to Andrews reads, "This category includes both clear and masked language which insultingly refers to any aspect of sexual orientation pertaining to themselves or other players."

When word of the citation got out, Blizzard Entertainment was inundated on its message boards and last week released a statement defending the policy but saying it would rewrite portions, and that the company would clarify the policy's enforcement with its online game monitors.

The statement, posted Jan. 27 on the site's message boards, said that use of the term "GLBT" was not allowed, because it has a "tendency to result in communication that often breaks down into harassment."

Rather than diffusing the controversy, the message fueled it further.

"Does this mean I should report people who mention their wives and children?" asked a character named Artos on the boards.

Andrews said she was not satisfied with the statement.

"Blizzard has yet to address the fact that I never violated the policy," claimed Andrews, "as it was stated at the time the citation was given. I did not violate the policy as it was written at the time that I agreed to it"

Andrews said she plans to cancel her membership to World of Warcraft because of the way the incident has been handled.

### Flaunting heterosexuality?

As of Jan. 31, there were more than 2,500 postings in the online general dis-



Some gay fans of the popular 'World of Warcraft' online game are protesting the site's policy barring use of the term 'GLBT.'

cussions area concerning the topic. The controversy has even spilled over into game play.

During the weekend while play was under way on the website, which is the world's largest massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG), it was reported there was a wedding at which several characters showed up to protest people flaunting their heterosexuality.

The original posting by Andrews that led to the flap was fairly innocuous: "OZ [the name of her guild] is recruiting all levels — We are not 'GLBT only' but we are 'GLBT friendly!' (guilduniverse.com/oz)."

Blizzard's stance was clear that recruiting for a guild using "GLBT" was inappropriate as, the company said, it may "incite certain responses in other players that will allow for discussion that we feel has no place in our game."

Two large gay guilds, Stonewall Champions and Spreading Taint, have expressed displeasure at the incident.

"Of particular concern to us is that the policy in practice punishes players for hypothetical harassment at the hands of another. This is not only a GLBT issue; but one which could easily escalate to impact guilds who are family-friendly, religious, geographical, or recruit gamers of a certain age," the gay guilds wrote.

"Silencing a guild that is seeking friendly new members is not a satisfactory preventative for harassment. Rules should exist to punish the harasser, not those who may be harassed."

## Houston Equal Rights Alliance taps field director

Gay-rights activist previously fought to defeat Proposition 2

By ERIC ERVIN

Houstonian Emily Langdon is no stranger to fighting for gay rights and other political issues. During the last presidential elections, she worked with the Howard Dean campaign.

Langdon, who last year joined gay-rights groups in the fight to defeat a state constitutional ban on same-sex marriages, was recently hired as the first-ever field director for the Houston Equal Rights Alliance.

"I'm really excited about it," Langdon says. "We would like to build this huge power base so we could monitor things such as gay marriage and anti-bullying policies in schools."

Langdon said her long-term goal is to establish the alliance as an "umbrella" organization for the many different gay organizations in the Houston area. She believes the city's many gay organizations are separated, with a lot of officials not knowing each other.

"When I came to Houston I noticed that everyone was so fragmented," Langdon says.

Langdon says her immediate plans are to establish voter registrars, voter registration drives and develop a new website for the organization, which is formerly Equality Knocks-Houston.

The group consists of individuals and organizations committed to promoting equality and respect for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. Alliance partners include Equality Texas, which is formerly the Lesbian/Gay Rights Lobby of Texas, the Houston GLBT Political Caucus, the Houston GLBT Community Center and the Foundation for Marriage Equality.

### Key role

Langdon, 23, who is a lesbian, is a founding member of the alliance, and previously served as a board member.

### MORE INFO

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Emily Langdon, 23, has become field director of the Houston Equal Rights Alliance, overseeing the organization's day-to-day operations.

She will oversee the organization's day-to-day operations and work on voter identification, volunteer management, office management and fund-raising projects.

Langdon also volunteered for the alliance's predecessor project, Equality Knocks. Officials said she has devoted a lot of time to the organization and its projects.

"We are extremely pleased that Emily has taken on the role of field director," says April Ayers, alliance vice president. "Emily has played a key role in the launch of the Houston Equal Rights Alliance.

"Her experience with both HERA and No Nonsense in November give her a wealth of knowledge to push forward with our voter identification efforts," she says.

Ayers says Langdon's hiring fulfills the alliance's primary objective of development and mentoring youth leadership.

### Voter identification

Hiring a field director will enable the Houston Equal Rights Alliance to focus on identifying gay-supportive voters before the next gay rights battle hits the ballot box, according to Tammi Wallace, HERA president.

The group "is dedicated to continuing voter identification work in Houston and the hiring of a field director reflects our commitment to this critical work in the Houston community," Wallace says. "We see this as one of the top priorities for the

organization in terms of fulfilling the mission set forth by the board.

"If we are to hold legislators accountable, educate the public about our lives and stories, and change the political landscape locally, then we can't engage in voter identification in crisis mode such as when responding to anti-gay legislation," she says.

Langdon was one of two Houston area field coordinators for the No Nonsense in November group. The group, which was headed by gay former state representative Glen Maxey of Austin, unsuccessfully fought to defeat Proposition 2 last year.

The state constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriages passed by more than 76 percent of the voters who went to the polls. Less than 24 percent of voters opposed it. Statewide voter turnout reached 17.81 percent, which was one of the largest since Gov. Rick Perry's Tort Reform measure.

The amendment defines marriage as the union between a man and a woman.

"The campaign was really stressful," Langdon says.

In preparation for the March primary election, Langdon said the group will soon canvass neighborhoods to gauge voters' opinions on gay issues, such as marriage rights.

The work must be ongoing, Wallace agrees.

"Voter identification work must be in progress every day of the year in our community," Wallace says. "Voter identi-

### Emily Langdon

Age: 23  
Birthplace: Stonybrook, New York  
Occupation: Field director, Houston Equal Rights Alliance  
Education: Bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Houston  
Relationship status: Single  
Pets: One dog named Foxy  
Hobbies: Knitting, walking, reading and sudoku puzzles.

fication work is most effective on an ongoing basis when it's embraced by the community as a key effort to fight for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender civil rights.

"This is one more example of how HERA continues to offer individuals and organizations in the community an opportunity to participate at a local level in the fight for GLBT civil rights."

Last year, the alliance compiled a database of 45,000 voters who support their mission of equal rights for everyone thanks to voter identification efforts.

### 'Plenty of passion'

Langdon received a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Houston in 2005. Originally from Stonybrook, N.Y., Langdon said she is taking a year-long break from school before returning to New York to study law. She plans to attend City University of New York.

In her spare time, Langdon says she looks for new hobbies. She recently started to knit, and likes to take walks in the park, read and solve Sudoku puzzles.

"I'm trying very hard to be social, but my friends always give me a hard time," she says. "They don't count voter registration [drives] at a bar as really going out."

"I'm open to new hobby suggestions." Alliance officials said Langdon is extremely passionate about the fight for civil rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

Langdon considers her work with the No Nonsense in November group good experience that can be applied with the Houston alliance.

"It was something that I was really interested in doing," she said. "I had plenty of time, plenty of passion."

Alliance officials say because of Langdon's hiring, the group's offices will be open daily. They encourage people to drop by to meet Langdon and learn more about the group's goals and future plans.

# out in houston

(Photos by Dalton DeHart)



Entertainer Rick Comeaux, Fiona Dawson, Robert Bunch, Tianna Hall, Barbara Shoemaker, entertainer Jerry Atwood and Dan Snare at a fund-raiser benefiting Bering Omega Community Health Services.



Gay candidate Jeff Cook (center), who is running for a seat in Congress for New York's 19th Congressional District, was recently in Houston for a fund-raiser. Cook is joined by Alex Martinez, Barbara Mills and David Arpin.



Aaron Masterson, Alain Flambert, Chris Erickson, Joe Zoellers, Mike Collins and Parker Langley at the Bayou City Boys Club's kickoff party to mark the start of the group's 2006 fund-raising season.



Those opposing President Bush came out in force Tuesday night as part of 'The World Can't Wait' rally at KHOU-Channel 11 studios.

