



Fantasy in B&W
The giant black and white photos by Jay Rusovich are to say the least, provocative.
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FEBRUARY 25, 2005

FOCUS ON FOCUS: An infiltrator's view. Page 3



VICTORY BRUNCH: Raising election bucks. Page 4



MAKING HISTORY: Utah has an openly gay senator. Page 6



Secret tapes shed light on Bush and gays

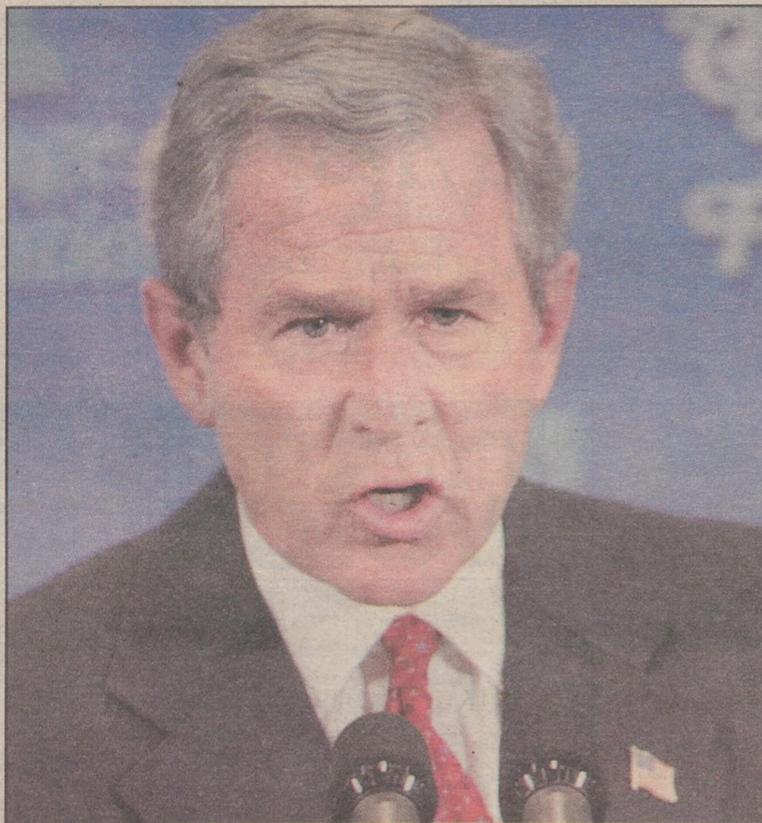
Friend who recorded calls was fired from White House in 1990

By JOE CREA

The man who secretly taped phone conversations with President Bush in 1998 was fired from the George H.W. Bush administration in 1990 because he objected to gay activists participating in two White House bill signings, according to media reports from the time.

Doug Wead, a former special assistant to the first President Bush, and the man who secretly recorded private conversations with then Gov. George W. Bush in 1998, was reportedly fired after objecting to the presence of gay leaders at two presidential bill signing ceremonies: the Hate Crimes Statistics Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The Washington Times and the Washington Blade both reported the story back in 1990. The Washington Times reported on its front page that Wead worked as a liaison to anti-abortion and other "conservative movement" groups and was dis-



Candidate George W. Bush told a friend in secretly recorded private conversations in 1998 that he expected social conservatives wanted him to 'kick gays,' but that he would not do that. (File photo by AP)

missed for publicly criticizing the inclusion of the gay leaders.

The Blade later reported that a White House spokesperson confirmed that Wead was fired but would not give a reason for the move.

Wead, who this week claimed that he was not fired, said he secretly recorded his conversations with Bush because he viewed

Please see **BUSH TAPES** on Page 7



Making sure "Les Miserables" makes it to the stage at the Hobby Center is the task of HSPVA graduate Scott Luken.

Back home in Houston with "Les Miserables"

Realizing that he wasn't cut out to be an actor was a good thing for HSPVA grad Scott Luken

By JOHNNY HOOKS

Growing up talented, inspired and gay in Bryan, Texas—home of Texas A&M University—there wouldn't seem to be an abundance of outlets to allow that creativity to bloom.

Steve Luken, assistant company manager for "Les Miserables," now playing at Houston's Hobby Center through March 6, knows this better than anyone. He is that talented, creative young gay man who grew up in Bryan.

"I was in all the local church productions and in little the-

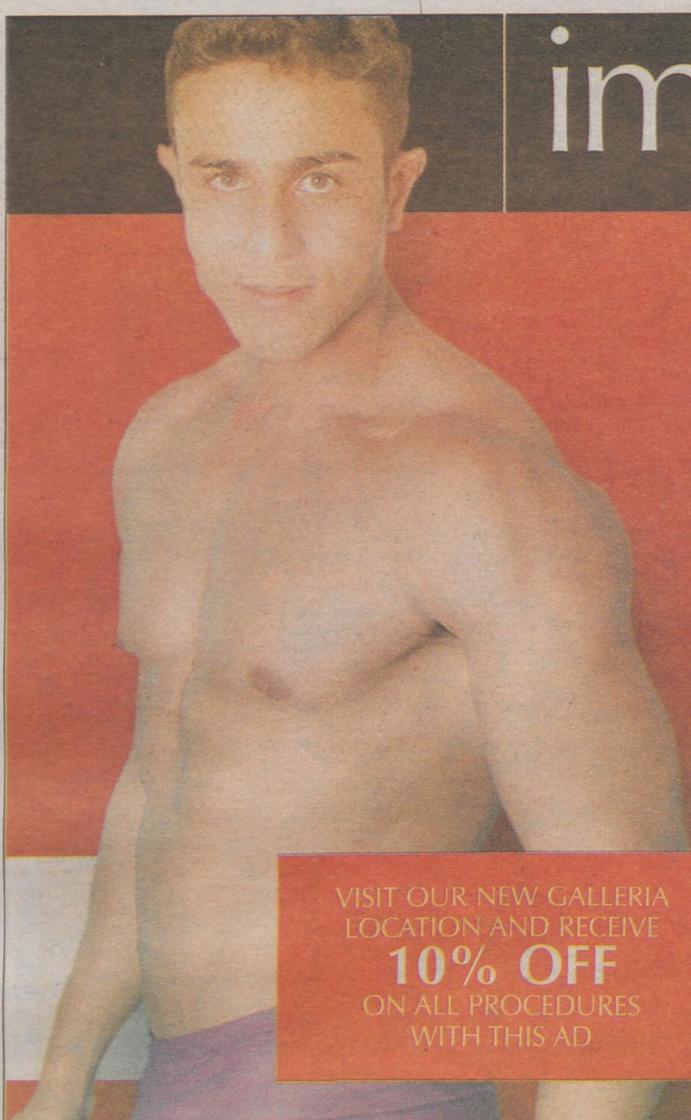
Please see **ACTING** on Page 19



local life
Rob Arcos is rolling out the red carpet for Houston's Oscar night.
PAGE 8

dish
The first transgendered doll, out next week, will look a lot like, you guessed it, Ru Paul.
PAGE 17





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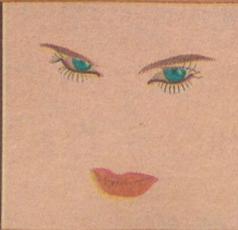
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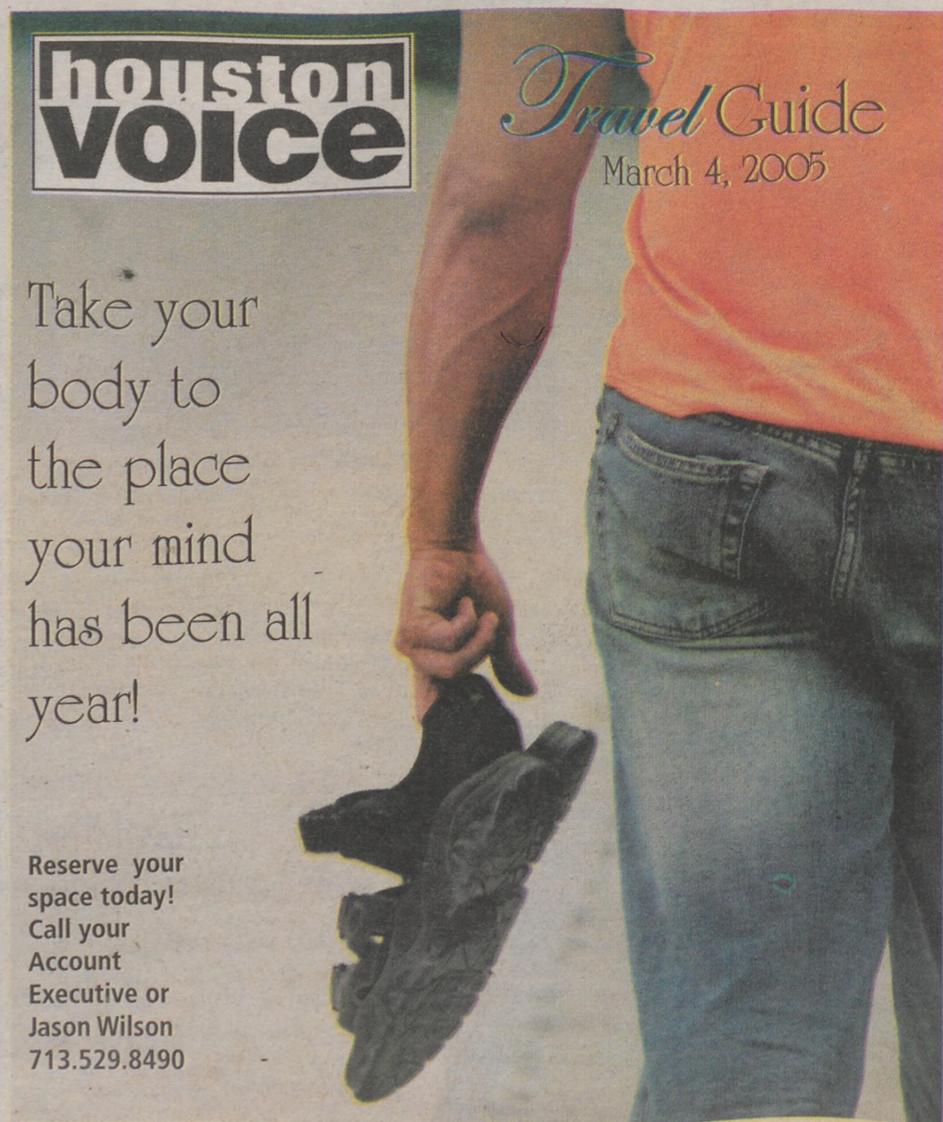
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houston news

Response to ex-gay conference crossed all lines

From a protest with placards to infiltrators and an alternative conference, Houston was prepared to respond to ex-gay event.

By BINNIE FISHER

Glancing around the cavernous sanctuary at Grace Community Church on Feb. 19, where Focus on the Family conducted its Love Won Out ex-gay conference, Brenda Mendiola found herself studying the faces around her.

"Some people seemed to be really enthusiastic," she said. "Others seemed to be questioning or a little fearful."

She was there on a mission. She and a number of other "infiltrators" were there to hear what Focus on the Family had to say and to quietly offer an alternative view whenever possible.

When she found her opportunity during a break, she overheard a woman question whether she should purchase a book on transsexuals for her daughter who had recently come out as a lesbian.

Mendiola interjected that the book would not be appropriate, since the woman's daughter was a lesbian and not a transsexual. The woman wanted to know, "What's a transsexual?"

As Mendiola did her best to explain, the woman began to back away. She suddenly sensed that Mendiola was one of them, an infiltrator.

"It was hard to tell who the infiltrators were," Mendiola said.

She had tried her best to attend the conference with an open mind, but almost a week later, Mendiola chokes up when she relates some aspects of the experience.

Still, she came away with the impression that although the group put on a well organized conference, "They took every argument I've ever heard and turned it around."

To one presenter's statement that people choose what to believe and that it is hard to change beliefs, Mendiola said, "That cuts both ways."

Though several presenters who spoke were deemed experts by Focus on the Family, she said, it was the personal testimonies that seemed to have the greatest impact on conference attendees.

Although Focus on the Family claimed 800-900 people attended the conference, Mendiola said she was careful to take a head count. She counted between 500 and 600.

Reaching out to those who are questioning

In the end, she came away with the perception that, "We need to do a better job of



Activist Ray Hill (center) thanked those who demonstrated against Focus on the Family's Love Won Out Conference. (Photo by Dalton DeHart)

reaching out to the questioning folks rather than trying to convince the leaders of this group to change their views."

She said she attended because, "You can't fight the other side if you don't know what the other side is saying."

An alternative conference on the same day in another part of Houston offered another view on homosexuality and reparative therapy.

Jerry Simoneaux said the Foundation for Marriage Equality called its conference "Love Won. We're Out!"

Presenters included psychologist Jeffrey Vannice, who talked about the dangers of reparative therapy like that offered by Exodus, an organization aligned with Focus on the Family.

