



Keeping the faith
Rev. Troy Perry, the founder of MCC, will retire soon but says he will stay active.
Page 12

FAILED SESSION: Lawmakers made marriage a priority. Page 3



IRAN PROTESTS: Executions denounced worldwide. Page 6



GAY CHAMBER: Government contract questioned. Page 7



Gay Iraqi laments life after invasion

Americans form gay support group in Baghdad

By EARTHA JANE MELZER

As the drafters of the new Iraqi constitution debate the role of religious law, Salam Pax, the gay Iraqi blogger who became internationally known through his postings about life in Iraq during the war, told the Blade that conditions have worsened for gays in the country since the United States invaded.

Salam said that gays in Iraq have no rights and are seen as, "lower in status than sewer rats."

An architect by training, Salam worked as a translator for an American journalist during the war. He began his blog to keep in touch with his friend, who had moved to Jordan to pursue a master's degree. After gaining international fame as a writer, he covered the 2004 U.S. presidential election for the British Guardian newspaper. But since then, his voice has not been heard much on the Internet.

"Being ignored and not acknowledged is for me much better than being actively persecuted by a religiously zealous government," he said.

"The previous regime [of Saddam Hussein] didn't actively persecute gay men, and we never got to the point where men were hanged like in Iran, but if you got accused of engaging in homosexual acts then [you could] get something like five months in prison which, as we know, is never going to be a pleasant thing in Iraq."

Please see **IRAQI** on Page 7



Salam Pax, a gay Iraqi blogger, said gay men and lesbians have no rights in Iraq as religious extremists vie to codify religious law in the new constitution. (Photo by Fred Ernst/AP)



Mark Jordan, a religion professor at Emory University, said he hopes Catholics in New Orleans will worship at the Metropolitan Community Church to protest the church getting kicked out of a Catholic AIDS facility. (Photo by John Roux /Emory University)

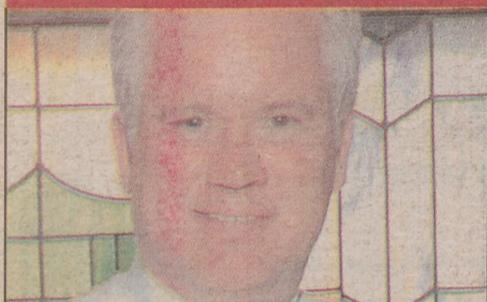
Gay church booted from AIDS hospice

MCC New Orleans has been handed a 90-day eviction notice for its stance on same-sex marriage

By DYANA BAGBY

A predominately gay New Orleans church is being kicked out of a Catholic HIV/AIDS residential facility after the Catholic

Please see **MCC** on Page 4



Local life
Ron Beagle may know more than anyone the power of the Internet
PAGE 8

dish
Ellen DeGeneres is back as the host of the Primetime Emmy awards Sept. 18.
PAGE 18



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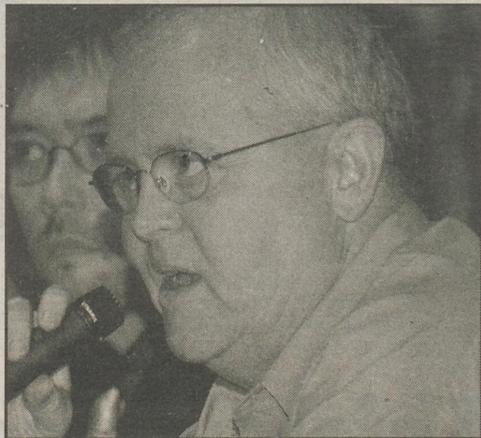
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local news briefs

Glen Maxey 'appalled' that legislators put gay marriage before school

As the Texas Legislature prepares to end its second special session to address education finance reform, Glen Maxey, director of the No Nonsense In November campaign opposing the constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage and civil unions, this week blasted the Legislature's inability to solve school finance. "As a former legislator, I am appalled that, in three tries, legislators couldn't come together on something as important as Texas school children, but found a way to come together on the marriage Constitutional Amendment that would write discrimination against some Texas families into the Texas Bill of Rights," Maxey said. At the beginning of the legislative session, Gov. Rick Perry said solving the problem of school finance was the group's top priority. Perry called two special sessions, but legislators still have not passed a funding bill for Texas schools, even though they spent weeks on a proposed constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage.



Glen Maxey, director of the No Nonsense campaign to oppose the November referendum on same-sex marriage, says he's appalled at what the Texas legislature did not get done. (Photo by Dalton DeHart)

John Kellett is guest speaker for this month's Sunday History Series

Philanthropist John Kellett is the guest speaker for the Sunday History Series on Sunday, August 21, at 4 p.m., at the Houston GLBT Community Center. The program is presented by the Gulf Coast Archive and Museum of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender History (GCAM) and the community center. Each program of the quarterly series features a well-known individual who participates in a moderated discussion about his or her life and their personal part in helping make the gay and lesbian history of Houston. Jimmy Carper, GCAM vice chair and producer/host of the weekly "After Hours" radio program on KPFT-FM, moderates. There is no admission charge for the program, but donations to GCAM are welcome. The Houston GLBT Community Center is located at 3400 Montrose Blvd., Suite 207. GCAM, located at 1609 W. Main, Number 4, displays some objects from its 30,000-piece collection at the community center.

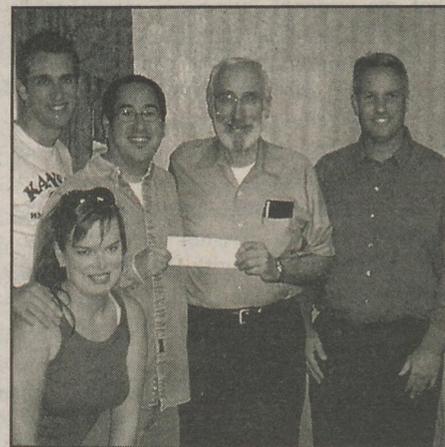
Training sessions for gay switchboard to be offered over three weekends

In an attempt to lure more volunteers, the Houston Gay and Lesbian Switchboard will offer its training sessions over three weekends rather than during the week. Sessions are scheduled to begin Saturday, August 28 and continue August 29, Sept. 10 and 11 and Sept. 17 and 18. "We're hoping that by having the training sessions on the weekend, more people will be able to fit it into their schedule," said the center's Community Projects Specialist Sally Huffer. "The trainings cover a lot of territory because you never know what the person at the other end of the phone is calling about." Although the majority of calls are from individuals who are not in crisis and who are inquiring about services in Houston, Huffer said, switchboard volun-

teers are trained to be ready for callers who are in distress. Volunteer applications are available at www.gayswitchboardhouston.org.