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# Forum

HOUSTON VOICE

FEBRUARY 3, 2006

PAGE 8

## editorial

# Mourning the loss of a true leader

Coretta Scott King was more than an advocate for gay rights or black civil rights. She was a true advocate of human rights.

By MUBARAK DAHIR

# W

HEN CORETTA SCOTT King died in her sleep overnight on Jan. 30 at age 78, America lost one of its most eloquent and forceful activists for gay and lesbian rights.

That statement might surprise some readers, and anger others, who primarily remember Mrs. King, the wife of slain civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as a black civil rights heroine.

But for more than a decade, Mrs. King was also an unflinching advocate for the equal treatment of gay and lesbian people. She spoke out against the ban on gays in the military, testified on behalf of the Employment Nondiscrimination Act, and came out in favor of allowing same-sex couples to marry.

She repeatedly addressed gay and lesbian rights groups and rallies, and spoke valiantly in support of gay causes.

Even when it was controversial and unpopular among other black civil rights leaders, Mrs. King did not waiver. Indeed, members of her own family remain split on the issue of gay rights, with some descendants of Martin Luther King Jr. vocally opposed.

Some black leaders, many of whom have their roots in the black churches, continue to organize actively against gay rights, supposedly on moral grounds. Some of them even use Dr. Martin Luther King's name in their crusades.

But no one knew the late civil rights leader like his own wife, and she adamantly maintained that the principles she and her husband established and fought for all their lives must apply to all groups, including gay and lesbian people.

"I still hear people say that I should not be talking about the rights of lesbian and gay people and I should stick to the issue of racial justice," she said in March 1998. "But I hasten to remind them that Martin Luther King Jr. said, 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.'"

"I appeal to everyone who believes in Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream to make room at the table of brother and sisterhood for lesbian and gay people."

Her history and her standing in the African-American community made her a particularly formidable ally. While many African-American leaders virulently oppose equating the black civil rights

movement and the gay rights movement, Mrs. King embraced the obvious parallels.

"Homophobia is like racism and anti-Semitism and other forms of bigotry in that it seeks to dehumanize a large group of people, to deny their humanity, their dignity and personhood," she said in a speech in Chicago in April 1998, just days before the 30th anniversary of her late husband's assassination. "I've always felt that homophobic attitudes and policies were unjust and unworthy of a free society and must be opposed by all Americans who believe in democracy."

Though the phrase "human rights" is perhaps so over-used today as to have lost its meaning, Mrs. King was a true champion of that notion. And she made it clear that her vision included gay and lesbian people.

"Freedom from discrimination based on sexual orientation is surely a fundamental human right in any great democracy, as much as freedom from racial, religious, gender or ethnic discrimination," she remarked in a speech at the November 2000 Creating Change conference, a gay rights convention held annually by the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force.

CORETTA SCOTT FELT THE SCOURGE OF discrimination from the very beginning of her life. Born on a farm in Marion, Ala., in 1927, she and other black children were forced to walk five miles each way to attend a one-room school house, while white children rode buses to an all-white school closer to their homes.

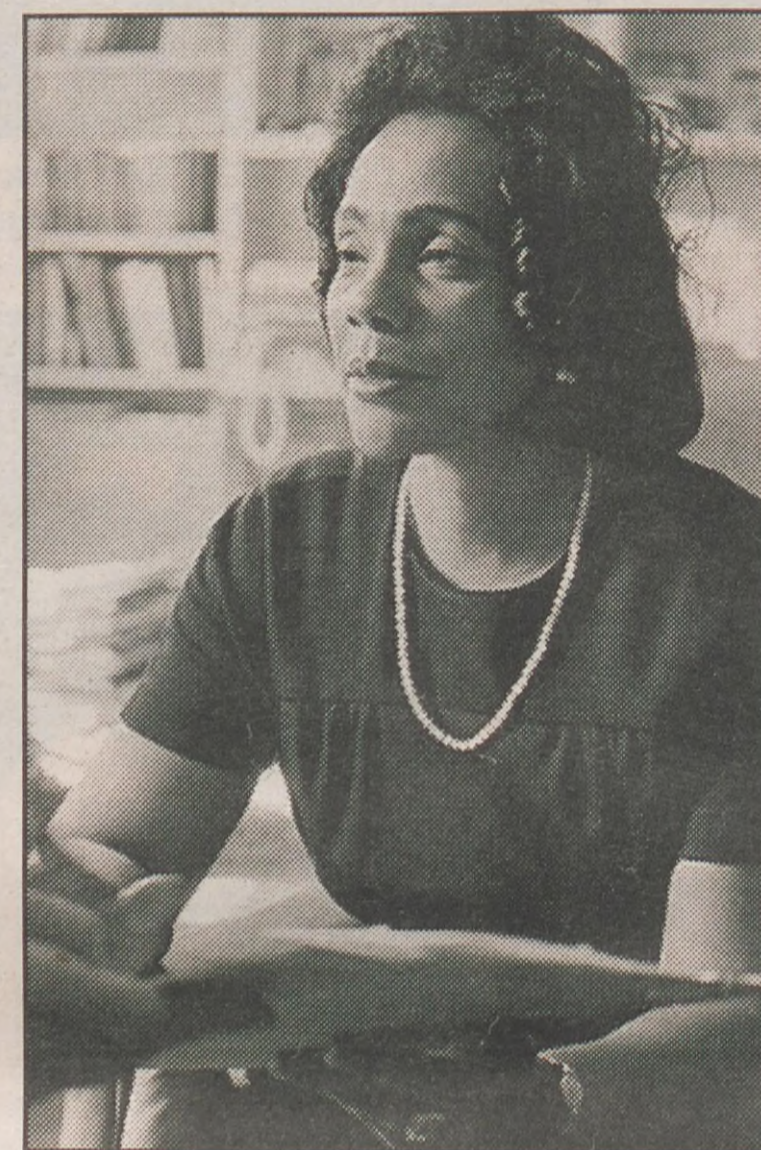
But the young woman excelled in her studies and in college joined the civil rights movement, becoming a student member of the NAACP and the school's Race Relations and Civil Liberties Committees.

It was later in Boston she met a theology student named Martin Luther King, Jr., and they subsequently married and moved to Montgomery, Ala. From there, Coretta Scott King held a front row seat in the tumultuous civil rights movement.

After her husband's death, she founded the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change. She authored an autobiography, remained active in politics, and campaigned to have Martin Luther King Day established as a national holiday.

And along her path, she became an outspoken advocate for gay and lesbian civil rights.

IT WOULD NOT DO MRS. KING JUSTICE, however, to simply call her a gay and lesbian rights advocate. Nor would it be enough to say only that she had been a



giant in the black civil rights movement.

Mrs. King, like her husband, was one of those truly inspirational leaders who transcended the "me, me, me" that is too rampant in much of contemporary political activism, including in the gay movement.

But I fear in her death that too many gays, thrilled that such a stalwart championed our cause, may miss her larger message.

If part of Mrs. King's legacy is to call anti-gay black leaders on their homophobia, so too should she stand as a reminder to gays to confront the racism that lingers in our own ranks.

For almost two years now, I have lived in a predominantly black neighborhood. I have been shocked at the not-so-subtle racism of many of my gay friends and acquaintances who come to visit. Sadly, unlike Mrs. King, it appears that too many gay men and lesbians fail to see the connections that all of us who face discrimination share.

As Mrs. King remarked at a news conference in June 1994, while speaking out in favor of the Employment Nondiscrimination Act: "Freedom and justice cannot be parceled out in pieces to suit political convenience. I don't believe you can stand for freedom for one group of people and deny it to others."

And Mrs. King never did.

@ Mubarak Dahir is editor of the Express Gay News, a publication affiliated with this paper, and can be reached at mdahir@expressgaynews.com



## viewpoint CHRISTOPHER STEVENS



Why is anyone upset by what 'American Idol' judges say? We ought to congratulate them for saying it in complete sentences.

# 'Idol' worship doesn't serve gay movement

ONE OF THE MOST VALUABLE LIFE skills a person can learn is how to choose his battles. If you have any personality at all, you are going to make enemies. You can try to fight all of them, but it may be a strain.