"He speaks from such a sense of authority," Simoneaux said.

Author Tom Allen talked about his research into ex-gay programs.

If there was a theme to the conference, Simoneaux said, it was that while Focus on the Family "believes it is what we do, we know it is what we are."

Although the alternative conference was organized in a short period of time, Simoneaux said, it was attended by 62 people.

He said his only regret is that the media chose to cover the Focus on the Family Conference and the protest that took place nearby rather than report on the alternative information presented.

Simoneaux said one reporter told him that his station would cover the protest because it was "sexy."

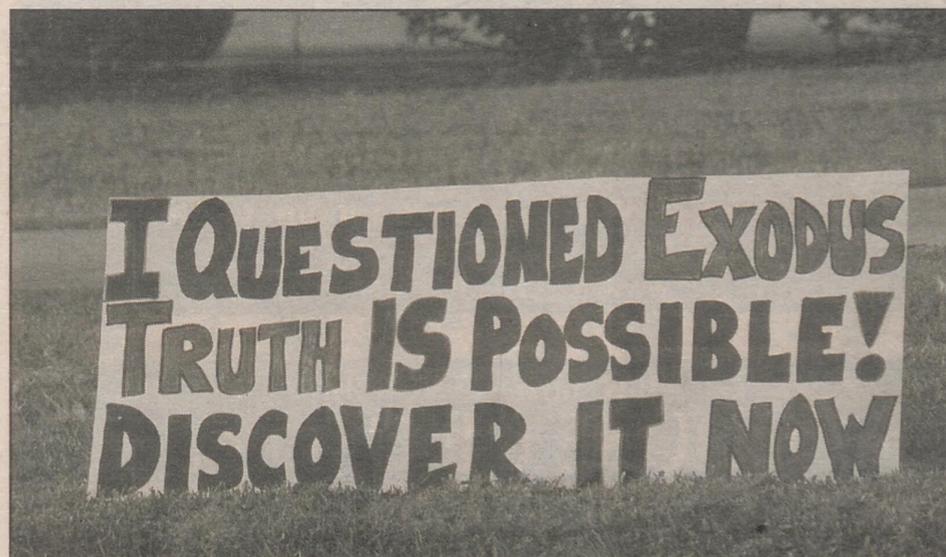
Ray Hill, one of the organizers of the protest, said he understands why the media chose to cover the demonstration, and he feels demonstrators did an effective job of countering the message presented by Focus on the Family.

"We were not an angry crowd," he said. "It was a piece of cake. The cops were wonderful."

Hill said as about 150 protestors gathered around 7 a.m., he watched as a young



Signs said it all as demonstrators protested Focus on the Family's ex-gay conference in Houston. (Photo by Dalton DeHart)



Protestors near the church where Focus on the Family conducted its Love Won Out conference used signs to make their views known. (Photo by Dalton DeHart)

man studied the group from a gas station across the street. At one point, the young man crossed the street.

The next he saw, Hill said, the young man had picked up a placard and joined the protest.

"It took him a while to summon up the courage," Hill said.

By 8:45 a.m., Hill said, the demonstrators began to disband.

During the time the protestors stood

across Interstate 45 from the conference, Hill said, he heard only one negative comment.

"We got more support from motorists who honked and waved," he said.

He said the crowd crossed all ethnic lines and included "everybody from HATCHers to senior Universalists." There was even a contingent of communists who brought along a life-size representation of Sponge Bob Square Pants.

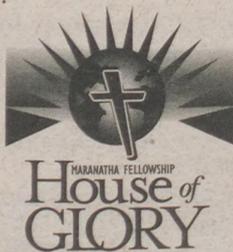
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**local news**

Houston City Council candidate Sue Lovell is among 17 candidates endorsed nationwide by the Victory Fund. (Photo by Dalton DeHart)

A 'victory' brunch for gay and lesbian candidates

Idaho State Rep. Nicole LeFavour and Portland, Ore. City Council Member Sam Adams, both of whom defied anti-gay ballot amendments in their states to win election in November 2004, will be in Houston March 13 for a Victory Fund brunch. The champagne brunch at noon at the Warwick Hotel, 5701 Main, is a fund-raiser for the Victory Fund, an organization that nationwide helped 41 gay and lesbian candidates win election in 2004. Since it was founded in 1991, the Victory Fund has generated more than \$3.5 million to identify, train and elect openly gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered candidates to public office. So far in 2005, the Victory Fund has endorsed 17 candidates, including Sue Lovell, a candidate for Houston City Council.

Renovated digs for Omega House

Bering Omega Community Services and the American Society of Interior Designers/Texas Gulf Coast Chapter (ASID) have planned a house party to celebrate the renovation and reopening of Omega House, Houston's only residential hospice program specifically for people with HIV/AIDS. The party is from 4-6 p.m. today at Omega House, 602 Branard. Houston City Controller Annise Parker and Council Member Ada Edwards will participate in the official ribbon cutting. Also participating will be Eleanor Asbury, the daughter of Omega House founder Eleanor Munger. Renovation on the structure was done by members of ASID and interior design students and instructors from the Art Institute of Houston.

**AIDS Walk Houston
is set for March 13**

The 16th Annual AIDS Walk Houston gets underway with registration at 8 a.m. March 13 in Sam Houston Park. The 3.5-mile walk benefits AIDS Foundation Houston and several additional AIDS/HIV service organizations. The money raised benefits more than 100,000 Houstonians each year. www.aidswalkhouston.org.

**New board members for
Houston Black Tie Dinner**

The Houston Black Tie Dinner, Inc. has appointed six new board members including Nelda Billescas, Scott Nettles, Ivan Mayers, Robert Boyce, John Trevino and Alden Clark. This year's event, Nov. 12 at JW Marriott, is co-chaired by Richard Hill and Sydnee White. The annual event had its beginnings in 1988 when Jay Hollyfield organized a fund-raising dinner. The Black Tie organization was incorporated in 1993 as a non-profit organization.

**A new plan for the Houston
Gay & Lesbian Political Caucus**

Partially in response to the results of the November 2004 election, leaders of the Houston Gay & Lesbian Political Caucus (PAC) recently met to plan for the city's political future. Several new committees were formed to actively pursue the goals of the caucus in 2005. "The HGLPC is at a crossroads in terms of responding to the political events of the last year," said HGLPC President Maria Gonzalez. "The organization is taking action by creating a strategic plan that has at its core a long-term infrastructure that will move the organization forward. We are excited about the new infrastructure because it gives individuals a huge opportunity to get involved in GLBT politics at the local level." Information for anyone interested in becoming involved with the caucus is available at 713-521-1000 or info@hglpc.org. The group meets the first Wednesday of every month at 7 p.m. at 3400 Montrose, Suite 207.

**Conference on gay future
is set for June 18**

A conference on the future of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Houston has been scheduled for June 18. Phyllis Randolph Frye, one of the conference organizers, said several interest groups have organized to draft resolutions in many areas including religion, legal issues, transgender issues, sports issues, historical issues and others. Those resolutions will be included in a conference workbook that must be drafted 60 days prior to the event, she said. For more information on the conference, contact Frye at pfrye@aol.com. An earlier conference resulted in the establishment of many Montrose institutions, including the Montrose Counseling Center, Montrose Clinic and the Q-Patrol.

From staff and wire reports


national news

Ill. court denies trans man custody of his child

CHICAGO — In spite of a 12-year-old boy's request to live with his father, the Illinois Court of Appeals last week refused to grant a transgendered man custody of his son, media outlets reported. The mother was given custody by the three-judge panel after the court decided that Sterling Simmons, 46, legally was not male when he married Jennifer Simmons, news reports indicate. Therefore, since the state does not recognize same-sex unions, the court ruled the marriage invalid, negating any right Sterling Simmons would have for custody, media outlets reported. "This is a terrible decision," Shannon Minter, legal director for the National Center for Lesbian Rights, told reporters. Minter also has helped the father's attorney, news reports indicate. "The decision does not have a single sentence addressing the best interest of the child." The Sterlings married 15 years ago, and the boy was conceived by Jennifer Simmons via artificial insemination, according to media reports. Sterling Simmons has lived as a male his entire adult life and undergone some sex-reassignment operations, news outlets reported.



Shannon Minter, legal director for the National Center for Lesbian Rights, said the decision to deny a transgendered man custody of his son is 'terrible.'

Judge urges parties to settle dispute

GREENSBORO, N.C. (AP) — A federal judge last week urged attorneys for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a Christian fraternity to settle a dispute over whether the group should be denied campus recognition for refusing to accept nonbelievers and gays. After a two-hour hearing, U.S. District Court Judge Frank W. Bullock Jr. urged lawyers to come to him later this month with a consent decree settling the case. "You don't seem to be so far apart," he said. Bullock gave the attorneys until Feb. 28 to reach a settlement. If they cannot reach one, he told them, he would issue a ruling on the fraternity's request for an injunction granting them official recognition pending a full trial in the case. Lawyers for the fraternity, Alpha Iota Omega — which has three members on the Chapel Hill campus — want the school ordered to restore the group's official status, which was revoked because the school said the group refused to adopt the university's nondiscrimination policy. In turn, attorneys for the university wanted the case dismissed.

Utah wants non-gay school books

SPANISH FORK, Utah (AP) — Nebo School District officials want to replace their 7-year-old textbooks for psychology classes in high schools, but they haven't found any that don't discuss homosexuality. State law does not allow the advocacy of homosexuality to be taught, and the Nebo district wants no discussion of it at all. "I don't think Nebo's position is that unusual, but it's becoming more difficult to do both things: teach the subject and have up-to-date things," said Priscilla Leek, the psychology teacher from Springville High School who brought the matter to the attention of district officials. Leek is a member of the healthy lifestyles committee that reviews and recommends new textbooks. District curriculum officials also realized the text for the AP psychology class — the book essentially required for a student to pass the AP test and earn college credit — not only addresses homosexuality, but takes an in-depth look at it.

Ind. couples won't appeal marriage ban

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Three gay couples who challenged Indiana's ban on same-sex marriage will not ask the state Supreme Court to review the ruling that upheld the law, instead shifting their focus to defeating a constitutional amendment against the unions, they said. The Indiana Court of Appeals last month rejected the challenge, saying Indiana has an interest in seeing that children are raised in stable environments and suggesting traditional marriage is the best way to do so. The appeals court upheld a ruling by a Marion County judge, who dismissed the lawsuit on the grounds that state law clearly defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman. "Even though we do not agree with the decision ... we have decided not to appeal," Dawn Egler told the Indianapolis Star.

Wash. couple battles over custody

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Whether or not Mian Carvin will be able to continue recent brief visits with the 9-year-old girl she views as her daughter remains uncertain as Carvin battles her ex-partner in court, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer Reporter reported. Attorneys for Page Britain, with whom Carvin was in a lesbian relationship for years, contend that since Britain is the biological mother of the girl, it is her decision alone whether or not Carvin will be part of the youngster's life, the newspaper reported. Both sides presented arguments last week to the state Supreme Court, according to the Reporter. Britain conceived the girl via artificial insemination when she and Carvin had been together about six years, and Carvin subsequently stayed home to care for the baby while Britain worked to support the trio, the newspaper reported. The women split up when the girl was 5, and a year later, Britain refused to let Carvin see the youngster anymore, prompting Carvin to sue for parental rights, according to the Reporter.

From staff and wire reports

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national news

Gay Utah man takes state Senate seat

McCoy survives
GOP challenges

By STEVE KOVAL

SALT LAKE CITY — What do you do for an encore after marrying your same-sex partner before a national audience in 2000 on "Politically Incorrect," Bill Maher's late-night talk-show?

If you're attorney Scott McCoy, 34, you follow it up five years later with another first: becoming Utah's first openly gay state senator.

McCoy made national headlines two weeks ago when he was appointed by Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman to fill a seat vacated due to illness by a gay-friendly incumbent. In a close race against his predecessor's husband, McCoy was elected by the delegates in his Senate district. McCoy is now one of the eight Democrats serving in the 29-member state Senate.

In 2004, McCoy lobbied many of the same legislators with whom he is now serving when he led the Don't Amend Alliance, the project that unsuccessfully fought Utah's proposed Amendment 3 barring gay marriage. McCoy still serves as vice-chair of Equality Utah, the state's gay advocacy organization.

The first week of February was a whirlwind for McCoy. On Feb. 2, the vacancy

was announced. After learning that several candidates were running for the seat, McCoy said he thought, "Why in the hell shouldn't I throw my hat in the ring and make it a contest?"

On Feb. 4, after a good afternoon workout at the gym he made his decision. "This shows you why endorphins are a dangerous thing," McCoy said.

That evening he began his campaign. The next day he was elected. Two days later he was sworn in by the governor.

GOP challenge falls flat

But Republicans and old political opponents from the constitutional amendment battle immediately began raising questions about whether McCoy met the Utah Constitution's residency requirement that legislators live in the state for three years prior to the deadline for filing for office.