Lone Star Volleyball Association awards \$6,000 to AVES

With proceeds from the 2005 Lone Star Volleyball Classic, the Lone Star Volleyball Association (LSVA) recently presented a check for \$6,000 to AVES, an HIV agency providing HIV education and services to Hispanics and other underserved populations living in Houston. "AVES is grateful to the LSVA for naming us as the beneficiary of their 2005 tournament," said AVES CEO Terrence O'Neill. "This event has become one of the major sports events in



Members of the Lone Star Volleyball Association presented a check for \$6,000 to Rev. Ralph Lasher (center) for AVES, its 2005 beneficiary.

the Houston GLBT community, and we are proud to be associated with them." The LSVA operates three divisions of play from the beginning of February through the end of November. Leagues from throughout the United States gather in Houston to compete each year. The LSVA selects a non-profit organization to benefit from the proceeds raised by the event.

From staff and wire reports

local news

Lawyer who killed partner will not receive insurance

Jury ruled that Mark Swaim willfully killed Keith Hodgson and should not benefit

By ELLA TYLER

A jury in Harris County has ruled that a Houston attorney who shot his partner to death should not collect life insurance benefits.

On Feb. 7, 2003, Keith Hodgson was shot and killed by his partner, Mark Swaim. Swaim claimed the shooting was in self-defense, and a criminal jury acquitted him of murder charges.

Both Swaim and Christine and Amuel Hodgson, parents of the dead man, made claim to the \$500,000 in life insurance benefits.

Although the civil jury in May found that Swaim willfully killed Hodgson and could not collect the benefits, his lawyer filed a motion for new trial and threatened an appeal. The judge denied the motion for new trial and last week's deadline to file an appeal passed with no appeal filed.

The Hodgson's attorney, Joe Stephens, said the civil trial was so traumatic for the Hodgsons that they could not sit in the courtroom throughout the nine-day proceedings.

"They sat outside on the benches because they could not stand to be in the same room as Swaim," he said. "And," Stephens continued, "the case centered on blood spatter analysis, so it was pretty gory."

Swaim, a 42-year-old lawyer, and Hodgson, a 37-year-old hairdresser, had lived together for about ten years when they met 18-year-old Adam Liotta in a bar.

Swaim testified that they took in Liotta because he was homeless and had recently been discharged from a rehabilitation center. They re-enrolled him in high school. Swaim shot Hodgson about two months after Liotta moved in.

Swaim claimed that he shot Hodgson because he came downstairs and found Hodgson beating Liotta for refusing to have sex. He testified that Hodgson was abusing steroids and had thrown Liotta out of the house the week before. Swaim also claimed that Hodgson had injured their dog.

Hodgson's parents claimed that Swaim and Liotta became close and excluded Hodgson and hatched a plan to kill him. The Hodgsons claimed that Swaim had no clients, had lavish tastes and was heavily in debt and

killed their son for his life insurance and his estate.

The Hodgsons also alleged their son was a material witness holding damaging information against Swaim in a lawsuit that accused him of fraud.

Testimony alleged that a week before Hodgson was killed, Swaim and Liotta hatched the plot to kill Hodgson for the insurance money while sitting in their hot tub.

The Hodgsons claimed that Swaim called the hair salon that Hodgson owned and told him that a bill collector was trying to repossess a piano. The repossession company brought records to court that proved it had not been there that day. His parents alleged that Swaim had lured Hodgson home to murder him.

According to Stevens, the police did not believe that Swaim shot Hodgson to stop a violent altercation, partly because they would have expected more evidence of physical disturbance if a fight had broken out with Hodgson brutally beating and kicking Liotta throughout the home.

Liotta had only minor scratches and abrasions, and he did not seek medical attention. He did not have a bloody lip, although he claimed he was beaten and kicked in the head.

Stevens said, "Swaim claimed that Hodgson lunged forward at the time of at the time of the shot, but his body was found lying away from Swaim. Tom Bevel, a renowned blood spatter expert who has taught Houston homicide officers, testified that Swaim's story did not match blood spatter evidence at the scene."

"There was no blood found on the gun, nor was there any evidence of fingerprints on the gun, and the police only found three gloves in the house," Stevens added.

Stevens said he believes that the different results in the civil case and the criminal case revolve around reasonable doubt and the handling of the testimony about the forensic evidence.

"One of the things that hurt my clients the most was Swaim's lawyer's suggestion that they didn't attend the (criminal) trial because they were ashamed of their son," Stevens said. "They are from East Texas and don't approve of homosexuals, but they loved their son very much and talked to him all the time. He brought his friends to see them and he and Swaim had visited them at Thanksgiving."

Although Swaim received the benefits of a \$100,000 insurance policy that paid without question, he has filed for bankruptcy, preventing any wrongful death claims by the Hodgsons. He and Liotta still live together and share a joint banking account, according to evidence presented.



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This courtyard garden area was donated by The Rosie O'Donnell Show in 1998 when Ann Rice named Lazarus House as her favorite charity.

Enforcing its doctrine

MCC, continued from Page 1

Archdiocese learned members of the church support same-sex marriage.

The Metropolitan Community Church of Greater New Orleans was told Aug. 4 it had 90 days to vacate its temporary space at the Project Lazarus complex, a Marigny AIDS hospice that is overseen by the Catholic Church.

The MCC and the Catholic Church entered into a one-year lease agreement on May 15 for the gay church to worship at the Catholic facility. But according to an archdiocese spokesperson, after the contract was signed and more inquiries were made into the MCC, the Catholic Church learned of its stance in support of same-sex marriage and decided to terminate the contract.

"We do not want to give the impression that we support [same-sex marriage]," Father William Maestri said.

"My understanding is that [the lease contractors] did not know about MCC's support of same-sex marriage until later," he said. "And we do not support [the MCC's] teachings."

Rev. Dexter Brecht, pastor of the 45-member MCC of Greater New Orleans, said he and officials with Project Lazarus had no conflict, but the archdiocese said it was "inappropriate" for the MCC to worship on its property.