Think of it in terms of energy conservation. In the same way that you can close the doors and shut off the heat to unused rooms to save on gas during the winter, you can look at your enemies and concentrate your energies on fighting the ones who actually hurt you.

Take Rev. Fred Phelps of Topeka, Kan., for example. Gay people get their knickers in a knot over his protests at the funerals of people who died from AIDS complications, but is it worth it?

Yes, the man's a whack-job, but this is generally recognized by everyone. For all his lunatic ranting, he's never really affected anything, except to get his gay targets all hysterical, which must be very rewarding for him. Take his reward away. Ignore him. He's not worth noticing.

THE SAME GOES FOR THE RECENT snit over some perceived insults on "American Idol." I don't partake of "Idolatry," myself. All I've seen of it are bits caught while channel surfing, and snips foisted off as "news" on other programs,

and this is still more of it than I need. So I didn't see the offending episodes, but it sounds like a tsunami in a soda can to me.

But apparently, poor little Zachary Travis auditioned by attempting to sing Whitney Houston's "Queen of the Night" (points off right there, if I were a judge). Sporting high heels, a girl's blouse and a decidedly feminine hair-don't, Travis informed the judges that he's often amused when asked if he's a girl.

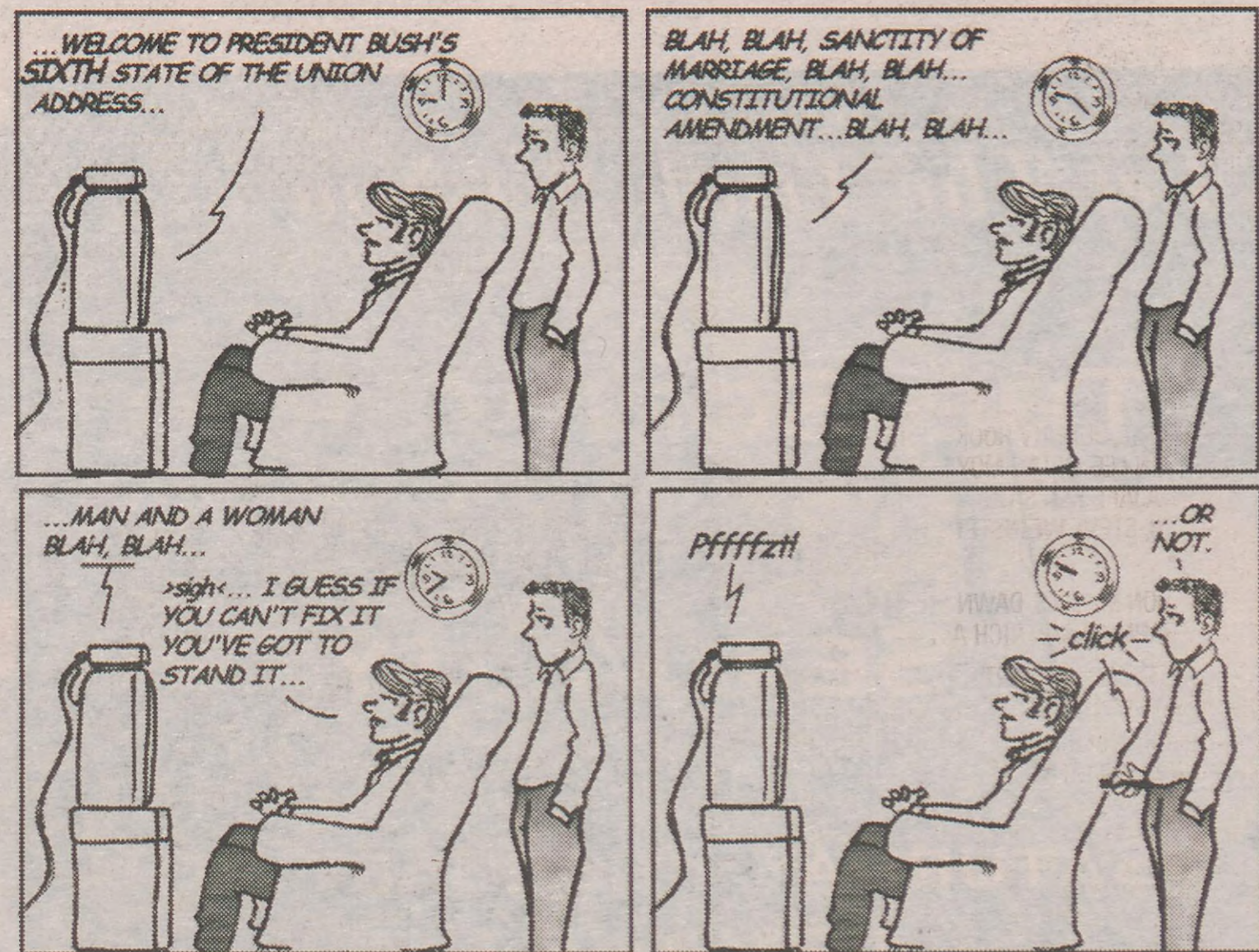
So Randy Jackson asked and — whadya know? — Travis was not amused. You go, girl! No, really, please go. Now.

"We" (meaning the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, because they speak for all of us, don't they?) are upset about that exchange, along with Simon Cowell's advice to another effeminate male contestant: "Shave off your beard and wear a dress. You would be a great female impersonator."

Again, I did not see this performance, but this sounds like valuable career advice to me.

At worst, these are slights, and from some truly slight people. Jackson and Cowell are bitter, snotty media turds, who never even had performance careers.

Paula Abdul did, but probably shouldn't have. Sure she could dance, but vocally she was the Florence Foster Jenkins of the '80s, and what's she done since then?



WHY IS ANYONE UPSET BY ANYTHING these deeply unimportant media whores say? They ought to be congratulated for managing to say it in complete sentences.

A very wise person (Lisa Simpson) once said, "You'll never go broke appealing to the lowest common denominator." And "American Idol" is LCD TV if ever there was.

All the contestants go into it expecting to be insulted. The audience tunes in expecting to hear insults. (If they were smarter, the audience would feel insulted, too, but if they were smarter, they wouldn't be watching.)

Why does anyone get upset when the insults occur, whether they're germane or not? There are only so many ways of telling someone she can't carry a tune in a bucket, or that he has a voice like a cat in a blender, and then you have to find something else to insult.

"Idol" is, of course, not a talent show. It's a freak show — a form of entertainment never known for its political correctness.

It's also not important, like for example the easy confirmation of a satanically

conservative Supreme Court justice. It is not the refusal by some Bay Area teachers to post school district-mandated GLBT "safe space" signs because of their religious beliefs.

It is not Bill O'Reilly (who deserves air time about as much as the "Idol" judges do) comparing issuing gay people marriage licenses to giving blind people driver's licenses.

These are insults worth getting riled about, from enemies worth the energy it takes to fight them. If we concentrate our ire on the battles that really matter and the enemies who can really hurt us, we can drive the Alitos, the O'Reillys and the Bushes running from the stage, weeping in the shame and mortification they so richly deserve.

They are un-American idols, and we cannot let them win.

@ Christopher Stevens is an Atlanta-based writer and designer and can be reached at [boyohboy@mindspring.com](mailto:boyohboy@mindspring.com).

## THE

# Q

## What do you think the approval of Judge Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court would mean for gay men and lesbians in America?



I believe it's another step towards the reduction of the few civil liberties our community has been able to achieve over the decades. It's time for all GLBT community members to be fully aware of our history, get out, vote and be heard.

ANDRIENNE BROWN, 44  
Houston Banker



Sadly, Alito isn't leading anyone to believe he is out to uphold the constitutional rights of anyone, especially the underdog. It is no secret how President Bush feels about the community, and with Alito approved he would have one more pal to further ensure his conservative, Bush-power agenda. It won't be a good thing.

ANGELA GIOIA, 40  
Houston Artist



Alito's confirmation will likely not be good for us. Anytime a conservative closet-case is in a position of political power, the GLBT community will always be at a disadvantage.

COLIN MITCHELL, 27  
Houston Recruitment consultant



I do not believe he will actively do anything to hinder gay and lesbian rights, but in the same sense he will not actively support gay and lesbian rights. I feel his approval would simply continue what is already in place, which needs a lot of growth and education in the human rights agenda.