Although McCoy moved to Utah more than three years prior to filing, the Constitution does not lay out a procedure for midterm appointments. His opponents argued he was required to live in Utah for three years prior to the time his predecessor filed for office in March 2002, a requirement he would not have met.

Since the issue was not raised until after his being seated, the only remedy available to his opponents would have been to move for McCoy's expulsion.

Utah Senate Minority Leader Mike

Dmitrich attributed the debate to McCoy's gay visibility.

"It was all over Amendment 3," Dmitrich said.

Sensing a public relations debacle if they attempted to expel McCoy, the Senate GOP caucus backed away from the idea within days of it being raised.

The reaction from Utah gays to McCoy's appointment has been predictably positive.

"Scott has proven himself to be a tireless, passionate and articulate advocate for social justice and civil rights," said Equality Utah Executive Director Michael Mitchell.

McCoy and his partner, Mark Barr, moved to Utah in 2001 when McCoy was chosen to clerk for a Utah Supreme Court Justice. Prior to moving to Utah, McCoy and Barr lived in New York City where McCoy attended the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law at Yeshiva University and Barr worked for Showtime.

While the two were living in New York, "Politically Incorrect" was looking for a gay couple to marry on television in February 2000, and McCoy and Barr answered the call.

The witnesses to the Universalist Unitarian wedding ceremony and guests on the show were an unlikely bunch: Maher, Sheldon, Bruce Vilanch, gay writer, and former "Hollywood Squares" celebrity; and Bill Horn, the anti-gay crusader



Scott McCoy married his partner on a television show with gay rights opponent Lou Sheldon sitting only a couple of feet from him. McCoy was appointed to the Utah state Senate two weeks ago. (Photo by Steve Koval)

best known for his "Gay Agenda" videos.

Prior to moving to New York, McCoy lived in Washington, D.C., from 1992-1998 where he served as a staff member on the House Committee on Agriculture and worked for Rep. Tom Latham (R-Iowa).

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national news

Gay Republicans encouraged by Bush tapes

BUSH TAPS, continued from Page 1

him as a "historical figure," according to the New York Times.

Wead, who just published a book on presidential childhoods, stands to benefit from the publicity surrounding his actions, but has denied that was the motive for releasing the tapes.

Wead did not respond to Blade inquiries.

Worried about conservatives

Excerpts from the tapes, made public in last Sunday's New York Times, indicate that Bush was concerned in 1998 that the social conservative base of the Republican Party would object to his unwillingness to condemn homosexuality during his campaign.

According to the tapes, Bush sensed that James Robison, a Texas evangelical minister, wanted Bush "to attack homosexuals."

In response to Robison's request, Bush said, "I'm not going to kick gays, because I'm a sinner. How can I differentiate sin?"

In the tapes, the future president expressed his now-familiar opposition to same-sex marriage.

"Gay marriage, I am against that. Special rights, I am against that," Bush said. He also expressed frustration over one conservative supporter's public declaration that Bush would not hire gay people.

"No, what I said was, I wouldn't fire gays," Bush said on the tapes.

The future president also said it hurt the Republican Party when the GOP bashed gays.

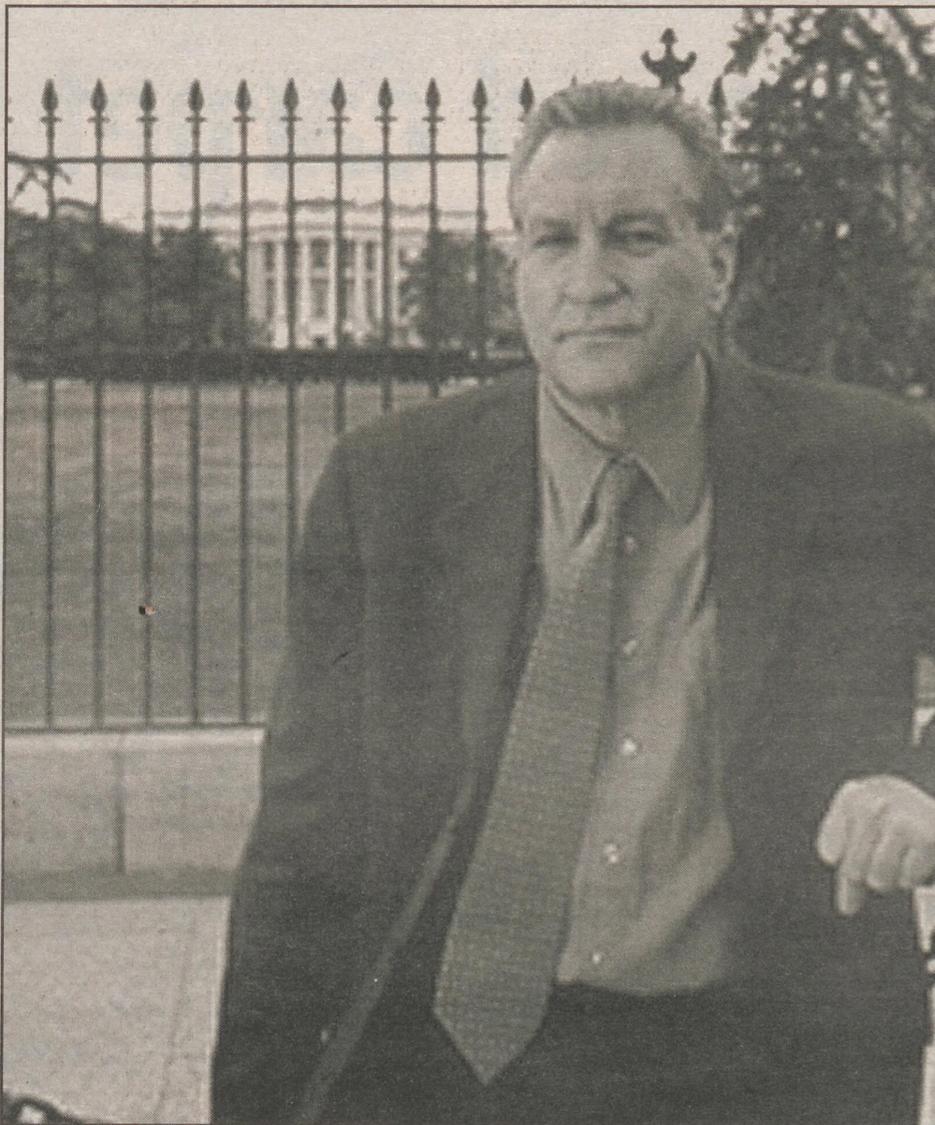
David Greer, a Bush appointee to the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS who was a part of the "Austin 12," a group of 12 gay Republicans who met with Bush in Texas during the 2000 presidential campaign, said he thought it was poignant that Bush would defend gays in a conversation with Wead, a man who had staked out anti-gay positions.

"Bush's remarks [to Wead] were sort of a smaller Sister Souljah moment," Greer said, referring to Bill Clinton's decision in his 1992 campaign to repudiate strident comments made by rapper Sister Souljah, making him appear more centrist to average voters.

"He's clearly thought about these issues without any advisers advising him on what he should think. He also went after another divide in the Republican Party... if we are going to base legislation on biblical morals, where do we start and stop because we are all sinners. He's sort of getting at an underlying principle of Christianity: 'How can you be put in the position to judge, Christian right?'"

Republican activist Carl Schmid, another member of the Austin 12, said the recordings show Bush's consistency on gay issues.

"This was a long time ago, and it confirms what he has been saying all along, that it's not good for Republicans to bash gay people and that he is against special rights," Schmid said. "He even said some things in our meeting that showed us he was not 100 percent in support of the social conservatives. He told us he wasn't going to their convention because they were 'too conservative.' He wasn't overtly supportive of them. That confirms the real George Bush."



Doug Wead lost his job in the first President Bush's administration in 1991 when he objected to gay people being included in signing ceremonies. He secretly recorded conversations with the current President Bush before he was elected to his first term. (Photo by AP)

Bob Kabel, a board member of the gay GOP group Log Cabin Republicans who was elected last fall as chair of the D.C. Republican Party, said the recordings demonstrate that Bush "has always been a very moderate guy who was very determined not to cave into some of the forces at work in that campaign."

"I think his comments [in the tapes] are really genuine," Kabel said. "It's what a lot of gay Republicans who support him say, that he is genuinely a very moderate, decent man who cares about people."

Bush actions don't match rhetoric?

But not all gays praised the president's 1998 remarks.

Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force, said the only way to evaluate elected officials is by what they do, not what they say.

"While he may say things like, 'I don't want to kick the gays,' that's all this administration has been about since Day 1," Foreman said. "To me, the remarks really underscore the lack of personal conviction that President Bush really has. I don't care if he's a nice guy. His policies are awful. So many people say, 'Well, he doesn't have a

problem with gay issues.' I don't care about him. I care about his administration."

David Smith, vice president of policy and strategy for the Human Rights Campaign, expressed similar sentiments.

"I don't know what the president meant by 'kicking the gays,'" Smith said. "Certainly, I don't think that's what his current thinking is based on his support for changing the U.S. Constitution to make sure that gay relationships are not recognized in any shape or form. Seems to be a pretty big kick to me. ..."

"There is an overt and covert hostility toward GLBT Americans by this president, and exhibit A is his support for this amendment."

Scott Huch, another member of the Austin 12, said the president's remarks reveal a political calculation.

"It's evident to me that the issue of basic equality for gay people could be so easily viewed by elected officials as a political poker chip, something used to gain votes," Huch said. "I know he doesn't support gay marriage, but there was no need for him to support the constitutional amendment."

Remarks in context

Patrick Guerriero, executive director of the Log Cabin Republicans, urged gays to put the remarks in context.

TAPE EXCERPTS

From the secret recordings made by Doug Wead of conversations with George W. Bush, as reported in the New York Times:

"I think he wants me to attack homosexuals." *After meeting with James Robison an evangelical minister in Texas. Bush was concerned that social conservatives wanted him to attack homosexuality.*

"Look, James, I got to tell you two things right off the bat. One, I'm not going to kick gays, because I'm a sinner. How can I differentiate sin?"

"This crowd uses gays as the enemy. It's hard to distinguish between fear of the homosexual political agenda and fear of homosexuality, however."

Reading aloud an aide's report from a Christian Coalition convention.

"This is an issue I have been trying to downplay. I think it is bad for Republicans to be kicking gays."

"No, what I said was, I wouldn't fire gays." *Setting the record straight after one conservative supporter publicly said Bush did not intend to hire gay people.*

"Gay marriage, I am against that. Special rights, I am against that."

Laying out the areas where he could find common ground with social conservatives

"The landscape of GLBT issues has changed dramatically since 1998," Guerriero said. "We are in a new day and those comments offer some hope as to where the president's heart may be."

"They are a window into a man who seems uneasy with the notion of picking on part of the American family but those sentiments were said at a different time, historically, at a different moment in our journey toward fairness and equality."

Several gay Republicans said they hoped that, based on the president's remarks about gays, Bush would move in his second term to tone down the anti-gay rhetoric of his party.

"We have four more years, and I'm hopeful he will reach out and show the real George Bush," Schmid said. "We've gone through half of his presidency and there's been some good and a lot of negative things."

Kabel said he was uncertain if gay rights issues would see any progress during Bush's second term but added that there will be a lot of "moderating in a whole lot of areas."

Foreman said despite his criticisms, he hopes that Bush is more willing to defend gay men and lesbians in the future.

"Hope does indeed spring eternal, and he does not have to run for re-election," Foreman said. "Therefore he doesn't have to endlessly give in to the forces of the religious and political intolerance. There is now an opportunity for him to move in the right direction. I really mean that. Hope does spring eternal."

Roll out the red carpet

Landmark's Rob Arcos says Houston should have its share of glitz on Oscar night

By BINNIE FISHER

Movies come and go, but the Academy Awards come around only once a year.

That's why Rob Arcos, city manager for Landmark Theatres, was running in circles this week.

True, the awards are handed out in Los Angeles, but why should Houston be left without a red carpet and all the beautiful people arriving in tuxedos and ball gowns?

Because officials of Landmark determined seven years ago that Houston should feel a part of the celebration, Arcos said, the chain started an Oscar-night party in the city. That party has grown over the years, and now it benefits the Houston Gay and Lesbian Film Festival.

"We wanted our market in Houston go get involved with all the glitz of the Oscars," he said. "We try to make it as interesting as possible."

In addition to h'ors d'oeuvres from BirraPoretti's, Arcos said, there will be giveaways and contests.

Tuxedos and ball gowns are encouraged and rewarded with movie passes.

"There is one lady who creates her own dress," Arcos said. "She makes a dress just for our Oscar party."