"Those with Project Lazarus are personally open, but the archdiocese owns the property. It didn't dawn on me the archdiocese might step in," Brecht said.

'You'll bury us, but you won't marry us'

Rev. Troy Perry, the outgoing moderator of Metropolitan Community Churches, the parent denomination of the New Orleans church, issued a written

statement criticizing the decision.

"I am saddened that the archdiocese is expelling the rent-paying, lease-holding congregation, not from a church building, but from an AIDS hospice," Perry said.

"They are sending a clear message to people with HIV that the Roman Catholic Church welcomes you as a sick or dying person, but not as a living, loving person.

"We've grown weary of a church that will condescend to bury us but not have the simple courtesy to marry us," he said.

Maestri stressed that a clause in the lease agreement allowing either party to back out within 90 days was requested by the MCC, and added that although the Catholic Church does not support same-sex marriage, it is not homophobic.

"I don't know how we are being presented as homophobic when in fact Project Lazarus was the first facility to care for HIV patients in New Orleans. And we never ask how anyone contracts AIDS," Maestri said. "How that is homophobic, I just don't quite understand it."

Brecht disagreed with Maestri's reasoning.

"He can call it whatever he wants to, but the bottom line is he's enforcing official doctrine that says homosexuality is inherently wrong. If that's not homophobia, I don't know what is," Brecht said.

Mark Jordan, a religion professor at Emory University and author of "The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism," said the New Orleans Catholic leaders are simply parroting what they are told to say by the church's hierarchy.

Jordan called current Catholic teachings against homosexuality "loud and severe" and encouraged Catholics in New Orleans to worship at the MCC on Sunday to protest the "official injustice" from the archdiocese.

"The reasonable thing — not to say, the Christian thing — would be to continue the lease as an ecumenical gesture while repeating gently that a lease doesn't imply an endorsement," Jordan said. "Of course, the more Christian thing would be for the archdiocese to repent of the sin of persecuting queer people."

MORE INFO

Project Lazarus House
www.lazarushouse.net

national news briefs

Former Republican mayor named to head GLAAD

NEW YORK — Neil G. Giuliano, former Republican mayor of Tempe, Ariz., was named president of the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), the nation's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender media advocacy organization. "I understand firsthand how important it is to ensure that our stories are being told through the media in every corner of this country," said Giuliano in a statement. Chris Bugbee, director of public relations for GLAAD, said that Giuliano is uniquely qualified to reach out to different communities and build diverse coalitions. "He struck me and the search committee as someone who sees a bigger picture, who understands the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans folks not just through a political lens or through a media lens but also very personally," said Kate Kendell, executive director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights. Kendell served on the GLAAD search committee. When asked if it was unusual for a Republican to lead a gay rights group, Kendell said that some might see it that way but added, "I think his political party identity is less important than his political world view. His political world view is certainly one that values difference, values consensus, values justice. Those values became much more important than his stated political affiliation." When Giuliano was mayor of Tempe the city won the "Best America City" award by the National Civic League in June 2003. He also worked as Director for Community Relations at Arizona State University and, last year, he was co-chair of the final 2004 presidential debate. In 2001 he survived a mayoral recall campaign that many viewed as anti-gay. The campaign began after the Tempe city manager recommended that they change their United Way campaign for city employees so that contributions could only be directed to charities that comply with Tempe's non-discrimination policy, which includes sexual orientation. Giuliano's opponents saw this as part of his "gay agenda," according to media reports. During the recall campaign, the mayor's office received anti-gay mail, phone calls, e-mails and even death threats. Giuliano succeeds Joan M. Garry, who stepped down in June after eight years in the position. He will take over at GLAAD on Sept. 1.



Former Arizona mayor Neil G. Giuliano was named president of the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation this week. GLAAD acts as a media watchdog, monitoring how gay men and lesbians are portrayed in popular entertainment and news coverage.

Closeted man wins \$270,000 after radio show identifies him as gay

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A San Francisco man who says he was devastated after he was identified as gay on a national Spanish-language radio show will be paid \$270,000 by Univision Radio, an arbitrator has ruled. Roberto Hernandez, 45, was driving to work in 2002 when he received a phone call from a man who said that he met Hernandez at a San Francisco gay bar. The caller then announced that the conversation was being broadcast live on the "Raul Brindis & Pepito Show," based in Houston. Hernandez worked for the local station that broadcast the show. He said he was so depressed by the incident that he could no longer work. Hernandez had been secretive about being gay before the incident, not telling his family. Arbitrator Rebecca Westerfield found last week that Hernandez suffered emotional distress but dismissed claims of sexual harassment.

Bullied teen who sued Kansas school district wins \$250,000

KANSAS CITY, Kan. (AP) — A Kansas teenager was awarded \$250,000 last week in his federal lawsuit claiming that he was so badly bullied by classmates that he quit school. Dylan Theno, now 18, claimed Tonganoxie school district officials knew about the taunting and did nothing to stop it. The district said it dealt with all the incidents Theno reported, noting that the harassment stopped before Theno dropped out. He has since earned a GED and plans to enroll in community college this fall. The lawsuit, heard in U.S. District Court in Kansas City, Kan., sought \$700,000. Theno

claimed the harassment deprived him of an education. Theno's attorney, Arthur Benson, said he is unaware of any other verdicts in same-sex, student-on-student harassment cases in federal court won by a student. The lawsuit was filed under Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972. The verdict is important, Benson said, in that the law has been used mainly to curb discrimination in athletics programs on the basis of gender.

Gay victims to speak at bomber's sentencing

ATLANTA — The owners of an Atlanta gay bar targeted by a serial bomber said this week they plan to be in court Aug. 22 to confront Eric Rudolph when he is officially sentenced for a string of attacks that shook Atlanta in the late 1990s. "We're looking forward to speaking to this guy," said Bev McMahon, who owned the Otherside Lounge with her life partner, Dana Ford, when it was bombed by Rudolph on Feb. 21, 1997. McMahon said federal officials would not allow her to disclose what she planned to say. In April, Rudolph pleaded guilty in federal courts in Atlanta and Birmingham to four bombings that killed two people and injured more than 100: the attack on Atlanta's Centennial Olympic Park in July 1996; the January 1997 bombing of an Atlanta abortion clinic; the bombing of the Otherside Lounge, McMahon and Ford's now-defunct gay bar, a month later; and the January 1998 bombing of a Birmingham abortion clinic. Rudolph will also have the opportunity to speak when he is sentenced for the bombings.