D. WOODWARD, 47  
Houston Relocation specialist



Time will tell, but given his track record with answers that go back and forth, I am very concerned it will not be good. I am concerned with Alito's presence on the high court, which in my estimation will undoubtedly shift the court too far to the right. The Human Rights Campaign says Alito is the right-wing choice the Republicans have been waiting for. I'm afraid that in the end, he will be no friend of ours. I hope I'm wrong.

RICHARD GRABER, 36  
Cleveland, Ohio Grants specialist

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on the record



"Many Americans, especially parents, still have deep concerns about the direction of our culture, and the health of our most basic institutions. They are concerned about unethical conduct by public officials, and discouraged by activist courts that try to redefine marriage."

President Bush equating same-sex marriage with recent GOP scandals involving lobbyists and lawmakers (State of the Union address, Jan. 31)

"You'll know them by their fruits."

Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.), using a biblical reference to criticize countries like Sweden that have legalized same-sex marriage (Rolling Stone magazine)

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits."

Matthew 7:15-16, the biblical passage paraphrased by Brownback

"While this biblical passage was pertinent to our overall conversation about faith and deeds, it apparently led the writer to believe I was making a joke. I was not and would never do so with such a personal and sensitive issue."

Brownback, who has advocated for a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage, in a statement clarifying the remark (Jan. 30)



"You turn this nation over to the fags, and our soldiers come home in body bags."

Shirley Phelps-Roper, daughter of anti-gay crusader Rev. Fred Phelps, on her efforts to protest at funerals of U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq; five states are considering bans on such demonstrations (Washington Post, Jan. 30)

"I'm not certain that there's ever been a film that has a gay romance that's been embraced this way. But ... the film is about a lot more than that. I've said this before, but it's sort of like saying 'Lonesome Dove' is just a story about a cattle drive."

Diana Ossana, nominated with Larry McMurtry for adapted screenplay for "Brokeback Mountain"; the duo won the Golden Globe (Associated Press, Jan. 31)

"I didn't know there were so many gay people out there. Everywhere, they turn up. More importantly, I think I'm amazed how people everywhere have had the sensitivity to want to get into the complexity of the issue, the probability of love, the illusion of love, all those things."

"Brokeback Mountain" director Ang Lee on audience response to the film, which led all films with eight Oscar nominations announced this week (Associated Press, Jan. 31)

"Brad has asked his people to find him a script to play a gay man. He's seen the critical acclaim that 'Brokeback Mountain' has won and he wants a piece of it. He wants it to be a story that appeals to both men and women and he wants it to be the edgiest work he's done."

An unnamed source about Brad Pitt's reaction to the accolades rolling in for "Brokeback" (Sun, Feb. 1)

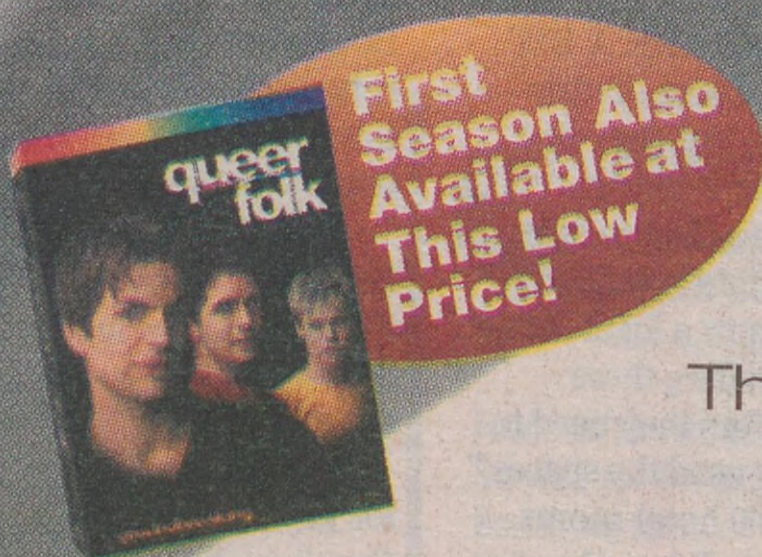
"I still hear people say that I should not be talking about the rights of lesbian and gay people and I should stick to the issue of racial justice. ... But I hasten to remind them that Martin Luther King Jr. said, 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.' ... I appeal to everyone who believes in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream to make room at the table of brotherhood and sisterhood for lesbian and gay people."

Coretta Scott King, who died this week at the age of 78, at the 25th anniversary event for the Lambda Legal Defense & Education Fund (March 31, 1998)



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# eclipse



## Who could 'Imagine'

In a lesbian 'Brokeback Mountain', a bride falls in love with a florist and they make out on a bed of roses.

Page 14

GAY HOUSTON NIGHTLIFE, ARTS & CULTURE

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FEBRUARY 3, 2006

## Mardi Gras miracle

New Orleans' biggest party emerges from Katrina with gay bars, events still intact.

By RYAN LEE

WHERE THERE HAS BEEN MUCH sorrow and misery, there soon will once again be music and revelry.

Shortly after Hurricane Katrina leveled the Gulf Coast last August, few outsiders imagined that New Orleans could recover quickly enough to host this year's Mardi Gras, the city's most famous annual event.

But they underestimated the steel of Crescent City residents, says Ken Grandepre, general manager of Wood Enterprises, which operates gay bars and gay-popular eateries in New Orleans.

"The people of New Orleans are different than the people anywhere else — they have a strong will," Grandepre says. "Any true New Orleanian would've told you there was no way we wouldn't be back in time for Mardi Gras."

Party promoter Johnny Chisholm, who owns the gay dance club Oz New Orleans, returned to the city four days after Katrina. He says he was astonished by how intact much of the heart of the city was.

"It's not all great, but as far as the French Quarter and the Business District, it's almost like you can carve that area

out — it's been untouched," Chisholm says. "Were we nervous about Mardi Gras not happening? Hell yeah, but we're feeling very good about it now."

Most people who visited New Orleans during the past few months were surprised by the "very dramatic" difference between the devastated areas that are broadcast on TV and the more touristy areas like the French Quarter that avoided major damage, says Kim Priez, vice president of tourism for the New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau.

"It really is the tale of two cities, where one-half of the city looks devastated, but the other area looks like a bad wind storm hit and everything's been repaired," Priez says.

Mardi Gras week this year is Feb. 22 through Fat Tuesday, Feb. 28, leading up to Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent.

JUST BECAUSE THE FRENCH QUARTER was spared Katrina's wrath didn't automatically mean Mardi Gras would resume in 2006, Priez says.

"[Having Mardi Gras] was a very sensitive issue, because there were many of our friends and relatives who haven't come home yet," Priez says. "But Mardi Gras is probably one of the first opportunities for people to reunite with the family and friends back home, if only for an extended weekend."

"It's really important for Mardi Gras this year that people take a break from cleaning up their homes, and doing repairs, and come together to see that New Orleans is really starting to move forward," she continues.

The city does not conduct scientific calculations of the Mardi Gras crowds, but unofficial estimates in recent years average as many as 1 million people in and around the French Quarter on Fat Tuesday.

"It's very difficult to estimate how



Even after Katrina, gay revelers are sure to join the fray of Mardi Gras in New Orleans later this month.

many people are going to attend this year," Priez says. "But we've said we would be absolutely thrilled to have one-third of the usual crowd."

This year marks the 150th anniversary of parades being incorporated into Mardi Gras, and organizers have been planning the sesquicentennial festivities for more than two years. They aren't going to let the remnants of Katrina ruin their plans, Priez says.

"While Mardi Gras may be smaller this year, the pageantry is not going to be lacking in any way," says Priez, who notes that the regular Fat Tuesday parade route was altered because of the storm.

"[The new route] is one of the areas of New Orleans that wasn't affected by flooding, so it looks really good," she says. "It's the most popular parade route throughout the year anyway, so it really makes sense."

SOME GAY BAR OWNERS ARE A BIT more optimistic about the size of this year's Mardi Gras crowd, but they are starting to express concerns about where out-of-towners are going to stay.

"Our biggest problem right now is lodging," Grandepre says. "I know a lot of hotels and Bed & Breakfasts are telling these FEMA people and contractors they need to be out by Mardi Gras; they need the spaces."