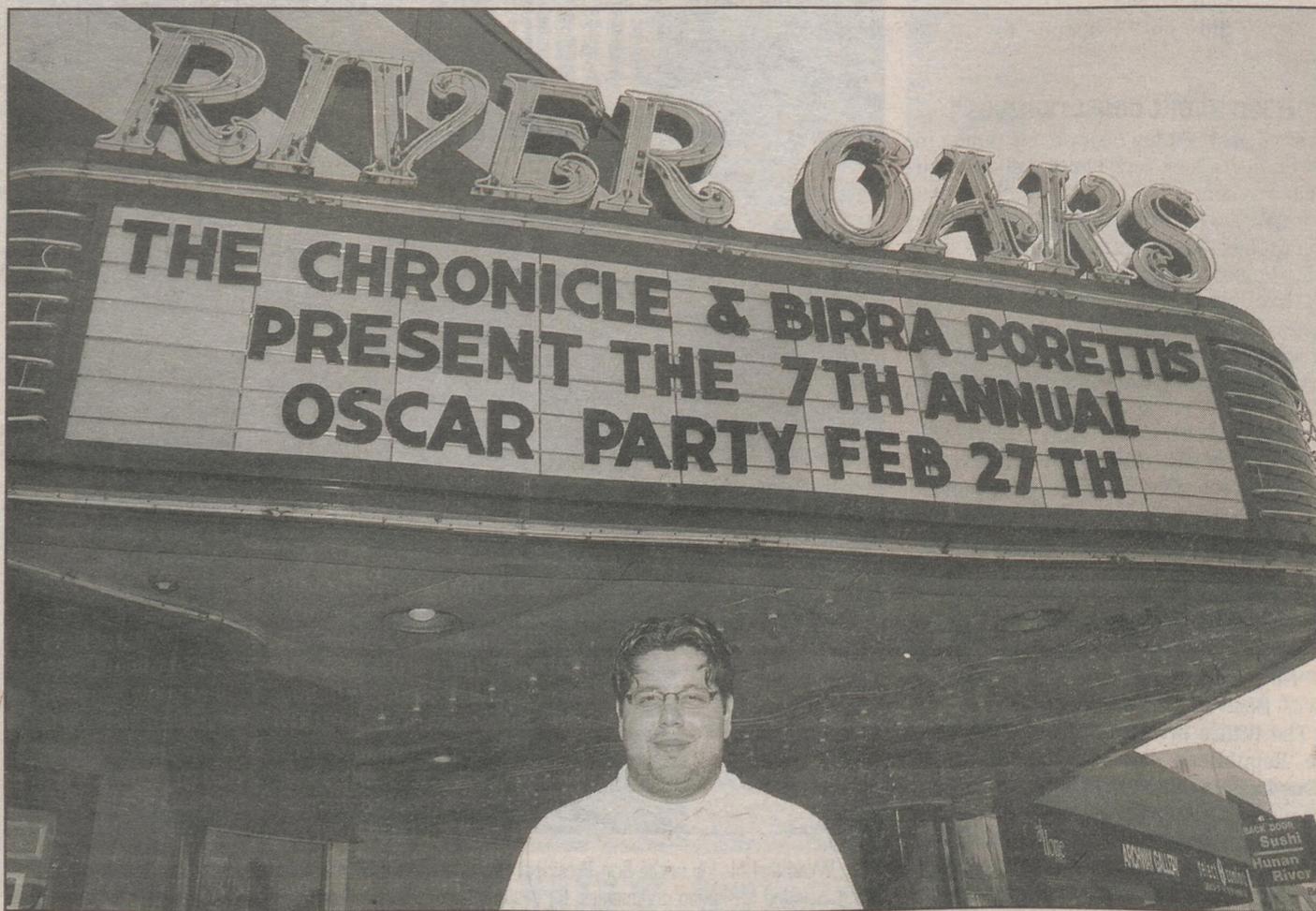
In past years, he added, the woman has placed favorably in the contest to determine who is wearing the most Oscar-like attire.

This year, Houston PBS host Ernie Manouse will serve as the party host for the event.

The showing will be on the theater's large screen.

Arcos said by the time the show starts, he will have made his own choices for the major awards.

For Best Actor, he has this to say, "Hands down, Leonardo DiCaprio." Until his performance in the Aviator,



Rob Arcos, city manager for Landmark Theatres, is rolling out the red carpet at the River Oaks Theatre for Sunday's 7th Annual Academy Awards Viewing Party. (Photo by Dalton DeHart)

Arcos said, "I never took him seriously as an actor."

For Best Actress, Arcos said, "I'd really like to see Annette Benning get it. I saw 'Being Julia' three times. I like Hillary Swank, but I'm all about Annette."

Unfortunately, the last time either actress was nominated for an award, he noted, they again competed against one another. Hillary Swank won for "Boys Don't Cry."

As for Best Picture, Arcos said, "I thought 'Ray' was overrated. The same for 'Sideways.'" The competition, he said, is between "Million Dollar Baby" and "The Aviator."

Some might ask what qualifies a 23-year-old as an expert on movies. This particular 23-year-old has lived and breathed movies on the job since he was 17. That's when he was hired to be an usher at the River Oaks.

He had spent the short lifetime before then watching movies on television.

"When I was young, my mom had to work two jobs to support me," he said. "I spent a lot of time watching TV."

Fresh out of high school, he started what he never realized would turn out to be a career. Flashlight in hand, he ush-

ered patrons in and out of the River Oaks.

The River Oaks wasn't then and isn't now just any old theater. It was the house where the foreign and the art films played. It opened for Arcos a world that included names like Deneuve, Kurosawa and Fellini.

"The door really opened for me on foreign films," he said.

Now, Arcos is probably as well versed as anyone on foreign films. He's seen enough French films to proclaim, "Catherine Deneuve is one of the few women I'd consider going straight for."

And so, at 23, Rob Arcos is not only an expert on foreign and art films, but he admits, "I'm pretty much the face of Landmark in Houston."

He may well be one of the youngest city managers for a theater chain in the country.

"That's the beautiful part about this company," he said. "My district manager also started from the bottom up."

With 74 theaters around the country, Arcos said, Landmark has found its niche by making an effort to present thought-provoking cinema. For his part, he said, he is always on the lookout for films that

i Rob Arcos

Hometown: Houston

Home: Houston

Age: 23

Education: Reagan High School

Occupation: City Manager for Landmark Theatres

Relationship Status: Partnered

Pets: Two chihuahuas, Mindy and Michaela

will appeal to gays and lesbians.

Landmark also offers midnight movies at the River Oaks. Arcos said he has learned that a certain type of movie appeals to the midnight crowd. Among the sure winners are "Goonies," "Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory" and "A Clockwork Orange."

As for speculating on the reasons those films work when others don't, he said, it's anybody's guess.

"There are a lot of films I'd like to try, but they are proven disasters," he said.

This week, though, it isn't midnight movies or first-run blockbusters that are garnering his attention. It's those little gold statues called Oscars.

i MORE INFO

7th Annual Academy Awards Viewing Party

Sunday, Feb. 27, 6 p.m.

Landmark River Oaks Theatre

2009 West Gray

www.hhglff.org

out in houston

(Photos by Dalton DeHart)



Artist John Palmer (center back) conducted a class and demonstration when students and teachers from Ortiz Middle School visited his studio on a field trip.



At a recent Greater Houston GLBT Chamber of Commerce event, (from left) chamber executive director Coy Tow and Berryhill Baja Grill owner Philip Wattel introduced Kris Martin and Robert Moore of TXT to chamber members.



John Daniels III helped his parents, Lillian and John Daniels II from Seattle, celebrate their 46th wedding anniversary.



Performers were beaming recently as they helped raise money for Miss Camp during Ireka's Revival.



Janie Lopez and Amber Batson distributed L Word T-shirts at the L Word premier at Meteor, sponsored by the Human Rights Campaign.



Shortly after arriving in town, the cast of 'Les Miz' at Broadway in Houston, showed up for Monday Musicals at Meteor.

APPOINTMENTS

FRIDAY FEB. 25

A world premier by Stanton Welch highlights "Rock, Roll and Tutus" through March 6 at the Wortham Center. The winter repertory program also includes the neo-classical "Suite en Blanc" and Christopher Bruce's hard-driving, sexy "Rooster." Welch, the openly gay artistic director of Houston Ballet, said the new work, set to Rachmaninoff's "Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini," was created to highlight the Houston Ballet company. www.houstonballet.org.

SATURDAY FEB. 26

Interest sessions for Houston Pride volunteers are scheduled at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. today, and at 7 p.m. on Tuesday at the Pride office at 1415 California, Suite 110. Volunteers are needed to work on mass mailings and to serve on various sub-committees. Those interested in volunteering may express their specific volunteer interests by going to Pride Houston's web site and filling out a volunteer application online at www.pridehouston.org/volunteer/ or by attending a volunteer interest session. 713-529-6979.

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AVES is the beneficiary of Miss LSWA 2005, an event sponsored by the Lone Star Volleyball Association from 8-10 p.m. at South Beach, 810 Pacific. Cost is \$5, and the evening will include the farewell performance of Miss LSWA 2004, Erica Lucci.

THURSDAY MARCH 3

The Bering Omega Social Committee is sponsoring an evening of mingling and theater beginning at 7 p.m. at Theatre Suburbia, 1410 W. 43rd St. "The Movie Game" by Adam Hummel will be performed at 8 p.m. RSVP at 713-523-7110, ext. 110.

FRIDAY MARCH 4

Names of the 2005 Houston Pride Grand Marshals will be announced at an event that begins at 7 p.m. upstairs at 1415 California. Pride Houston officials said record numbers turned out to vote during polling conducted on recent Saturdays. www.pridehouston.org.

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editorial

Just say 'Wolf!' just won't work

Now comes word of a new strain of HIV that could bring a 'new wave' of infections and death. So why are gay men hitting the snooze button on this latest alarm?

By CHRIS CRAIN

W

HEN NEW YORK CITY'S health commissioner announced just before Valentine's Day the discovery of a "possibly new and deadly HIV strain," he must have known that the

hysterical news reports that followed would all but bury the "p word."

But such is the fight against HIV/AIDS in the new century. Frustrated by their abject failure to change the sexual behavior of gay men, and clearly out of new ideas, public health officials and their allies among some AIDS organizations, have resorted to crying wolf.

When the smoke settled last week, it turned out there was precious little evidence to support the New York commissioner's public pronouncement, much less the media avalanche that followed. One gay man's extreme personal history does not a "new and deadly HIV strain" make.

But the facts fit all too well with the "just say wolf" mentality that now pervades HIV prevention efforts. He was a gay man addicted to crystal meth and who had been hyper-promiscuous. Aware of the long-standing connection between meth abuse and HIV infection, public health officials and some AIDS activists were quick to embrace an example that fit their foregone conclusions.

It's a phenomenon sadly familiar to those of us who have covered the epidemic for years. Nearly every press release churned out about HIV/AIDS inevitably contains "alarming" new information that portends "a new wave of infections" that will return us to the "nightmare of mass deaths" from the 1980s and '90s.

Four years ago, the refrain was over "reinfection." Based on a single case study involving a gay man in Canada, the public was alerted of the "alarming" news that an HIV-positive person "possibly" could be "reinfected" with a second strain of the AIDS virus, and that second

strain, or the combination — dubbed "super-infection" — could "possibly" thwart existing drug treatments.

In 2002, the *New England Journal of Medicine* doubled the evidence, publishing a report involving two — count them! — people who were each infected with a second strain of HIV after they were already HIV positive. Lost in the fine print was that one of the two men acquired the first strain in Southeast Asia, where it is uniquely endemic, and then acquired the second strain in South America. Hardly your typical gay male cruising pattern.

Regardless, the predicted tsunami of new infections never struck. New HIV infections in the U.S. have remained flat at about 40,000 new cases each year. And happily, the "nightmare of mass deaths" has not been revisited upon us.

But like the proverbial tale of the boy who cried wolf, now many gay men roll our eyes at the latest "alarming" reports about a "new strain" of drug-resistant HIV, whether or not the news turns out to be real.

BURNOUT HAS BEEN AN ONGOING problem in the fight against HIV. Good people who commit their professional lives to fighting a virus for which there is no cure and no vaccine find themselves frustrated when their ideas and hard work don't have the impact they hoped for.

Unlike other public health threats, stopping the spread of HIV requires convincing people to alter their behavior in the heat of sex, among the most fundamental and logic-free activities known to mankind. If most of us can't even manage to have sex with the right person, how can we be expected to remember to make it less pleasurable, too?

Truth be told, once the initial information about safer sex had run its course years ago, most public health officials ran out of new ideas. Even worse, most AIDS organizations ran out of interest.

Their leadership became so focused in the late '90s on self-preservation, that the priority went from the mis-

sion to the money, and pleasing key funding constituencies took paramount importance.

When private giving slowed to a trickle, especially after 9/11, that meant pleasing Uncle Sam. And when Republicans captured the White House in 2000, that meant de-gaying and de-sexing most HIV prevention programs.

These days, far too many HIV prevention programs are designed to win government grants, not prevent the spread of HIV. They are hopelessly specialized on smaller and smaller populations, and their impact is negligible. Nowhere is this clearer than in safer-sex efforts aimed at gay men.

IT IS NOTHING SHORT OF astounding — and depressing — to see how much more impactful HIV prevention efforts can be in other countries, where the pressure not to offend the sexual sensibilities of governmental overseers is not so strong.