From staff and wire reports

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national news

Poll: support for same-sex unions increases

By EARTHA JANE MELZER

The latest Pew Research Center poll on same-sex marriage shows 36 percent of Americans favor allowing same-sex couples to marry and 53 percent support legal recognition that would offer gay couples many of the same rights and responsibilities as married straight couples.

The numbers represent a 4 percent increase among those who support full marriage rights for gays and a 6 percent jump among those who back some form of legal recognition of same-sex relationships since the last poll was taken in December 2004.

In a statement celebrating the poll, Evan Wolfson, executive director of Freedom to Marry, a group working for marriage equality, said that a year of legal marriage in Massachusetts has demonstrated to many that ending marriage discrimination helps gays and harms no one.

"This is exactly what the right wing is afraid of," Wolfson said. "If we stick with the conversation and persist in engaging the non-gay public on marriage equality, the public will move to fairness."

In a sign that support for a federal marriage amendment may no longer be seen as politically advantageous, Rep. Marilyn Musgrave (R-Colo.), told the Associated Press last week that she is putting her work on the marriage amendment on hold

as states and the courts battle over the issue at the state level.

Musgrave, who is beginning a re-election campaign, was the original sponsor of the marriage amendment in the House last year. The AP reported that the GOP has rated Musgrave as one of the 10 most vulnerable Republicans in the country. Musgrave said that gay rights activists and other groups spent \$2.5 million on television advertising attacking her during her last campaign.

Calif. marriage bill alive

In California, the issue of marriage equality is being dealt with in the courts, in the legislature and by ballot initiative.

Earlier this month the California Supreme Court decided not to hear an expedited appeal of a lower court ruling that the state's marriage law is unconstitutional because it discriminates against gays. The appeal will instead make its way through the appellate court and could much longer to resolve.

Geoffrey Kors, executive director of Equality California, a statewide gay civil rights organization, said that Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and some legislators had stated that they would wait to see how the courts handled the issue before taking a position on marriage equality.

The Religious Freedom & Civil Marriage Protection Act, which would

have legalized same-sex marriage was defeated in the Assembly earlier this year. Last week the bill was introduced in the Senate for the first time, and Kors said he believes it has a strong chance of passing.

"Most of the Assembly members who have strong records on gay issues but did not vote on the bill last time around are running for Senate," Kors said.

"If they see that their colleagues in the Senate have passed the bill, this could give them comfort and build momentum toward passage of the bill."

"In races where this has become an issue, every candidate who supported marriage equality won," Kors said.

Ballot initiatives are pending on two amendments to repeal domestic partner benefits and ban same-sex marriage. A vote on one or both of these amendments could take place as soon as June of 2006.

In Oregon, bills that would have established civil unions and prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation, died earlier this month.

Though supporters of the bills were certain there were enough votes for passage, House Speaker Karen Minnis (R-Wood Village) prevented the measure from coming to a vote through a series of unusual parliamentary moves.

Because the Oregon Legislature meets every other year, the earliest the measure

could be reintroduced is 2007.

"I think there are a number of people who are disgusted and angered and outraged that one person can interfere with democratic process in such a way," said Rebekah Kassell, of Basic Rights Oregon, which was the major organizer of the campaign for the legislation.

"The community in general is encouraged by the fact that this was the most massive lobbying effort in our history and there was a level of seriousness, visibility and discussion around the issues that has never taken place before," Kassell said.

The effort to enact civil unions and anti-discrimination legislation in Oregon was a response to last year's passage of an amendment banning gay marriage rights. The marriage amendment is also being challenged in court.

ACLU sues Tennessee

In Tennessee, the American Civil Liberties Union and the Tennessee Equality Project are suing the state, claiming that it failed to give adequate public notice before approving the language of a proposed marriage amendment.

More than 90 lawmakers in Tennessee have voluntarily joined the suit to defend the state's actions. The lawmakers are represented by the Alliance Defense Fund, a religious legal group.

Iranian executions spark new protests

By ELIZABETH WEILL-GREENBERG

WASHINGTON — Protests persist against the executions of two teenagers in Iran, as condemnations broaden to include the use of the death penalty against children.

In mid-July photos of two Iranian teenagers awaiting execution, Ayaz Marhoni and Mahomoud Asgari, surfaced on the Internet. Gay rights groups Outrage and the Human Rights Campaign quickly condemned the executions and claimed the boys were killed for being gay. HRC urged the State Department to investigate the murders.

However, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the International Gay & Lesbian Human Rights Commission, were not able to find evidence corroborating the claims the boys were killed for being gay. Instead, their research had uncovered, to that point, that the boys were charged with and executed for sexually assaulting a 13-year old boy at knifepoint. Scott Long, director of Human Rights Watch's gay, program, said they based their findings on journalists and human rights workers in Iran.

Gay rights groups and human rights organizations continue to sift through conflicting accounts of the executions, trying to distinguish amongst myth, rumor and fact. It appears that reports claiming the boys were executed for being gay originated, in part, with incorrect English translations of an Iranian Student News Agency report.

Outrage, a British gay rights group main-

tains it is likely the boys were executed for being gay.

Afdhere Jama, the editor of Huriyah, a U.S. based magazine for gay Muslims, claims he has information from anonymous sources inside Iran who say the boys were lovers and that was the reason for the execution. He said the Voice could not speak with his sources and he could not identify them by their true names because it would endanger their lives.

Long said that Human Rights Watch is looking into Jama's claims and hopes to speak directly with his sources.

"We're waiting to get information we can actually check out," Long said.

Ghaemi added: "As long as those witnesses are not available, that dimension remains from his point of view."

HRW is also investigating rumors that two Iranian men will be executed for homosexuality at the end of August, Long said.

"The information [on the new executions] comes from an Iranian group in Europe," wrote Ghaemi in an e-mail to the Blade. "I have talked to them and they refuse to discuss any details of who their sources inside Iran are or to put me in contact with them. I have asked my own contacts in Iran to see if they can find any information on it."

Doug Ireland, a widely respected journalist who has been following both cases closely, says it is likely the rape charges against Marhoni and Asgari were trumped up.