There were about 24,000 hotel rooms available post-Katrina, but all but about 10,000 of those rooms are occupied by con-

tractors helping with recovery, Priez says.

Lodgings for Mardi Gras are often sold a year or more in advance. Priez says rooms this year are still available — but selling out quickly. She says prospective tourists should contact the New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau for help finding a place to stay.

"Everyday, [hotels] put more rooms into inventory once they've been repaired, so even if someone called their favorite hotel last week and they said they didn't have any rooms, they should still give us a call because the number of rooms is sort of a moving target," she says.

GAY HOSTS EXPECT A HIGH DEMAND for hotel rooms among gay tourists who descend on New Orleans to listen to an all-star line-up of DJs at various clubs and take part in Mardi Gras' signature debauchery at wild annual events with gay visitors in mind.

In December, the city lifted the curfew for residents, so all of the gay bars are again open 24 hours. For Mardi Gras, the Bourbon Pub & Parade bar features the return of DJ Joe Gauthreaux to his hometown, as well as top-rate spinners including Lydia Prim and Max Rodriguez.

At Oz New Orleans, drag queens Lisa Beauman, Coca and Vivica kick off the Mardi Gras festivities, and DJ Kimberly S. as well as Atlanta's own David Knapp are also scheduled to perform sets there.

Two of the most talked about events for gay revelers are the "Dick of Mardi Gras" contest at Café Lefitte in Exile, the wet underwear contest at Good Friends.

### MORE INFO

**Mardi Gras**  
Feb. 22-28  
New Orleans French Quarter  
www.gaymardigras.com

**Bourbon Pub & Parade**  
www.bourbonpub.com

**Oz New Orleans**  
www.ozneworleans.com

**Rawhide, Good Friends and Cafe Lafitte**  
www.woodenterprises.com

**DINING:** This restaurant only smells like gasoline on the outside. **Page 13**

**DISH:** Former Green Beret comes forward and claims he had a man-on-man tryst with a former 'American Idol' star. **Page 15**

**dining** J.A. CHAPMAN

After filling the gas tank of your vehicle, fill up on some outstanding Greek food at Stelio's Deli, which is located inside a gas station.

# Dining on empty

STELIOS DELI IS LOCATED IN A GAS station. No, not a former gas station that's been renovated into a restaurant, but one currently in operation with pumps and a fully stocked mini mart inside.

When Steve's Automotive needed more space, the owner moved across the street to some larger digs. With room in the old location and a woeful lack of Greek delicatessens in the Galleria area, Stelio's Deli was born.

The sandwich shop is located inside the convenience store attached to the service station. You order at a small counter in the back and can watch the cooks prepare your food while you wait.

The menu is extensive, offering everything from breakfast to hamburgers to Greek specialties. It seems fairly straightforward, but this is a new venture and not everything is available. In addition, it's not offered in the same format as the menu and a few deli favorites are not yet offered.

But don't worry about the menu confusion. What counts is the food and it's outstanding.

The gyros (\$4.95 sandwich/\$8.50 plate) are exceptional. Thin sliced, spicy, tender gyro meat is served with a thick, soft and warm pita. Add some lettuce and tomato slices and a bit of their tangy, creamy tzatziki sauce and it feels like you've hit the Greek jackpot.

The same goes for the excellent chicken kabobs (\$4.95 sandwich/\$8.50 plate). Chunks of marinated white meat chicken on skewers alternate with onion and bell pepper. First it's cooked on a grill over flames and then finished on the griddle. The meat is tender, with a subtle hint of oregano and garlic.

On a recent visit, off-the-menu beef kabobs were made up, sitting in the cooler ready to be cooked. After some confusion regarding what exactly came on the kabob plate, I asked to substitute one chicken kabob for beef. It's no problem to substitute, but not something I'd do again. The beef was overcooked and a little tough.

THE GYROS AND KABOBS COME WITH French fries, thick cut and cooked fresh to order. Sprinkled with a little flavored salt, they're outstanding. Somehow they even manage to avoid the dreaded sogginess that plagues lesser fries after a trip home.

The robust and meaty moussaka (\$9.25) is a fine version of this classic Greek dish. The eggplant retains its skin, giving it a chunky texture. A hint of allspice adds sweetness and the mashed potato topping is light but substantial. It's perhaps a tad salty, but the



Stelio's Deli offers Greek favorites in a gas station.

spicy tomato sauce on top makes up for any shortcomings.

The moussaka is served with Greek potatoes roasted in olive oil with a hint of lemon and topped with plenty of oregano. Tender inside and slightly crisp outside, they're a delight.

Be sure to save a little room for dessert. The flaky baklava (\$2.75) is full of walnuts and cinnamon. The slices are generous and it's the perfect ending to a Greek meal.

Stelio's Deli is new and it shows. The young staff is unfailingly friendly and helpful, but they can't always answer questions or prepare a plate properly. Sometimes it works out in your favor, like the time they mistakenly added a stuffed grape leaf to my salad—it's one of the best I've ever tasted. But often it's just confusing, like not knowing the price of a dish or what's included with it.

The dine-in options are also limited, with three tables for two and a counter with five stools. Sitting in the mini mart makes for interesting people watching though, as customers wander in and out, many of them discovering the deli for the first time.

And like most first time visitors, they're impressed when they take that first bite. The food at Stelio's Deli is outstanding and the people are friendly.

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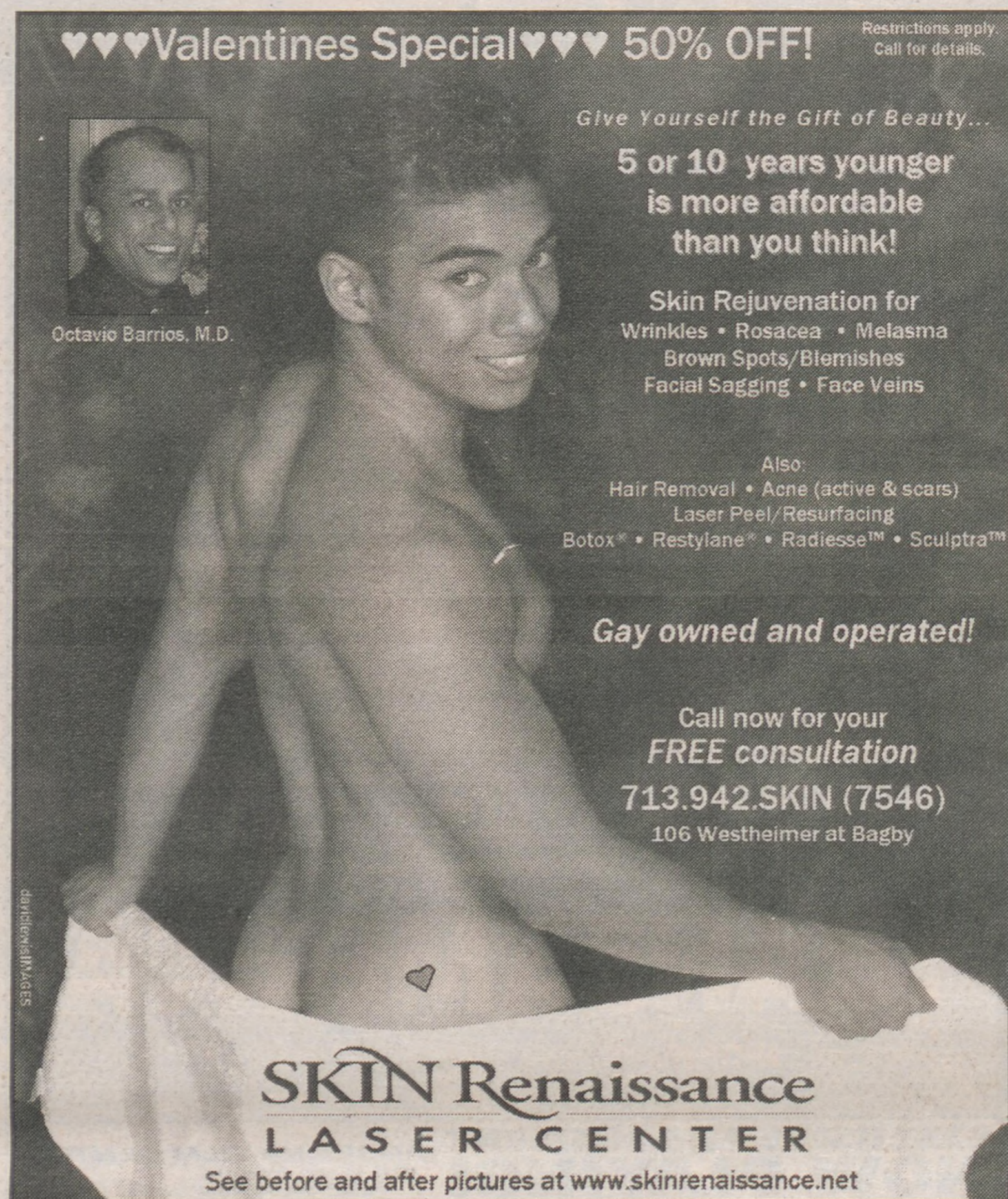
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**film GREG MARZULLO**

Imagination is all that's lacking in the surprisingly touching and charming lesbian romantic comedy 'Imagine Me & You.'