There are still places, outside of George Bush's America, where creative and effective HIV and STD prevention posters plaster the gay bars and bus stops in the gayborhoods, where free condoms and lube are plentiful, and where prevention workers dare to venture into the spaces, real and virtual, where gay men meet for sex.

Back home in the USA, it's high time to retire those burnt out prevention strategists who can think of nothing better than to scare straight those gay men who persist in having unsafe sex, at least some of the time. These fear-mongers are not needed, and they're making things worse.

Instead, it's long past time for public health officials and their allies in AIDS, Inc., to begin arming gay men with real information, not "alarming" alerts of "new strains" of HIV.

More than three decades into this epidemic, still they will only talk off the record about the actual risk percentages associated with different sexual acts and different safer-sex techniques. They arrogantly assume that real information will lead to irresponsibility.

In the meantime, expect gay men to hit the snooze button on the latest round of HIV alarms.

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



viewpoint MARC PAIGE

It is always ironic and sad when a high-profile anti-gay politician turns out to have a gay child.

That child needs and deserves its parents' love.

Where are their family values?

AT 19 YEARS OLD, MAYA KEYES, daughter of former presidential and Illinois Senate candidate Alan Keyes, finds herself in a difficult position, but one that is so familiar to millions of gay youth in our country, especially those who have grown up in right-wing Christian families.

She loves her father. She does not want to disappoint him.

Yet she knows that her father thinks her sexual orientation is "sinful" and represents "selfish hedonism."

For the young gay daughter of a man who has often cited his religion to denigrate homosexuals, Maya Keyes has had to endure a father who has campaigned for years against her own welfare and equality.

IT IS ALWAYS IRONIC AND SAD WHEN an anti-gay, high-profile public figure is found to have a gay child.

Many of these young people are raised in right-wing Christian environments, and have parents who campaign against any government recognition of the humanity of gay people.

Yet some of their kids do end up gay.

If they are very strong, these young people may become well-adjusted adults, despite the self-hatred that their parents and their churches have instilled in them throughout their childhoods.

RIGHT-WINGERS CONTINUE TO RANT about homosexuality undermining America's families, but actually, it is homophobia that has damaged too many families, including some rather high profile right-wing Christian ones.

Operation Rescue founder and fervently anti-gay Randall Terry has said of his gay son, Jamiel, that he is "bringing great sadness to our home and embarrassment to our family," and "is no longer welcome in my home."

For his part, Jamiel said he still loves his father, and if he could choose, he "definitely would not choose to be gay, especially in the family that I live in."

When Sadie Fields, chairwoman of the Georgia Christian Coalition, found out her daughter, Tess, was gay, she went to where she worked and told her she was "dead to the family," and called her sick, crazy, and "of the devil."

The late conservative Republican state senator from California, William J. "Pete" Knight, was that state's leading opponent of gay marriage. He was estranged from his gay son, David, and never met David's partner of ten years, Joseph.

There are also some high profile right-wing parents that have kept their gay kids close in their lives.

Phyllis Schlafly, founder of the Eagle Forum, has for years deftly finessed the delicate



Maya Keyes

balance of satiating her "pro-family" constituents while trying to avoid assaulting her own family member. Schlafly and her gay son, John, remain close.

PARENTS AND FRIENDS OF LESBIANS and Gays (PFLAG) has launched an ad campaign highlighting the close relationships of some high profile straight celebrities and their gay loved ones.

The campaign's message is: "Stay close to your loved ones because relationships are too precious to lose."

The campaign will feature, among others, Ben Affleck and his cousin, Jason; Congressman Gregory

Meeks and his brother, John; talk show host Cristina Saralegui and her brother, Ignacio; and Congressman and Mrs. Dick Gephardt and their daughter, Chrissy.

In the future, maybe we will see our nation's vice president in the ad cam-

paign with his wife Lynne and their gay daughter, Mary Cheney.

Although the Cheneyes have stated they have tremendous pride in both their daughters, there are some in the Bush-Cheney administration who continue to promote the idea that homosexuals are not as good as heterosexuals, and that positive images of gay people should not be in public view.

IN ONLY HER SECOND DAY IN OFFICE, Education Secretary Margaret Spelling attacked a PBS children's program featuring various families from around the country for including a loving Vermont family of two gay women and their kids.

When any member of the Bush-Cheney administration deems gay families as not fit viewing for children, it is an assault on all gay American's, including the daughter of our nation's vice president.

A Cheney family appearance in the PFLAG "Stay Close" campaign would go a long way to heal the deep wounds left by a presidential campaign marred by politically motivated attacks against gays, and this most recent display of intolerance by Margaret Spelling.

ONE FAMILY WE WILL NOT BE SEEING in the PFLAG campaign any time soon is the Keyes family.

Maya Keyes has recently written in her blog that her father has given her two-weeks to leave their apartment, and has terminated her employment, leaving her with no resources.

Maya writes, "After all the arguments and tension over the years, I always hoped it would never actually get to this point, although I suppose given our vastly divergent political beliefs it was inevitable."

For his entire career, Alan Keyes has promoted his version of "family values." Now he is challenged to show his gay daughter true family values, and not have her sexual orientation be a barrier to the love and support that all young people need and deserve.

@ Marc Paige is a Fort Lauderdale-based writer and can be reached at marc-paige@msn.com

THE

Q
If Hollywood made a movie of your life, whom should they cast as your lover?



Michelle Pfeifer. She does ecstasy better than any other Hollywood actor, bar-none.

BETH TUDOR, 49
Houston
Small business consultant



I would let my husband, Alan Caskey, play himself. His dream has always been to be an actor, and he has the talent for it.

ANDREW JORGENSEN, 31
Houston
Physician



It would be easy to name a celebrity. I am a real person and would hope that my life would be represented by real people.

TARA-MARIE MARTINEZ, 21
Houston
Administrative assistant



Brad Pitt. Older, wiser, money for me to invest. I would like to massage his "portfolio."

JAY BELL, 31
Houston
Financial advisor



Andre 3000 from Outkast because he is intelligent, articulate and sexy as hell. Plus, I love his bone structure. He is very beautiful.

SHEBA LA QUEEN GIPSON, 30
Dallas
Lambda Legal
outreach associate

Sound off about what's happening in your world at www.houstonvoice.com/soundoff.

Interviews and photos by Dalton DeHart

on the record

"Today, same-sex couples are marrying under the law in Massachusetts. Some are actually having children born to them. It's not right on paper. It's not right in fact. Every child has the right to have a mother and a father."

Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, who is considering a presidential run in 2008, in a speech to South Carolina Republicans (Boston Herald, Feb. 22)

"The least he could do while traveling the country is tell the truth about his record. Maybe he momentarily forgot, down there near [ultra-conservative] Bob Jones University."

Massachusetts Democratic Party Chairman Phil Johnston said of the speech in South Carolina, where Romney, who supports civil unions for gay couples, claimed he's a "conservative Republican" (Boston Herald, Feb. 22)



"A period of engagement is announced between Mr. John Christopher O'Connor and Dr. Mark Brian Jones, both of Islington, north London. Following the enactment of the 'Civil Partnership' legislation, expected later this year, the couple will announce the time and location of both the civil union and subsequent church blessing ceremonies to interested parties."

The first same-sex union engagement announcement to appear in the 220-year history of The Times of London newspaper. The British government announced this week the Civil Partnership law is scheduled to take effect on Dec. 5 (BBC news, Feb. 19)

"It is legitimate and necessary to ask oneself if this is not perhaps part of a new ideology of evil, perhaps more insidious and hidden, which attempts to pit human rights against the family and against man."

Pope John Paul II writes about "homosexual marriages" in his new book 'Memory and Identity' (Reuters, Feb. 22)

"Now I know what President Bush meant when he said he had a mandate."

Talk show host Bill Maher on the revelations about conservative journalist Jeff Gannon (a.k.a. James Guckert), who was frequently called on in White House press briefings (HBO's "Real Time," Feb. 19)

"Holy One, convict those who are using their power not to lead or to guide but to harm the gay and lesbian citizens, a small minority in this commonwealth."

Rev. Debra Peevey, of the Journey of the Heart Ministries in Reston, delivering the invocation to open the Feb. 18 House of Delegates floor session in Virginia (Associated Press, Feb. 19)



"What troubles me about our black churches is their silence about white supremacy, homophobia, domestic violence, HIV and AIDS. Jesus did not just talk about redeeming people to heaven. He liberated them from sickness and hunger on earth."

New York's Union Theological Seminary professor James H. Cone in a speech to 800 clergy at a national black clergy conference in Atlanta (Associated Press, Feb. 15)

"[AIDS] is not going to go away anytime soon. I think we have to be careful that we don't fall back in a place of denial and go back to the pre-AIDS days, having sex without protection and that sort of thing."

Actress Christine Ebersole (A&U magazine, March issue)

"To begrudge someone else their love of another person because of gender seems to me absolutely absurd."

Jennifer Beals, who stars on "The L Word," Showtime's sexy melodrama about lesbian life in Los Angeles; the show started its second season last Sunday



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Splitting Seams
Gay designers Dolce and Gabbana have split, but their label lives on.
Page 17

FEBRUARY 25, 2005

turning photography 'inside out'

BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOS TO CHALLENGE PERCEPTIONS AND STEREOTYPES

By JOHNNY HOOKS

PHOTOGRAPHER JAY RUSOVICH paces back and forth in his Montrose area studio, sipping coffee as he talks about art and artists.

"You cannot make an artist, you can't teach someone to be creative," he says.

A casual look around his studio reveals that while his instrument is a camera, his work is definitely art.

Visitors are greeted in the entryway by two fluffy Persian cats and a four-foot-tall angel statue. Glossy photography books and magazines line the bookcases along two walls.

But it's the large black and white photographs that grab the attention. In each of the 12 or so pictures displayed, beautiful, well-defined bodies are in various stages of undress.

The subjects, with taut muscles in curious poses, may be male or female. The usual identifiers of masculine or feminine are blurred. What appears to be an ebony man with enormous thighs straddles a chair.

Back to the camera, he is wearing a blond wig and spike-heeled pumps. Facing a mirror he pulls a comb through his wig.

In another photograph, three people are in what appears to be a locker room. The seated figure on the left gives off an air of masculinity, yet the visual senses are unsure. Standing in the middle of the photo, a man with thighs as big as tree trunks removes his jeans, only to reveal panties and garters underneath. The final figure stands naked with his huge bare bottom and back to the camera.

"We actually shot that in a locker room. Looking back on it I have no idea how we fit into that small space," Rusovich says. "I see locker rooms almost everyday of my life and with this picture, as always,

I worked with the models on a script, like in a film. Every shoot is approached in that manner.

"I have extensive discussions and dialogue with every subject," says Rusovich. "I don't pay these body building models to just stand there and pose. I need to scratch their individual surfaces to reveal what is underneath."

In the locker room shot, Rusovich reveals, "The model in the middle mentioned that even though he is a very masculine, he does have a fetish for wearing women's undergarments. Those are the moments that I seek, the reality, the honesty, the purity."

Jay Rusovich was born and reared in New Orleans. He grew up Catholic in a household he describes as repressive. "There was alcoholism in my family, and a lot of dysfunction. You never talked about how you were feeling. Never. Things were either 'OK' or 'I don't want to hear about it' ya know?"

Unable to relate to the real world, Rusovich became heavily involved in sports, where his appreciation for the body human grew.

"I suffered from clinical depression for 15 years," he recalls. "Back when I was growing up there was no Prozac, certainly no therapy. The only outlet I had to express myself was writing."

Rusovich, a tall handsome man with short cropped, bleached hair and mischievous eyes, eventually received his masters degree in English literature and made a name for himself as a commercial photographer, after a stint as an actor in New York.

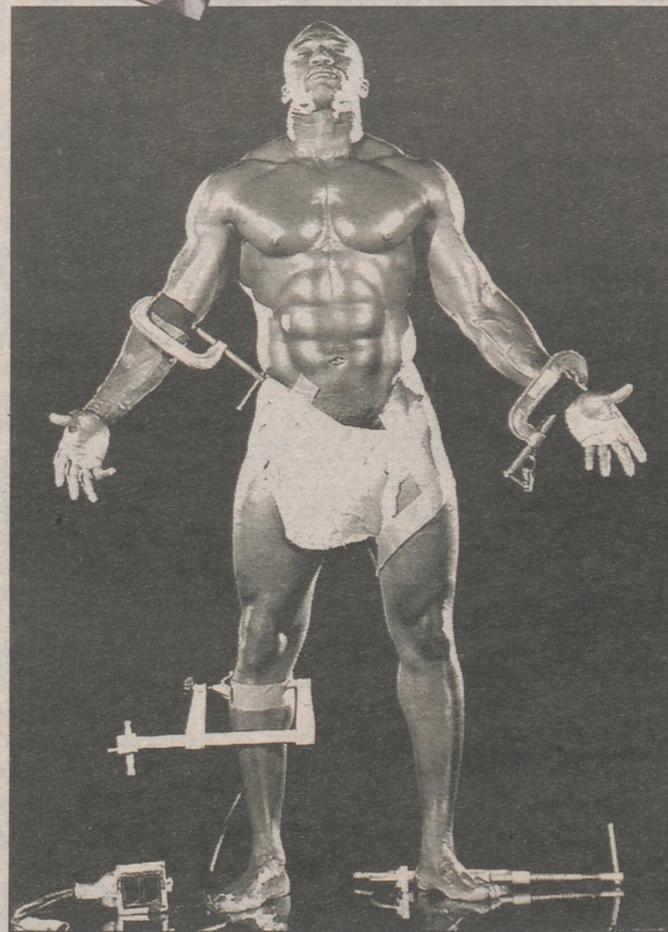
Rusovich is nationally recognized as a freelance photographer whose work includes more than 150 national magazine and book covers, countless features and national advertising campaigns for such companies as McDonalds, Miller Brewing Company, EAS and Harper Collins/NYC.