"The Iranian scholars I have spoken to

have been skeptical to a huge degree of the rape charge," Ireland said in a telephone interview. "There is a history of inventing charges to fit the regime's agenda."

In addition to conversations with Iranian scholars and exiles, Ireland said he has corresponded with the editor of an underground gay Iranian magazine, who asked Ireland not to disclose his identity or the name of his publication to protect his safety.

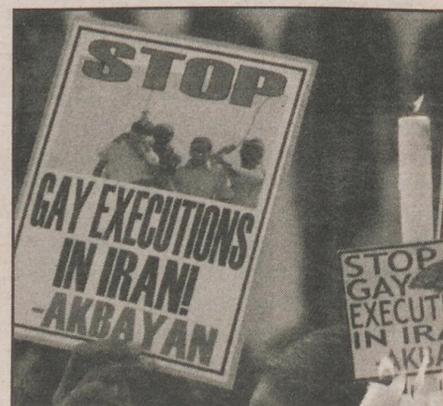
"In the wake of the story about the hanging of the two teens going global the atmosphere of anti-gay repression and surveillance has considerably heightened in Iran," said Ireland. As investigations continue, protests were staged last week in London, San Francisco and Paris to condemn the executions of the boys and, more broadly,

Iran's lethal criminalization of homosexuality. In Iran, homosexual intercourse between two men is punishable by death and homosexual acts that do not involve intercourse are punishable by 100 lashes, according to Ghaemi.

San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom said in a statement that he was "outraged and appalled" that Iran executed two boys for their "alleged sexual orientation."

In light of the executions, the Netherlands and Sweden have stopped sending gay asylum seekers back to Iran.

State Department spokesperson Noel Clay told the Voice that they were not planning to issue a statement condemning the hangings



The executions of two gay teens in Iran last month set off international protests, including this one in Manila, Philippines. Many protesters are calling for a worldwide ban on using the death penalty on non-adults. (Photo by Bullit Marquez/AP)

because the circumstances are unknown. When asked if the department would condemn the executions because one of the boys was a minor when the alleged crime was committed, Clay refused to answer.

Whatever the reasons for the teenagers' execution, many have noted, their state sanctioned murder highlights Iran's human rights record. However, many have said that the international outrage on Iran's treatment of gays applies a double standard to Western and Muslim countries.

"We simply cannot be asking the world to point a flashlight on the recent executions in Iran, for example, and not be willing to put our own western countries under the same scrutiny," wrote Kim Vance in an editorial for Xtra!, a Canadian magazine about gay issues.

national news

State Dep't OKs gay group at Baghdad embassy

IRAQI, continued from Page 1

Criminalizing homosexuality?

Shiite religious groups have come to play a far more prominent role in Iraq since the fall of Saddam Hussein's secular dictatorship.

"There is now a real struggle to keep the demands of the religious extremists in check, to make sure that Iraqis are not denied basic human rights in the name of abiding to religious laws," Salam said. "It is way too early for us to even think about gay rights. I want to make sure I will have the right to shave my beard and wear a tie if I want to."

Juan Cole, a University of Michigan history professor who has been following

the development of the new Iraqi constitution on his blog "Informed Comment" confirmed Salam's concerns.

"I very much doubt the constitution will give rights to gays," Cole said via e-mail. "If it enshrines Islamic law, in fact, being gay could be a capital crime."

There are no political support groups for gays and no political party sees any benefit in mentioning gays in a positive or negative way, Salam said. Public discussion of gay issues is generally limited to discussion in the newspapers of how disgusting gays are and what type of punishment is appropriate for gay behavior.

The only group that has voiced an opinion about gay rights for Iraqis, Salam said, is the Organization for Women's Freedom in Iraq, which is affiliated with the Iraqi Worker's Socialist Party, "and they have never mentioned this inside Iraq because as progressive as they are in demanding women's rights, they know that supporting same-sex relationships is a bit too progressive."

Many high-level members of the government are eager to have religious law enshrined in the new constitution, said Farida Deif, researcher for the women's rights division of Human Rights Watch said.

Everywhere that conservative religious law has been written into a constitution, Deif added, it has codified inequality and discrimination.

"The question is, is Islamic law going to be a source of legislation or is it going to be the source of legislation," Deif said.

Since the adoption of the Code of Personal Status in 1959, Iraq's family-law has been fairly secular, Deif said.

Zaid A. Zaid, a gay American, worked in Iraq as a liaison between the Coalition Provisional Authority and the Iraqi Governing Council between February and April of last year. Zaid said that his experience as an openly gay man in Iraq was a positive one.

Zaid said inside the Green Zone, the three square mile area guarded by American troops, he encountered other openly gay government workers, closeted U.S. service members and National Guard troops, and closeted gay civilians who had previously worked for Republicans in Washington.

Working in the Green Zone is stressful, Zaid said, with most people working 13 or 14-hour days and nothing to do but sleep during down time.

"It's not like there were many opportunities for dating or anything else."



ON THE WEB

Salam Pax's blog
http://dear_raed.blogspot.com

Gay group for Baghdad Embassy

Those who deal with issues relating to being gay or lesbian while working with the embassy in Baghdad now have a new resource to help them.

According to the August newsletter of Gays & Lesbians In Foreign Affairs Agencies, the gay and lesbian employees of Embassy Baghdad have formed a support group.

The GLIFAA newsletter reports that agent Tim Lunardi initially approached post management about supporting June Pride events within the embassy community.

"Unfortunately, post [management] decided not to support Pride events, due to management's desire not to disturb State's relationship with military colleagues by raising such an 'emotional' issue," he said.

A subsequent request by Lunardi to create and advertise a gay and lesbian support group did win approval, the GLIFAA newsletter reports, and the group held its first meeting July 30.

i MORE INFO

U.S. Embassy in Baghdad
Mailing address:
APO/FPO: APO AE 09316

Gays & Lesbians in Foreign Affairs Agencies
P.O. Box 18774
Washington, DC 20036-8774
GLIFAA@hotmail.com
www.glifaa.org

Anti-gay group questions gay chamber contract

Perkins calls Interior Dep't agreement illegal

By ELIZABETH WEILL-GREENBERG

Tony Perkins, president of the anti-gay Family Research Council, slammed an agreement between the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce and the Department of the Interior as illegal, and urged Congress and President Bush to intervene.