# Rose full of thorns

THE CONVENTIONS OF THE ROMANTIC comedy genre infuse writer-director Ol Parker's "Imagine Me & You" with sweet clichés, but as with all overworked romances, it gets a bit cloying before the end.

The film is the English lesbian comedy answer to "Brokeback Mountain," a film about everyday Janes, one of whom gets married to a man at the film's start. Rachel (Piper Perabo) is marrying her best friend, Heck (Matthew Goode), but after seeing her florist, Luce (Lena Heady), on the way down the aisle, the bride is blushing with the bloom of love-at-first-sight.

The rest of the film follows a fairly standard formula. Rachel becomes increasingly tortured as she recognizes her feelings for Luce as love and passion. The florist tries to stay away from wrecking Rachel's coupled existence, but as with all pie-in-the-sky schmaltz, love will win in the end.



Lena Headey (left) and Piper Perabo star in 'Imagine Me & You,' a new lesbian film full of charm and pat plot turns. (Photo by Bill Kaye)

SOMETIMES PARKER SEEMS consciously to work romantic ideals in a new way to highlight the magical and fresh love the two women experience.

Rachel's younger sister is giving a school presentation on the galaxy, and the little girl invites Luce, whom she befriended at the wedding. Rachel and Luce sit in the room, and stars and comets are hanging from the ceiling, casting sparkling reflections on the women's faces. They are truly falling in love under the stars, but with a kitschy twist.

When the two soon-to-be-lovers begin to make out, they're rolling around on a bed of roses in Luce's shop. However, that quickly comes to an end given the precarious nature of thorns, and this also provides a quirky and amusing touch to overwrought scenes of courtship.

The performances are what make this movie work. Both Perabo and Headey remain open and honest in their acting, even in the midst of a groan-provoking finale.

The oddly beautiful Perabo (of "Coyote Ugly" infamy) in particular delivers an excellent, yet understated, moment when she slips into bed with her fast-asleep husband after having had a love-filled evening with Luce. The look in the actress' eyes tells 100 stories, and you can see the character's strange emotional mix of exhilaration and regret.

One of the nice features of the film is that the male characters, with the exception of the stereotypical best man, are not mired in insipid machismo. Goode's performance as Heck is heartbreaking, especially when he realizes that he has to let Rachel go. You come away wishing all men were as open and true (and handsome).

Rachel's father (Anthony Head, formerly of TV's "Buffy the Vampire Slayer"), a standard distant dad for most of the story, delivers one of the most moving scenes in the film when he urges his daughter to chase her new paramour.

THE UNFORTUNATE SNAG IS WHEN the conventions cross the line into triteness. Rachel and Luce have happenstance meetings one too many times. And the ending, without spoiling it, is so tired and far-fetched that it almost entirely destroys all the goodwill created by wit of the rest of the scenes. The mere inclusion of same-sex couples in the formula is not enough anymore to make it appear novel.

The two most dramatic scenes between Rachel and Luce are shockingly out-of-step with the rest of the movie's emotional clarity. As Rachel decides to call it off with Luce, the script plays shallowly and seems to have been given a cursory treatment. It's almost as if Parker and his production team were unwilling to create fully three-dimensional characters when it really counted.

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FILM CLIPS

**dish**

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

# Clay unwrapped

More Aiken news, soldiers face porn charges and smut directors go legit

Back in Dish's New Year's prediction, she channeled the spirit of Fifi, Drag Queen of Heaven, who said that **CLAY AIKEN** would finally come out of the closet and the Washington Blade would never write about him again. Well, dear readers, Fifi's predictions might just be coming true.

A supposed former hot trick of Aiken's decided to cough up some information about their man-on-man tryst, according to the New York Post's Page Six, the New York Daily News and the ever-reliable National Enquirer. Dish's momma said two wrongs don't make a right, but maybe three tabloids make a reliable source.

John Paulus, a hunky former Green Beret, claims to have met Aiken online.

"I have several personal ads on gay [male] websites," Paulus told the Enquirer. "Clay later told me he saw my pictures on a couple and decided to e-mail me. On Dec. 16, using the screen name of 'valleypretty-boy,' Clay sent me his first message."

Dish has never understood the fascination with the pasty-faced, swizzle-stick thin Aiken, and his online haughtiness just amps up her annoyance.

"He told me that he was single again, having broken up with his boyfriend about five months ago," said Paulus. Could this be the hair stylist that Aiken was rumored to have held hands with on an airplane trip this past fall?

Paulus claims they met in a hotel and performed their own 90-minute version of "Bareback Mountain," including unprotected anal intercourse, as Dish's doctor would call it.

Since Paulus revealed his identity, he's been receiving death threats from rabid Aiken fans who call themselves "Claymates" and want to protect their idol's good name. Perhaps they should be offering Aiken some condom demonstrations instead.



Clay Aiken supposedly likes his tricks beefy and without latex, according to a former Green Beret boy-toy turned tattletale. (Photo by Michael Dwyer/AP)

## No, sir!

In a fantasy come true, a group of soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division, based at Fort Bragg in North Carolina, really have been performing for the gay porn camera and the Army is currently investigating members' on-screen conduct as unbecoming, according to the Associated Press.

A group of soldiers has been separated out from the rest of their units during the inquiry to insure the investigated officers' safety. Dish is hoping the soldiers in question are able to release some of that stressful anxiety by rehearsing for upcoming shoots.

Although the AP never actually names the site where the guys were saluting, Fleshbot.com, a snarky website trafficking in porn-related news, points its sticky finger at ActiveDuty.com. TV news station WRAL also alludes to the site as the drop off point for military studs looking to supplement that government check.

The site advertises real military men who are 100 percent novices at taking orders from superiors.

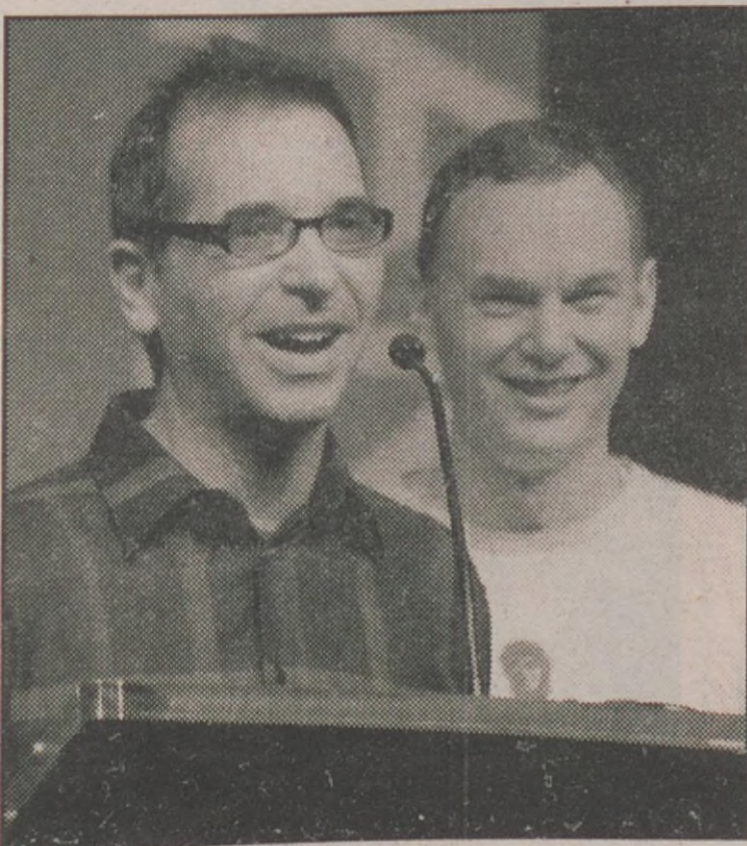
## Making the grade

Film festivals and awards are going berserk over queer cinema.