Nowadays, he turns his laser-like focus to his personal photography.

"I may do an occasional commercial print job, but this is me now," he says. "I am absolutely driven to create. Everything I have ever processed through my entire life is seen in this show. It's just seminal."

A show that at first includes 20 photographs may end up with 200. "I just don't know yet. You know, its not like I came up with a better hula-hoop, you just get to a point where the dam breaks. JK Rowling didn't even start writing her first Harry

Please see **PHOTOS** on Page 18



i MORE INFO

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MARRIAGE SIMPSON STYLE: Gay marriage turned 'Simpsons' into social commentary. Page 14

THE PERFECT FIT: The Montrose Diner is a classic fit for the neighborhood. Page 15

television BRIAN MOYLAN



From 'The Simpsons' satirical look at gay marriage to a 'Desperate Housewives' gay kiss, last Sunday was must see TV.

'Simpsons' hits a Homer

LAST SUNDAY, IT SEEMED LIKE EVERY one was either at Montrose Diner or one of the city's bars. Some were taking in the season premiere of the "The L Word" — or creating their own drama. It was a holiday weekend, after all.

What many of those partygoers missed were the gay plotlines on two other popular Sunday night shows, as sweeps month takes over TV land. All the networks are scrambling to come out on top during this four-week period that helps determine how much they can charge for TV commercials over the coming months.

On Sunday evening, Fox aired the

much-hyped episode of "The Simpsons," in which Marge's butch sister Patty finally came out of the closet.

The town of Springfield legalized same-sex marriage to capitalize on pink tourism dollars. What followed was a satirical look at how economic incentives can lead to exploiting gay couples, all in the name of the mighty dollar.

When Springfield's local church refused to perform the commitment ceremonies, Homer Simpson became an ordained minister so he could help.

Eventually, Patty approached Homer about presiding over a ceremony for her and her professional golfer girlfriend. And as much as Homer and Patty hate each other, he didn't think twice about what to do.

Ironically, the liberal Marge, a same-sex marriage supporter in theory, had misgivings about her sister's coming out. She attended the wedding ceremony, but only to expose Patty's beau as a man pretending to be a woman so that he could play professional women's golf.

Patty then affirmed that she likes girls,



Homer Simpson (center) cashed in on the same-sex marriage craze by becoming a minister and marrying gay couples — for a price.

and kicked the deceptive golfer to the curb.

ALTHOUGH IT MAY HAVE BEEN A ratings stunt, "The Simpsons" used nuance, humor and a dash of stereotyping to deliver one of the most insightful looks at same-sex marriage to air on primetime television. Without the usual sitcom simplicity, creators of "The Simpsons" recognized the complexity of the issue and masterfully mined it for humor. That's why this cartoon for adults as well as children has been around 16 years and counting. This show just keeps reinventing itself and getting better and better as it chugs along.

The gay marriage storyline bumped the show's ratings up to 10.5 million view-

ers, according to Neilson Media Research. After an 11-year high with its post-Super Bowl episode earlier this month, "The Simpsons" only scored 8 million viewers the week before last, which marked its second-smallest audience ever.

Meanwhile, over at ABC, juggernaut "Desperate Housewives" continued to roll over the competition with 24.2 million viewers (2 million more than the week before) tuning in to catch a surprise same-sex kiss between sexy teenager Justin (Ryan Carnes) and Andrew Van de Camp (Shawn Pyfrom).

While the rumor that Bree's (Marcia Cross) son Andrew was going to come out has been swirling around the Internet, the network wouldn't confirm it and didn't seem to try to exploit it for sweeps.

"Housewives" is only the fourth primetime network show to air a gay male kiss. The first, "Will & Grace," did so in 2000, and was soon followed by "Dawson's Creek" and "The O.C."

Lesbian kisses are a familiar sweeps stunt, one revived two weeks ago on Fox's "The O.C." when a much-hyped kiss between Marissa (Mischa Barton) and Alex (Olivia Wilde) had no effect on the show's ratings.

Marc Cherry, the gay creator of "Housewives," scored another hit with his show by integrating a gay kiss into the story without making it seem like a ratings ploy or gimmick.

Unlike "The O.C.," Cherry relied on his show's overall quality to lure viewers. Then, he added a dash of gay content to encourage those who remained home Sunday night to stay tuned.

i MORE INFO

'THE SIMPSONS'
Fox
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'DESPERATE HOUSEWIVES'
ABC
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dining J.A. CHAPMAN

The corner of Westheimer and Yoakum was just waiting for the perfect neighborhood dining experience, and the new Montrose Diner seems to be the perfect fit.

A classic fit

DINERS ARE TIMELESS. THE SMOKY smell of the griddle. The no nonsense wait staff. It's all part of the ambiance. It's the reliable American favorite.

So I was intrigued to see the Montrose Diner open up in the spot formerly housing Cabo Montrose. I wondered how they'd update an American classic to fit the neighborhood.

The décor has been redone somewhat, toning down the more garish colors of the previous occupant, and adding artsy touches, like posters from local theatre, dance and musical shows. The chrome diamond plate counters and tabletops are still in place, along with the ostrich banquettes. But the former "cigar room" is now available for dining, creating an option for private groups.

With fun touches like a large Betty Boop touting the daily specials and classic Motown and other favorite American tunes playing in the background, the Montrose Diner is a good blend of traditional and modern - just right for the locale.

The menu offers few surprises, but with diner food, that's a welcome sight. A good bet is the hearty classic burger (\$4.95), made with quality beef, and topped with lettuce, pickles and tomatoes. Or try the Montrose club (\$4.95), with grilled turkey adding a twist to the traditional club sandwich. All burgers and sandwiches come with either fries or onion rings. Both are good diner quality - deep fried, classic-cut, and served piping hot.

IF YOU'RE HUNGRY, TRY ONE OF THE entrees, which come with your choice of two sides. The pork chops (\$7.99) include two thin-cut pork chops prepared to your liking. The pot roast (\$7.95) is a huge serving of classic beef pot roast, topped with carrots, celery and garlic tossed on the grill. The entrees are hearty and tasty, just as you'd hope.

A wide variety of side dish options means there's something for everybody, and the servings are generous. The garlic mashed potatoes are a winner - creamy and smooth, with plenty of garlic flavor. The greens are done with garlic, as opposed to the traditional Southern style. The green beans are impressively crisp. The huge baked potato comes with all the toppings, making it almost enough for a meal. It's hard to go wrong with any of the sides.

The Montrose Diner is different from a classic diner in that alcohol is available. There's a limited choice, with red or white wine by the glass, a few choices of beer, and some top shelf mixed drinks.

Mimosas are available on the weekend brunch. It's a twist on the diner experience and it's nice to have the option.



The new kid on the block at the corner of Westheimer and Yoakum is the Montrose Diner.

Desserts come from Lawler's Bakery in Humble. The chocolate eruption (\$4.25) is a dense chocolate delight, with chunks of turtle cheesecake and nuts in the middle. It's more than enough to share. The bourbon pecan pie (\$3.95) is dark and decadent. Or stick with an old classic - the malts and shakes (\$2.50 and \$2.25) are rich and thick, just as they should be.

Breakfast is also on the menu at the Montrose Diner, and it's available all day. Don't miss the pancakes (\$4.95) - light, fluffy, buttery, and served hot off the griddle. They come with two sides, and the hash browns are an excellent choice. Crispy grated potatoes with a hint of onion - they're some of the best I've had recently. Eggs are available any style, and arrived cooked perfectly to order. The bottomless coffee is a dependable cup of Joe.

Service at the Montrose Diner can be spotty. The wait staff isn't always well informed and service can vary wildly from slow and absentminded, to attentive and professional. No doubt some of the mix-ups are growing pains, as the diner has only been open a few weeks. Some of the confusion should taper off as the restaurant settles into a routine.

Montrose Diner is already popular. It's bustling at lunch and dinner and during brunch hours on weekends. With dependable, traditional diner fare at reasonable prices, it's easy to see why.

It's a classic fit for the neighborhood.



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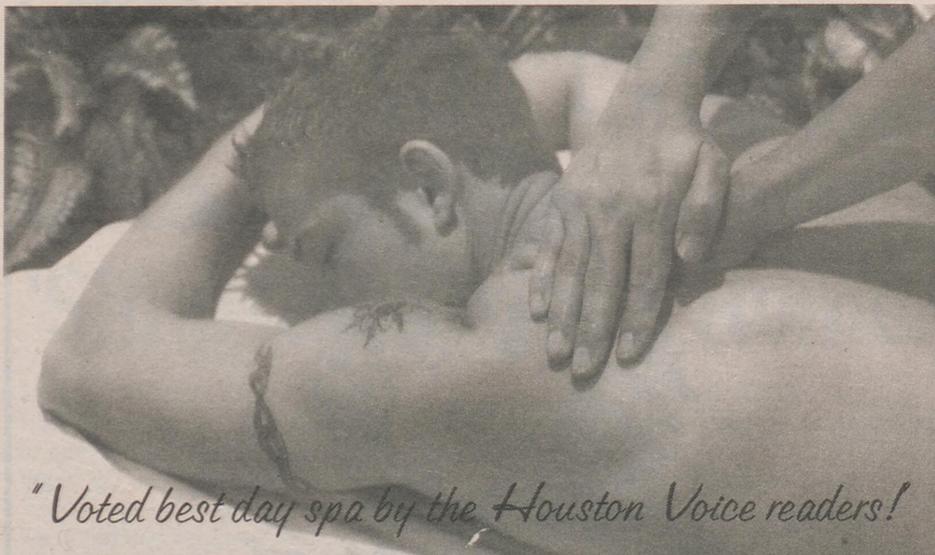


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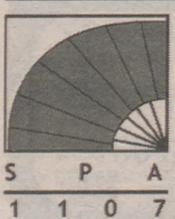


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nitelife JOHNNY HOOKS



Night in Black Leather raises bucks, Rich's shows off its new stuff, a favorite visits the Alley, and a walk on the red carpet

Black Leather Nites

WELCOME BACK QUEER KIDDIES! This week's HoVo on the Go-Go is all about performing. Cocktail arts, Oscars and a Night in Black Leather...oh my!

FOR ONE NIGHT ONLY! THE Contemporary Arts Museum's "Steel Lounge" returns Friday night, February 25. This monthly event lets you get your art on while getting your groove on. This month's talk is by Shafik Rifaat, graduate professor, Gerald D. Hines School of Architecture, University of Houston. He will discuss "Perspectives 145: Bodys Isek Kingelez." 5216 Montrose Blvd 713-284-8250 or www.camh.org

NIGHT IN BLACK LEATHER, NEVER reaching the end! With all apologies to the Moody Blues, it's that time of year again. Mr. Houston Fundraiser, otherwise known as Mr. Don Gill, returns with "Night in Black Leather 2005" at Richs-Houston Saturday. Doors open at 6 p.m.

The always spirit-filled event supports PWA Holiday Charities and The Wishful Thinking Fund. Chris Beck, Jim Benton, Robert Harwood, and Larry Markey are co-directors of the benefit, which features super special guest Deborah Duncan, KHOU anchor and host of HotGG's fave afternoon talk show, the Deborah Duncan Show. A silent auction precedes the festivities. Please make a point to come out and support this worthwhile event. Don Gill gives and gives 'till one would think he could give no more. Then he does. The least you can do is throw on your vest and cheer on NIBL 2005!