In June, the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce entered into an agreement with the Department of the Interior Office of Small & Disadvantaged Business Utilization to increase outreach to gay-owned businesses and to educate gay business owners about contract opportunities.

On the Family Research Council's Web site, Perkins wrote in his Washington Update on Aug. 5 under the heading "Interior Patronage," that the agreement means that gay-owned businesses would receive "preferential treatment" and allow "special access to over \$2 million in Interior contracts, money earmarked for small and disadvantaged businesses."

He continued, "[T]here is no basis whatsoever in federal law for such special treatment by the Department of the Interior."

But Perkins' understanding of the agreement is flawed, according to an official from the gay chamber.

"It's obvious [Perkins] hasn't read the Memorandum of Understanding nor has he read the Small Business Act," said Justin Nelson, co-founder and executive director of the NGLCC. "We're all entitled to our own opinions, not our own facts."

The Memorandum of Understanding, or MOU, between the Department of the Interior and the NGLCC only promises outreach and education to gay-owned businesses, he clarified.

"Perkins has decided to make up the facts to fit his bigoted needs," Nelson said. "Even the harshest of our critics understand this is a business issue."

Over the past five years, the department has created 14 national agreements like the one with the NGLCC with other chambers, like the U.S. Pan-Asian American Chamber and the U.S. Black Chamber of Commerce, according to Bob Faithful, director of the Office of Small & Disadvantaged Business Utilization at the Department of the Interior.

The agreement with the NGLCC also lists the laws and executive orders governing such a memo, such as the Small Business Act of 1958 and the Executive Order 13170 from October 2000, called Increasing Opportunities and Access for Disadvantaged Businesses.

"We are the very small businesses mentioned in the Small Business Act," Nelson said.

Nelson said that Perkins' attack shows that bigotry is at the heart of his talk about family values. The NGLCC has invited the Family Research Council to a public forum



Family Research Council President **Tony Perkins**, an opponent of gay rights, contested an agreement between the Department of the Interior and the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce.

to discuss the agreement but the Council has not responded, he said. The Family Research Council was asked to respond numerous times but did not do so.

"Perkins doesn't even want us educated about opportunities," Nelson said. "That's equal opportunity, not preferential treatment."

Letters protest gay deal

The Department of the Interior has been flooded with letters from the Family

Research Council mailing list, according to Nelson, who says he is concerned about Perkins' influence. Officials at the Department of the Interior were not available for comment.

Just last Sunday, the Family Research Council played host to Justice Sunday II, a televised event to celebrate and propagate conservative, religious policies. The event boasted support from House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Texas) and former Sen. Zell Miller (D-Ga.). Nelson urged supporters to contact the Family Research Council to protest Perkins' comments.

FRC opposes ENDA

The Family Research Council opposes the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, which would bar workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation at the federal level. According to the Family Research Council, employers should have the option to fire a person simply because he or she is gay.

"Giving sexual orientation this status would infringe upon employers' rights of conscience, religion, speech, and association," according to the Family Research Council Web site.

Nelson said he hopes middle America will see through the Family Research Council's claim that it is only interested in protecting "traditional marriage."

"They're about total marginalization [and] invisibility of gays and lesbians," Nelson said. "People should be concerned ... If he's allowed to get away with this for gay businesses, who next?"

Ron Beagle knows the power the Internet holds

Web surfing made easy

By DAWN RORIE

If today's world had a motto, it might be "faster, better, quicker, more." Everything is uploadable, upgraded, smaller, sleeker, wireless, and most importantly, instantaneous.

No one knows that better than Ron Beagle. As president of Rockport Solutions, his goal is to help businesses succeed online in today's fast-paced environment.

Because the Internet is an indispensable tool for acquiring news, receiving and sending information and doing business these days, a Web site is a must for many companies.

For the past three years, Rockport Solutions has been helping a variety of companies and organizations establish a stronger presence on the Internet. Rockport is responsible for the Web sites of a number of gay businesses and entities, including Camp Camp, the New England summer camp for adult gays and lesbians (www.camccamp.com).

"A Web site is a second business location," Beagle explains. While most people think of a Web site as an online "brochure" that looks nice and has information about their organization, a Rockport Solutions-designed Web site goes far beyond the "brochure" concept.

Design and navigation are important aspects of a successful Web site, Beagle says. Rockport Solutions designs visually pleasing, user-friendly Web sites that allow a visitor to go anywhere on the site with just one or two clicks.

Also important, Beagle says, is a Web surfer's ability to find a Web site when using a search engine such as Google or Yahoo. Through expert programming and search engine optimization and marketing, a Web site designer should be able to ensure that clients' Web sites are quickly located by potential customers.

Beagle first saw the potential for success in Web site design almost eight years ago before the Internet, cell phones, and Paris Hilton gossip were staples of everyday life. While he was vice president of sales and marketing of NPL Digital Graphics, the company hired a Web site designer and sold their first Web site. "I got very excited about realizing that there was a big future in the Internet," Beagle says.



After leaving his keys at the airport in Amsterdam and recovering them with a few mouse clicks, Ron Beagle can testify to the power of the Internet.

A diverse clientele

Operating out of a renovated church on Decatur Street, Rockport Solutions has designs Web sites for a variety of organizations in a diverse range of fields. Among Rockport's list of clients are oil companies such as NuFlo Measurement Systems (a spin-off of Halliburton) and the Houston Zoo.

Rockport also provides Web site solutions for individuals seeking to get their message or product in front of the public eye. Recently, the company designed a Web site for Houston photographer Dalton DeHart (www.daltondehart.com).

"As anyone who goes to any nonprofit event (in Houston) knows, Dalton is

there, taking pictures," Beagle says. DeHart's Web site provides a forum for him to display photos from the many events he attends.

As with all Rockport-designed Web sites, DeHart's was customized for his specific needs and cost requirements. "We built the site that best represents who he is," says Beagle.

Although Houstonians will have to stay tuned for more details, Beagle confirmed that DeHart has commissioned Rockport to work on a new Web site that will be a comprehensive calendar of events in the Houston gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community. The new Web site is slated to go live in

RON BEAGLE

Age: 50

Birthplace: Port Arthur

Home: Houston

Occupation: President of Rockport Solutions

Education: A proud LSU Tiger

Relationship Status: Single

Pets: A wire-haired Fox Terrier named Cordi

Tidbit: Working out at FIT; running (has run 3 marathons); traveling (just returned from Copenhagen, the Netherlands and Belgium); cooking; loves college football and enjoys living in the Heights.