The top film at the Sundance Film Festival was "Quinceañera," a movie about a young Hispanic girl in Los Angeles who is kicked out of her house after she becomes pregnant. She then goes to live with her great grand-uncle and her gay cousin.

Gay directors **WASH WESTMORELAND**, who directed the pornos "The Hole" and "Naked Highway" under the name Wash West, and his partner **RICHARD GLATZER**, who directed the execrable "The Fluffer," created "Quinceañera." The film won the best drama award from the juries and the run-of-the-mill audiences. This is the first time in Sundance history that the same film has won both, according to Reuters.

Dish takes her hat off to Mr. West. She can't wait until she sees smut advertised as "from the Sundance award-winning director of..." sticker on it.



Richard Glatzer (left) and Wash Westmoreland

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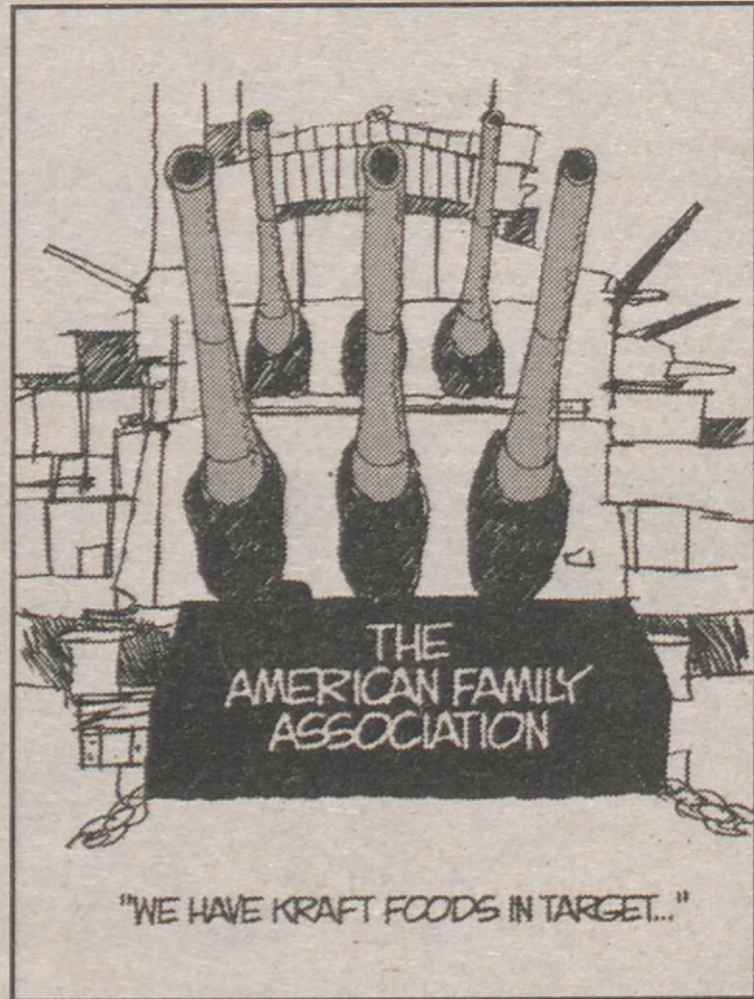
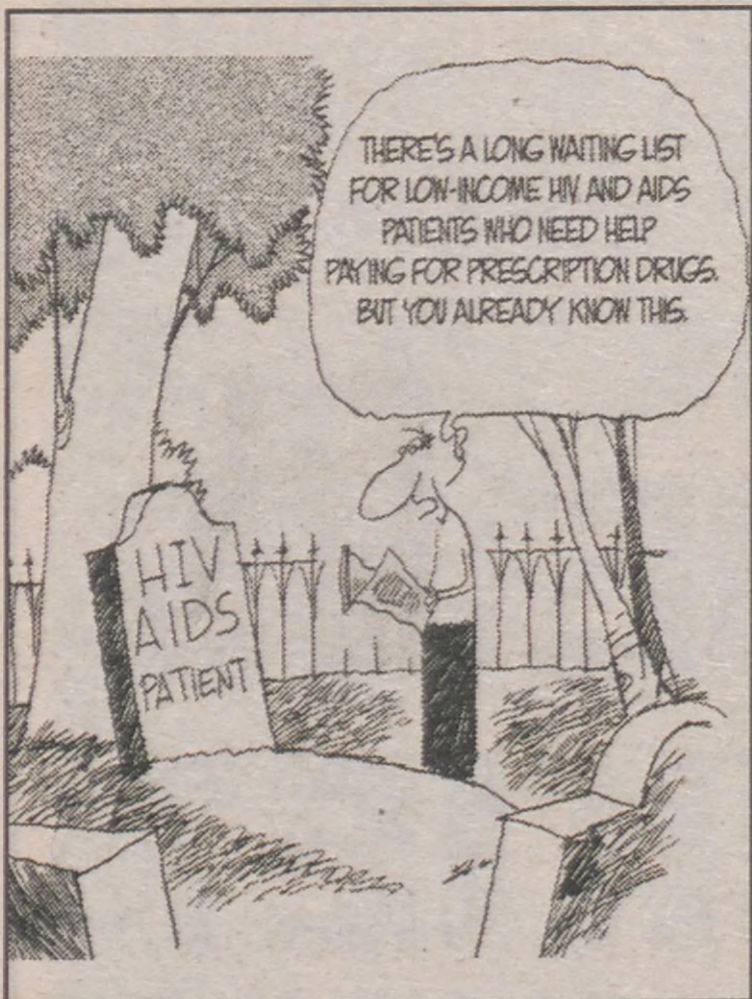
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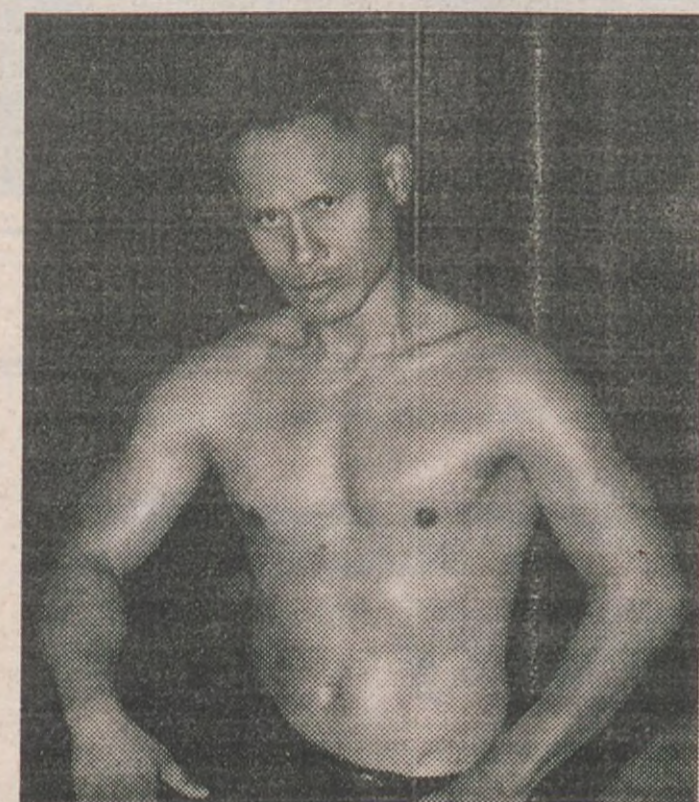
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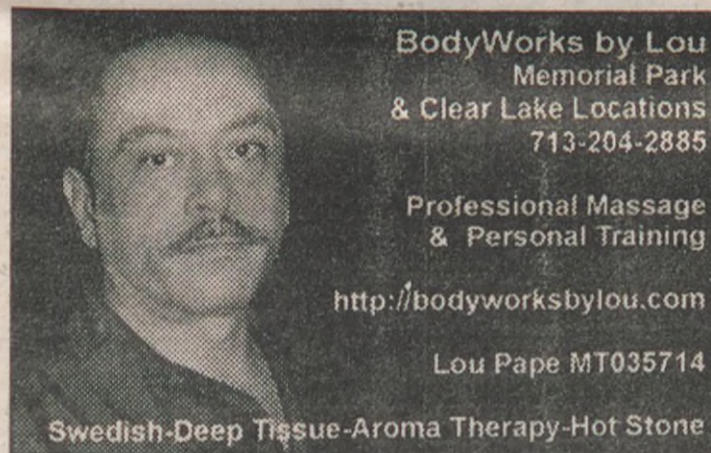