SPEAKING OF RICH'S, AND IT seems everyone is, here's the latest on reclaiming your nightlife. The people have spoken and apparently cannot wait until the light, design and sound renovations are done! So owner, Nassim Joseph, has thrown open the doors on Saturday nights only, with simply D-licious DJ Mark D. The D-Licious D is formerly of Roxy and Pacific Street, just to name a few and is currently heard on XM Satellite on Channel 81 for his weekly dance show. Now I remember when Mark was a fixture in the Houston scene (we're talking Fizz, Power Tools and NRG days kids) but at that time he played for the "other team." Ohh how many nights did HotGG go home achin' from shakin' our groove thing to his wax and once home was achin' for another reason. Now, we're happy to report the D-licious D has come to his senses and swings his bat for us! Whether he pitches or catches we don't know, but intend to find out. To see more of Mark and to

HoVo on the go-go

reclaim your nightlife, Rich's Houston is open from 9 p.m. until close every Saturday night at 2401 San Jacinto. HotGG has heard rumors of one-dollar vodkas too! Yummy. 713-759-9606

AND THE OSCAR GOES TOO. WELL you'll find out in high style if you attend 7th Annual Academy Awards Viewing Party on Sunday at the Landmark River Oaks Theatre at 6:30 p.m. until the awards run out! Hosted again this year by the one and only Ernie Manouse from Houston PBS. Watch the awards presentation and see the stars up close and personal on the big screen at the River Oaks Theatre. Take part in best dressed and guess-the-winners contests and win fabulous prizes including movie promotional items and posters. A \$10.00 donation benefiting the Houston Gay & Lesbian Film Festival gets you in the door.

Free Hors d'oeuvres provided by local Italian fave BirraPoretti's with a cash bar. Black tie highly encouraged and rewarded with a free Landmark Theatres movie ticket! Advance tickets are available online at www.HGLFF.org and at the door. Landmark River Oaks Theatre, 2009 West Gray.

SPEAKING OF AWARD WINNING actresses, a HotGG fave is back at the Alley. **Annalee Jefferies** is Haley Walker in the Alley Theatre's charming new comedy "Bad Dates" by Theresa Rebeck. "Bad Dates" previews March 4 and runs through April 3.

For ticket and event information, visit www.alleytheatre.org. We fell in love with Jefferies when we saw "Angels in America" at the Alley years ago, and are thrilled she's back!



@ If you have any club announcements or events, email them to jhooks@houstonvoice.com or call 713-529-8490. See you on the Go-Go!

dish

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

Splitting seams

Dolce & Gabbana call it quits, PFLAG enlists some stars, and RuPaul gets sassy again

Warning: Don't get your designer boxer briefs in a bunch just yet. Before you freak out, read to the end of this entry.

DOLCE & GABBANA have split up. Yes, the relationship between gay Italian designers Stefano Gabbana, 42, and Domenico Dolce, 46, has come to an end after 20 years. But thankfully, their fashion label, a staple of runways in New York, Paris and Milan and gay wardrobes the world over, will continue.

"We work together wonderfully well; we have a very strong understanding," Dolce told the daily Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* last week. "On a professional level, we are still together."

Dolce said they are both dating other men and no longer live together, though they have apartments in the same building in Milan.

When asked if they would possibly get back together Dolce replied, "Never say never, but, really, I don't think so."

So, boys, if you ever wanted to bag a hot, wealthy fashion designer who isn't **TOM FORD**, brush up on your Italian and head to Milan.

Actually, you might not need to go that far, since another fashion couple closer to home just called it quits as well.

New York-based Jack McCollough and Lazaro Hernandez, the duo behind the hot new label **PROENZA SCHOULER**, have split after five years together, the *New York Post's* gossip column Page Six reports.

The label first got noticed thanks to *Vogue* magazine and its icy editor, **ANNA WINTOUR**. According to Page Six, one of her assistants, Derek Blasberg, 22, helped cause the split.

It seems that Blasberg's male model boyfriend hooked up with McCollough, and then Blasberg and Hernandez started carrying on. And they say lesbians crave drama.

A family affair

Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays has enlisted the help of some high-caliber celebs for its latest advertising campaign.

Not surprisingly, gay civil rights advocate **CYNDI LAUPER** and her sister, Elen, appear in an ad together, proving that Mommy and Daddy Lauper aren't fond of traditional name spellings.

Also part of the publicity push are **BEN AFFLECK** and his gay cousin, Jason;

Ben Affleck and cousin Jason

Jason; Spanish language talk show giant



After 20 years as partners in business and life, fashion designers **Domenico Dolce** (right) and **Stefano Gabbana** have parted ways — but their high-end label will continue. (Photo by AP/Luca Bruno)

CRISTINA SARALEGUI and her brother, Ignacio; singer and gay icon **BARBARA COOK** and her son, Adam; U.S. Rep. **GREGORY MEEKS** (D-N.Y.) and his brother, John; and U.S. Rep. **DICK GEPHARDT** (D-Mo.), his wife, Jane, and their daughter, Chrissy.

Called "Stay Close," the ads (already seen on billboards in D.C. and New York) depict celebrities with their gay family members. The ads are scheduled to start appearing in *Time* magazine and other *Time* publications this month.

She's a doll

That crazy **RUPAUL** is always up to something. With a relatively new CD in stores, she is now dedicating her talent to promoting the RuPaul Doll.

Manufactured by Integrity Toys and billed as the first transgendered doll, it is to be unveiled next week.



RuPaul

Already, the glamazon is at New York's International Toy Fair trying to create some hype around the doll.

"I think that music, fashion, movies — all forms of art — are in a holding pattern for one simple reason: It's because of our culture's inability to expand on sexuality. And its inability to accept sexuality on life's terms," she told *New York Daily News* gossip Lloyd Grove. "I'm talking man-on-man sexuality."

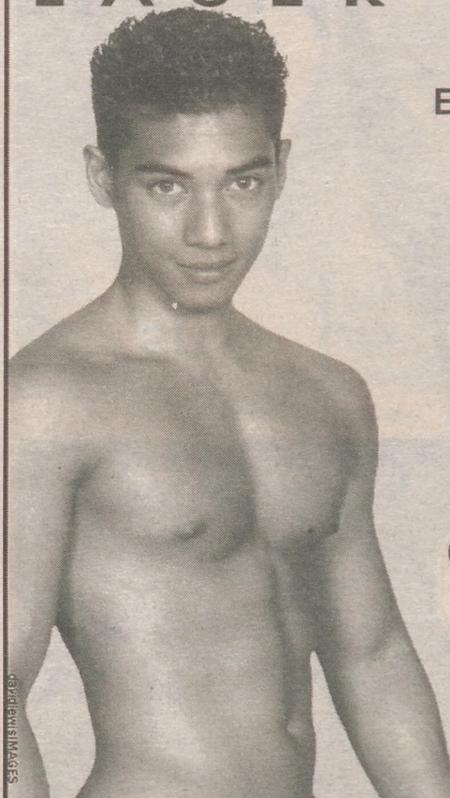
Dish isn't quite sure what Ru is talking about, but is always willing to support a declaration of man-on-man action.



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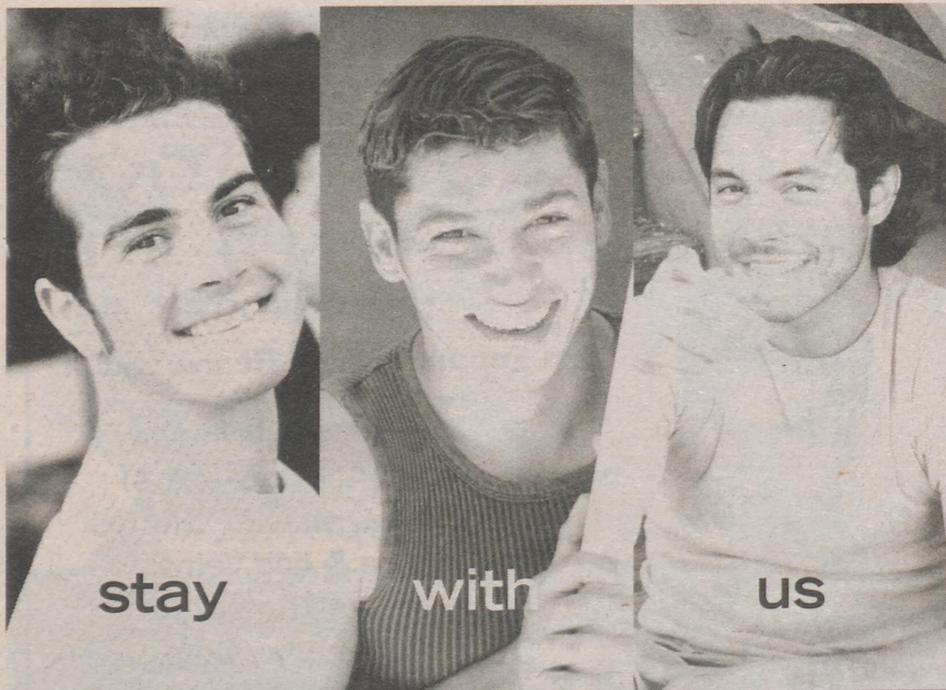
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eclipse cover story

Photos that delve beneath the skin

PHOTOS, continued from Page 13

Potter book till she was in her forties."

Asked about his own age, Rusovich wrinkles up his nose and says, "I really hate that question. Not because I am ashamed of my age, it's just that when someone finds out your age, they have to find a box to put you in. They immediately have a preconceived notion about who you are. My work is about peeling back those layers of what age is, or sexuality or gender."

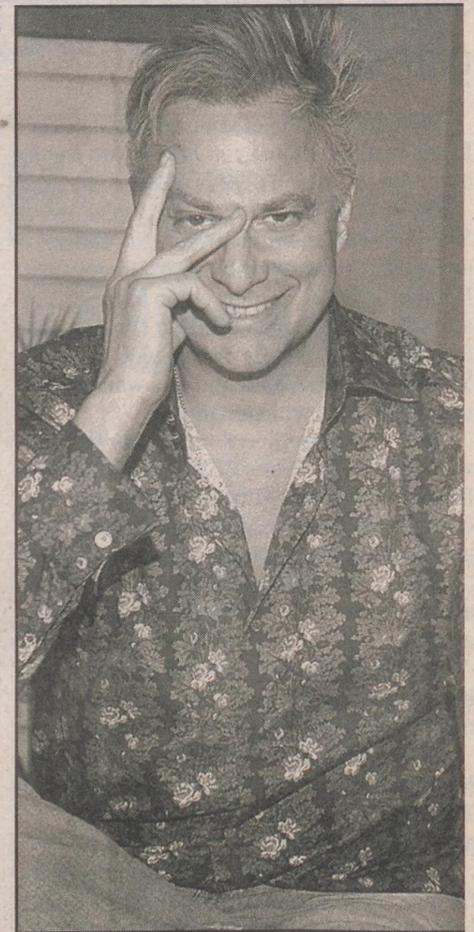
Rusovich is equally non-plussed when asked about his sexual orientation. "I am a sexual being that does not fit into the perceived notions of gay or straight."

His upcoming show is called "Inside Out".

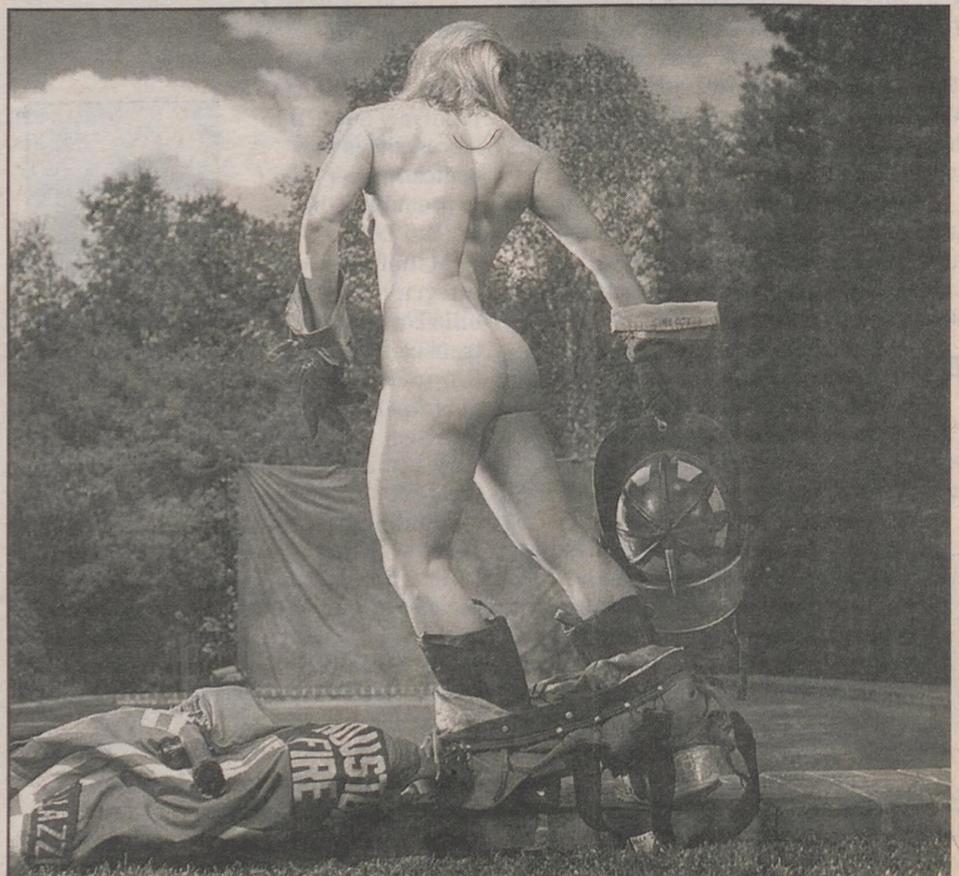
Rusovich's photography challenges the traditional notions of both sexual and social roles in western society and lures the viewer into a world where the reflection may be their own.