September.

Involvement in the local community is very important to Beagle, both professionally and personally. Each year, Rockport Solutions designs and donates a Web site to one nonprofit organization. Neartown Little League is one of the organizations that have benefited from Rockport's generosity (www.neartown-ll.org).

"We feel like we are good at what we do and want to give back to nonprofit organizations so that they can benefit from our experience," Beagle says.

To Amsterdam in a second

Beagle volunteers with Neartown Little League in his spare time, serving on the board and helping coach one of the teams. He has also served as a hospital team volunteer with the AIDS Foundation Houston for seven years in the 1990s. In that time, he has coordinated the hospital team at the HCA Medical Center Hospital and helped train new volunteers for all hospital teams in Houston.

"I like to help people. I'm a caregiver," Beagle says of his work with the AIDS Foundation.

While discussing his volunteer work, his hobbies, and Rockport's dedication to their clients' success, Beagle's eyes settle on a set of keys lying on his desk. He smiles and begins to tell the story of how recently, when he traveled to the Netherlands to study European Web design, he lost his keys at the airport in Amsterdam.

When he arrived home in Houston, Beagle realized that his keys were nowhere to be found. Remembering that he had laid the keys down while going through airport security in Amsterdam, Beagle turned to his computer for a solution. He immediately found the Web site for the Amsterdam airport. He quickly navigated the site and in no time, he was exchanging e-mails with an agent at the airport lost and found.

In just a few days, Beagle's keys arrived in his mailbox. "That," he says, "is the power of the Internet."

MORE INFO

Rockport Solutions
www.rockport-solutions.com

out in houston

(Photos by Dalton DeHart)



Brooks Ballard (left) celebrated his article in Real Estate Executive Magazine with (from left) Wanda Carraway, City Council Candidate Sue Lovell and Kathy Turner.



B.J. Smith (center) welcomed a nice crowd for the kickoff of Internet Rescue, a new organization aimed at getting Web surfers to socialize more.



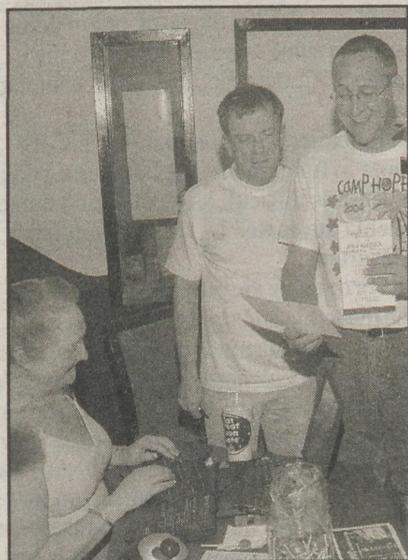
Bartenders proved good at soliciting donations at a recent fundraiser for Montrose Softball League.



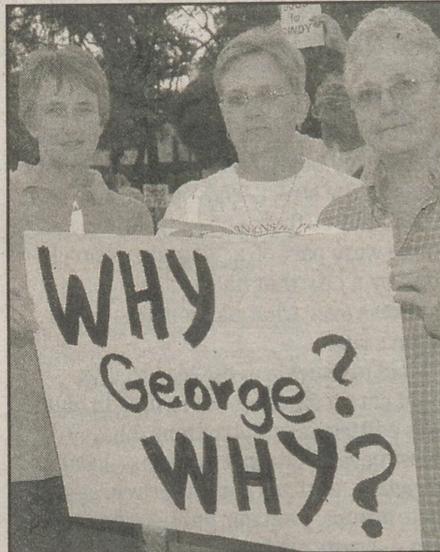
Christopher Bown, president of the Houston GLBT Community Center, recently presented a certificate of appreciation to Hollywood owner Danny Dang.



Participants in a recent event staged by River Oaks Area Democratic Women included (from left) Tony Carroll, Mitchell Katine, Muffie Moroney, Elsie Cook and Houston City Controller Annise Parker.



They lined up recently to cast ballots for Imperial Court of Houston royalty.



Protesters gathered recently in Houston to voice their opposition to the war in Iraq.



New officers for EPAH posed for a photo after their most recent meeting.



Diana Foundation representatives Bob Briddick and Lary Barton presented a check for \$7,000 to Bering Omega Community Services representatives Bob Bohan, Dan Snare and Fiona Dawson.



The peace flag and the American flag flew side by side during a recent antiwar protest in Houston.



Ken Malone was honored recently at a meeting of the Executive and Professional Association of Houston (EPAH).



After her live performance at South Beach, Jenna Drey chatted up Christian Andreson and Joey Guerra.

EDITORIAL & PRODUCTION

Executive Editor CHRIS CRAIN

Editor BINNIE FISHER

Correspondents DYANA BAGBY, LOU CHIBBARO, JR., MUBARAK DAHIR, LAURA DOUGLAS-BROWN, MIKE FLEMING, MATTHEW HENNIE, JOHNNY HOOKS, PHIL LAPADULA, RYAN LEE, BRIAN MOYLAN, KEVIN NAFF, YUSEF NAJAFI, KEN SAIN, RHONDA SMITH, STEVE WEINSTEIN, ANDY ZEFFER

Contributors DON MAINES, DAWN RORIE, ELLA TYLER, J.A. CHAPMAN AND RICH ARENSCHIELDT

Photographers DALTON DEHART, KIMBERLY THOMPSON

Art Director JAMES NEAL

Webmaster ARAM VARTIAN

SALES & ADMINISTRATION

General Manager

JASON WILSON

jwilson@houstonvoice.com

Sales Executive

MICHAEL B. CANNON

mcannon@houstonvoice.com

Classified Sales / Office Administrator

JOHNNY HOOKS

jhooks@houstonvoice.com

National Advertising Representative

Rivendell Media • 212-242-6863



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Forum

HOUSTON VOICE

AUGUST 19, 2005

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editorial

Amsterdam II is a Dutch treat

Three months after being beaten up in the supposed Gay Capital of the World for holding my boyfriend's hand, I saw firsthand how that title is well-earned.