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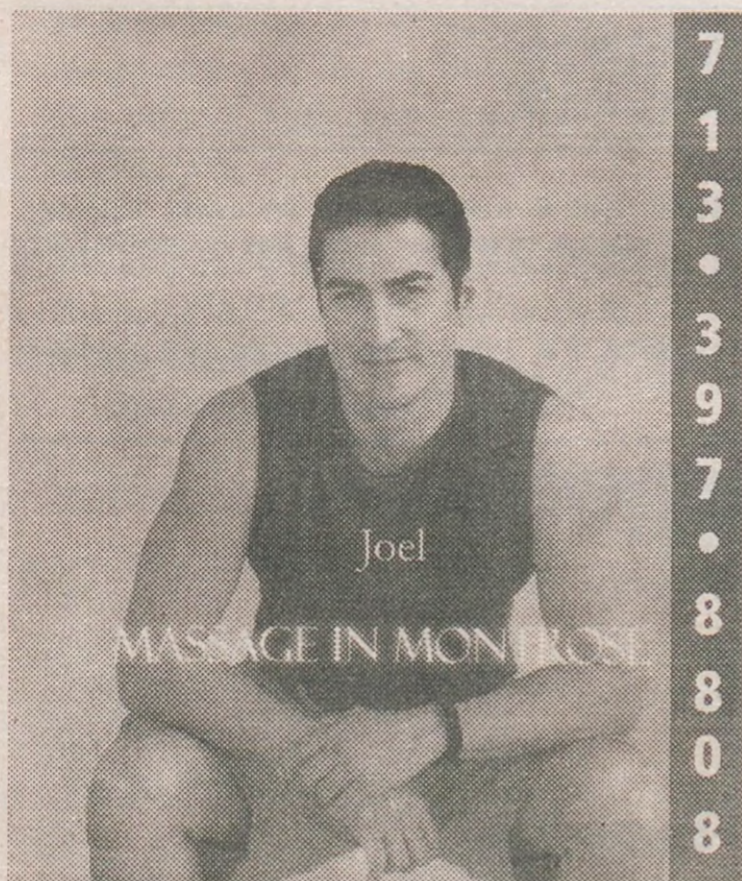


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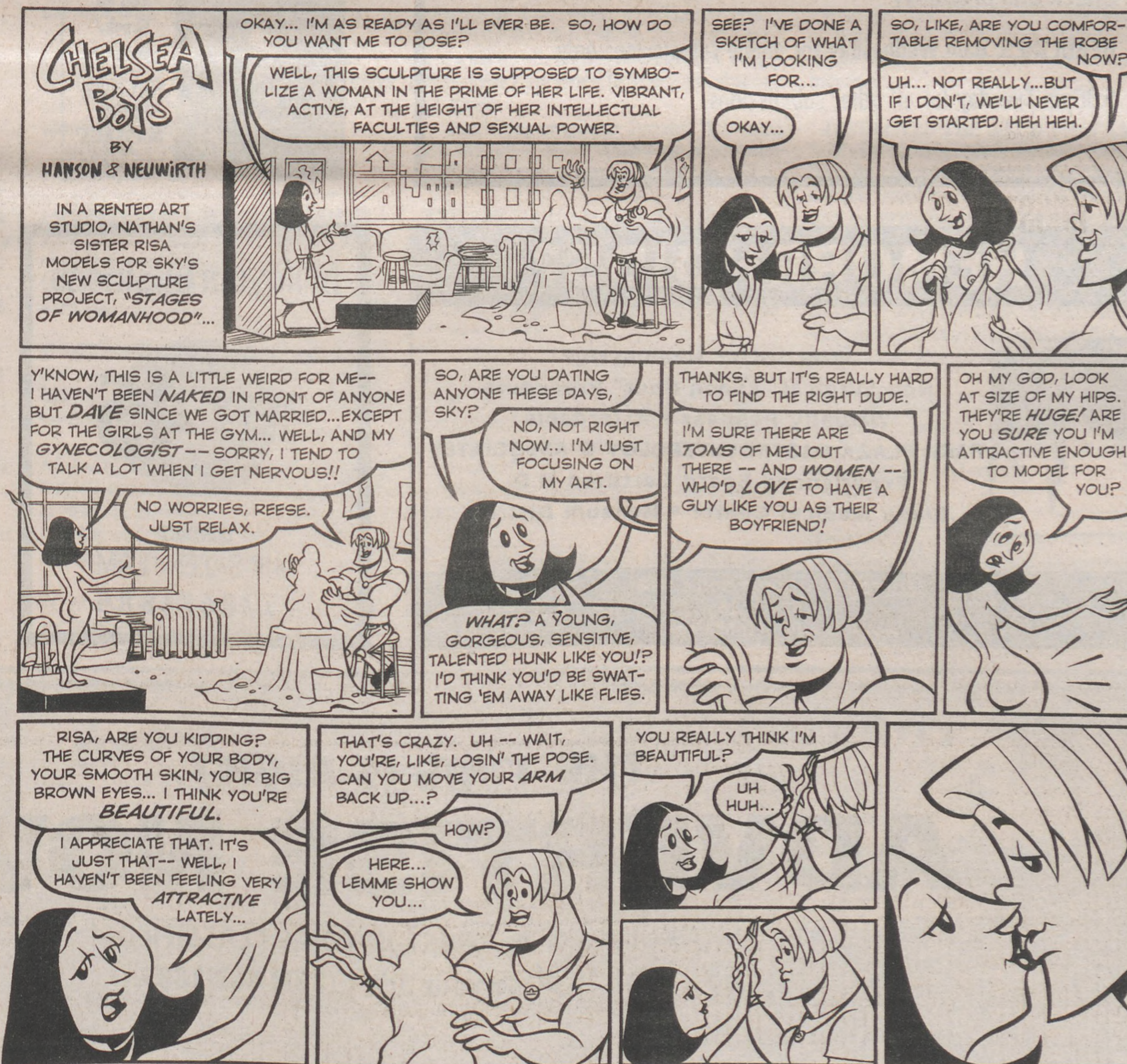
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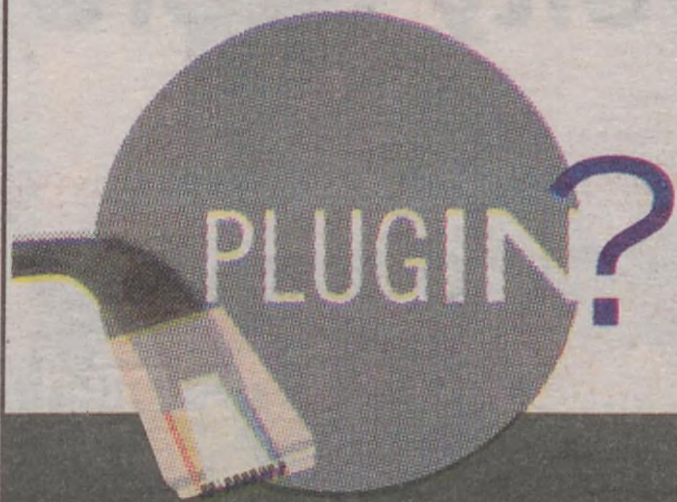


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