"Inside Out" is an "exploration of the inner realities that lurk just beneath the thin and often porous veneer of our cultural 'masks,' masks which distinguish, disguise and protect who we really are."

The exhibit challenges the viewer to accept and embrace the colorful manifestations ignited and fueled by the endless fires of our inner lives. It is a repudiation of social repression and, indeed, a celebration of life as seen from the "Inside Out."



Photographer Jay Rusovich says his works must be viewed from 'inside out.' (Photo by Dalton DeHart)



The photographs in 'Inside Out' are meant to challenge preconceived notions and stereotypes.

arts cover story

Acting wasn't his calling, but theater is his passion

ACTING, continued from Page 1

ater," he said. "I think I was in stage for the first time at, like age five."

Accepted for junior and senior year at Houston School for the Performing and Visual Arts (HSPVA), Luken found his ticket out of Bryan.

"My parents have been so supportive of everything I have ever wanted to do, which is a lot. They're great," Luken said.

He returns to the Bayou City in a role suited to his detail oriented personality.

"I began my theater life as an actor at HSPVA, but I realized soon that was not where my passion was," he recalled. "People were so envious that I was on stage, and I was bored."

Luken said he realized early that he didn't want to make acting his career.

"I'm grateful I learned that before I wasted years of my creative life," he said. "When you're the only one in Bryan who wants to do or knows anything about theater, that's one thing. But PVA is another!"

When asked about his HSPVA years and coming out, Luken giggled and let out a long sigh. "Well, I was actually outed, if that's possible in that utopian setting at HSPVA. I was hanging with a girl, and I told her I liked this guy and she ended up telling people."

The openness he experienced at HSPVA wasn't necessarily ample preparation for the world that existed elsewhere.

A hundred steps back

"That school environment kinda' messed me up because when I left to go to Northwestern University, it was a hundred steps backwards from HSPVA. I expected it to be that many forward," he said.

While at Northwestern, Luken pursued a theater degree but concentrated on behind the scenes activities like stage managing and directing. "But many of my classes were outside of theater, because I wanted to be well educated. Knowledge is my passion."

Luken said he is excited to return to his home away from home, Houston.

"I guess I was last there about two years ago. I still visit the woman who was my surrogate mom when I was a senior at PVA," he said.

Asked whether any of his fellow Broadway gypsies have relayed any information about the new Hobby Center, he said, "Well I know it's state of the art, but for me, once the company arrives in the designated city, my work is done. I am already in pre-production about the next city and the logistics that it requires."

Luken first cut his teeth as stage man-



Scott Luken, assistant company manager for "Les Miserables," said he discovered early that acting was not his calling, but that the theater was his passion. (Photo by Terry Gardener)

ager for the original tour of "Phantom of the Opera"

"Well the ironic thing is that I took the job in San Francisco after I had left show business for a year or so," he recalled. "I thought that might be the only time I could see if there was a professional life for me outside theater. Thank God I realized there wasn't!

He spent five years in San Francisco with "Phantom."

"So I got a big taste of what kind of logistics it takes to stage a mammoth production, even if we were stationary," he said.

Speaking of logistics, the raw numbers for the "Les Miz" touring company are staggering. Eight trailer trucks, barricades weighing nearly 13,000 pounds that hold up the famous 10,000-pound turntable. More than 100 cast and crew members, 150 pair of shoes, 1,000 lightbulbs.

Luken takes pride and makes it sound easy while describing his vital role in the tour.

"It's just in my nature to cross all my T's and dot my I's. Plus, I am touring with one of the greatest musicals ever to be brought to the stage," he said.

"Les Miserables" has won more than 50 major awards internationally, including the 1987 Tony Award for Best Musical. Based on Victor Hugo's classic novel, "Les Miserables" is an epic tale charging through three turbulent decades of 19th century France.

The musical tells the story of one man, the fugitive Jean Valjean, whose lifelong struggle is to evade capture by the cruel police Inspector Javert.

The current production at the Hobby Center is the only touring production in the world of the 16-year-old musical.

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HAVE YOU SEEN TONI?

HUH. NOT IN A WHILE.

HEY, ARE YOU HIDING?

OH, HI, GLORIA. I'M JUST TAKING A LITTLE BREAK.

THIS WAS A GREAT IDEA. IT'S NICE TO SEE CLARICE SO UPBEAT ABOUT THE ELECTION. WHATEVER ANTI-DEPRESSANT SHE'S ON, I COULD USE SOME.

EVEN IF IT MEANT NOT HAVING SEX SINCE THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION?

UH...AND RAFFI'S QUITE THE INSPIRED ORGANIZER.

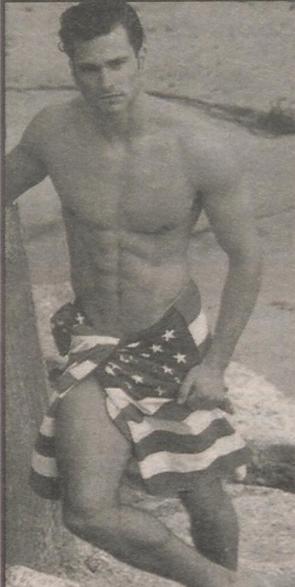
YEAH, HE AND CLARICE ARE REALLY BONDING AROUND ALL THIS. IT'S NICE, BUT A LITTLE LONELY. I MISS THE SPECIAL CONNECTION WE USED TO HAVE.

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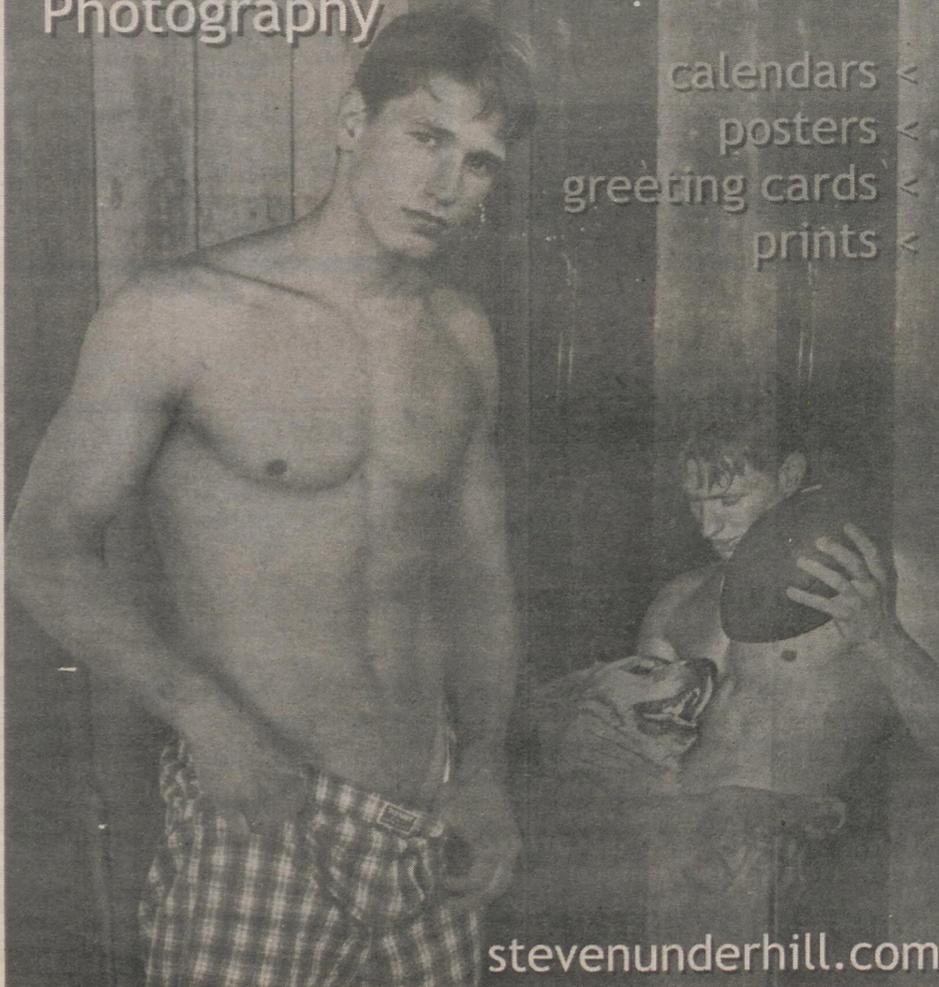


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TO THE FAG WHO WONDERS WHY ALL lezzies are fat and look like men: We wonder why all gay men are effeminate and twinks. Stereotypes suck, don't they?

TO THE BITCH WITH THE DEGREES and financial success: Don't apologize for

your success; just don't wear it on your sleeve like it makes you better than everyone else!

WHY IS IT HAIR CARE AND SKIN care products have to have fragrance added to them? Not every man wants to smell like a goddamn bouquet of flowers.

TO THE SKINNY QUEEN: RUDE isn't asking how much you weigh. It's asking when the funeral is, or how long you've had your crack habit.

GUYS CHASE STRAIGHT MEN INSTEAD of other gays sometimes because they are attracted to masculinity. Too many gay men succumb to becoming queens after they come out.

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH GAY men wanting to look like skinny female

Why do you get upset when people don't want to go to bed with you when you know you're never going to talk to them again if they do?

models? If we found that attractive, we would be dating skinny females. We like muscles! Heck, even some girth. Eat a burger already!

WHY IS IT THAT MEN SEEM TO think their boyfriends will believe anything they say, no matter the evidence?

I AM TIRED OF HAVING TO TELL MY mother that the Human Rights Campaign sticker on my car means I support more math education in our schools.

TO "A-LIST" GUYS: WHO DECIDED you made the list? A lot of us are better looking, have better jobs, and are more educated.

FOR ALL THOSE OUT THERE WHO think all lesbians sleep with each other.

Well honey, here is a fresh piece of ass that has not been tampered with and is in its early 30s.

OK, LET'S PUT NA END TO THIS. THE folk etymology that "drag" comes from the sensation of actor's skirts dragging on the ground is cute, but it doesn't explain why Yiddish, Dutch, German, etc., have related words? "Drag" is just an obsolete word that means "costume" or "clothing" that survived in a special situation.

WHAT? YOU SAY IT'S NOT GAY TO wear boxers? Why didn't I get the memo? It used to be gay to wear boxers. But then the heteros started pulling them on.

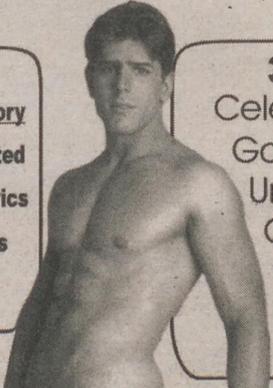
TO THE SLACK_JAWED BRAWNY tiger: So the fact that I am college educated and wear a tie is a turn-off? Size matters. So what's got your panties in a bunch? The size of my brain or the size of my paycheck?

IT SEEMS LIKE THE DOMINANT GAY male culture celebrates the coldest qualities of manliness: obsession with physical size and strength, narcissism, callousness, constant one-upmanship. Does "butching yourself up" have to mean losing all sensitivity and compassion?

Editors' note: These are real bitches, sent in by real readers, about gay life's little annoyances, and the big ones, too. Got a bitch? Call 1-800-858-8088 or e-mail: bitch@expressgaynews.com



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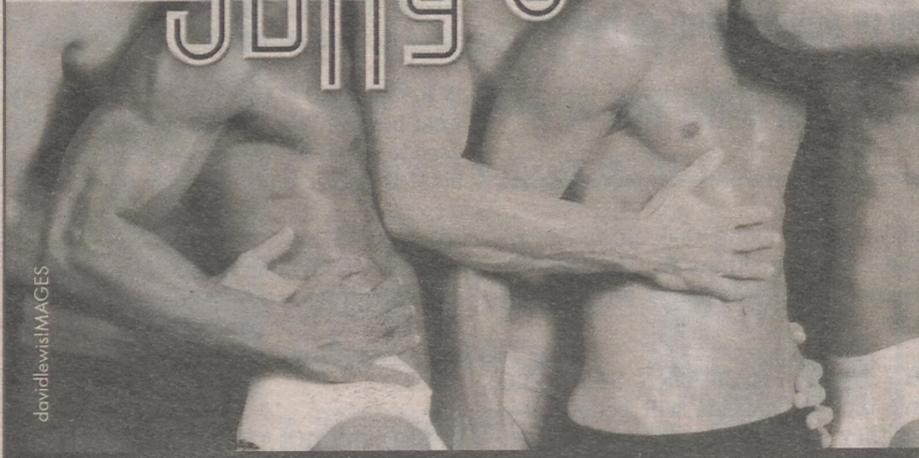
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