By CHRIS CRAIN

W

HAT A DIFFERENCE three months can make. After a visit to Amsterdam for the famous Queen's Day weekend in late April, I shrugged my way through Schipol airport wearing

sunglasses on my broken nose to hide two black eyes. My boyfriend and I had been beaten up in the heart of gay Amsterdam by seven men infuriated that we were holding hands in the street.

When I returned to Washington, I wrote a column about what happened, hoping that maybe a stray gay publication or two back in Amsterdam might let the locals know to be careful. I was wholly unprepared for the ensuing storm of media coverage, in Holland and some here in the States.

Much of the discussion in the Netherlands centered on the description of our attackers as "Moroccan-looking." The country has been struggling with first and second-generation Muslim immigrants whose cultural and religious conservatism hasn't integrated well with Holland's famous social tolerance.

Some anti-immigrant politicians there have even turned tolerance on its head, urging xenophobic government policies on the theory that immigrants won't share Holland's acceptance of gays and other minorities. The most famous of that lot, the openly gay Pim Fortuyn, was assassinated just weeks before he might have been elected prime minister, by a native Dutch leftist.

WITH THAT BACKDROP, THE STORY OF our attack made big news in early May and then receded, in a normal news cycle. But the city of Amsterdam decided to revisit our attack in a fairly unprecedented way, by flying me back to Amsterdam for Gay Pride weekend and putting my boyfriend and me up in a nice hotel, ironically only blocks from the spot of the attack on April 30.

The City Council and the mayor, Job Cohen, had invited us back so that we might see a better side of the city, and we

were happy to take them up on their invitation. Again we were unprepared for what awaited us: a slew of TV, radio and print interviews, and an invitation to speak at a reception hosted by the mayor at city hall. We even were asked to be judges for the famous Pride parade, which takes place entirely in the city's canals.

Inevitably, the media wanted to know how it felt to be back in Amsterdam, and whether my boyfriend and I would hold hands in the street. They also asked, as I would have in their shoes, whether we felt we were part of a "damage control" effort by a city that had gotten a lot of bad press over what happened to us on Queen's Day.

I had to chuckle at the idea that we would parrot anyone's party line. In eight years editing gay publications, I have almost never said what anyone — local politicians, anti-gay conservatives, gay rights groups, even our publications' sales team — wants me to say. I say what I think.

And what I think about Amsterdam is this: There's really no place like it. If we had been beaten up in the streets of New York, it might have made a few headlines, as recent anti-gay attacks in the Big Apple have. If it had happened in Washington or Atlanta, the two cities where I've lived the last 15 years, it probably would have merited a story or two. But what happened in Amsterdam was truly extraordinary.

I have received more than 1,500 e-mails from Dutch people, most of them heterosexual, upset about the attack. After the initial round of media coverage, local gay rights organizers turned out as many as 1,000 people for a rally in Leidseplein, a block from the spot of our attack, where gay people kissed and held hands, vowing not to return to the closet.

On this visit in Amsterdam, much of the media coverage again involved soul-searching about how a city that values tolerance can protect itself from intolerance without using the heavy hand of government to stifle conservative dissent. As a citizen of a country where the situation is flipped, and the conservatives who govern use the law to

enshrine their view of morality, I'm especially sensitive to the dilemma. I'm also impressed more than I can say by the quality of debate the Dutch have had so far.

TRUTH BE TOLD, I WOULD ENCOURAGE gays to visit Amsterdam regardless of how the locals had reacted, if nothing else but to defy those who would scare us away and back into the closet. But the reality in the streets of Amsterdam was quite the opposite this Gay Pride weekend. My boyfriend and I were stopped untold times by strangers, many of whom made a point of saying they were straight, and welcomed us back to the city.

In my favorite encounter, a self-described "football hooligan" festooned with tattoos, piercings and ragged clothes, stopped us on Leidsestraat and asked why we weren't holding hands. When I took my boyfriend's hand, he smiled broadly and said, "Now that's Amsterdam!" He also asked me to point out our attackers so he could, um, return the favor, but in doing so, he in some ways encapsulated the range of Dutch reactions to its changing culture.

Defeating homophobia that has its roots in fundamentalist Islam is no doubt at least as difficult as challenging homophobia advocated by fundamentalist Christians.

Fortunately for those of us in the U.S., the moderate and progressive wings of Christianity are much more active and have forced a difficult debate about the church's treatment of gays. Fortunately for those in Holland, the tolerant progressives already have the advantage of numbers in the ongoing debate, and there is every reason to believe that fair-minded people understand that maintaining their legendary tolerant society requires their constant vigilance.

So, is Amsterdam still the "Gay Capital of the World," as I was asked by almost every reporter I spoke with during my visit? Absolutely. The Dutch were the first to allow gays to marry, and their commitment to welcoming us is without equal.

Last week when I left Amsterdam, the scene in Schipol airport could not have been different. I was welcomed with smiles by KLM Airline ticket agents and flight attendants who recognized me from TV stories and asked if I had enjoyed Gay Pride weekend.

In fact, it surpassed even my very high expectations, and certainly put the trauma of Queen's Day into a much more optimistic context.

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



viewpoint JOE SOLMONESE



John Roberts seems to agree that the Supreme Court is a mere bystander when individual rights are trampled.

Clarence Thomas all over again

AMERICA RECENTLY LEARNED THAT Supreme Court nominee John Roberts assisted lawyers in the gay rights case *Romer vs. Evans*.

Anti-gay groups were quick to dismiss this work as nothing more than a courtesy to his law firm — makes you wonder what they know, doesn't it? Washington Post columnist Richard Cohen, on the other hand, said it proves that Roberts is not a bigot.

The question of whether Roberts is personally anti-gay is not only hard to answer, it is the wrong question to ask.

The right question is whether he will be the kind of justice that President Bush promised to appoint — another Antonin Scalia or Clarence Thomas. We should demand that our senators find out.

As we review documents from Roberts' career, we are finding strong evidence that he would vote with the far right wing of the court, and against protections for gays. It's not evidence that he's a bigot; just clear, convincing evidence that for decades, Roberts has embraced a view that the court has no business protecting basic civil rights.

IN 1981, ROBERTS DRAFTED AN article urging what he calls "judicial restraint." In it, he criticized the Supreme Court for what he called intrusions into social issues best left to the

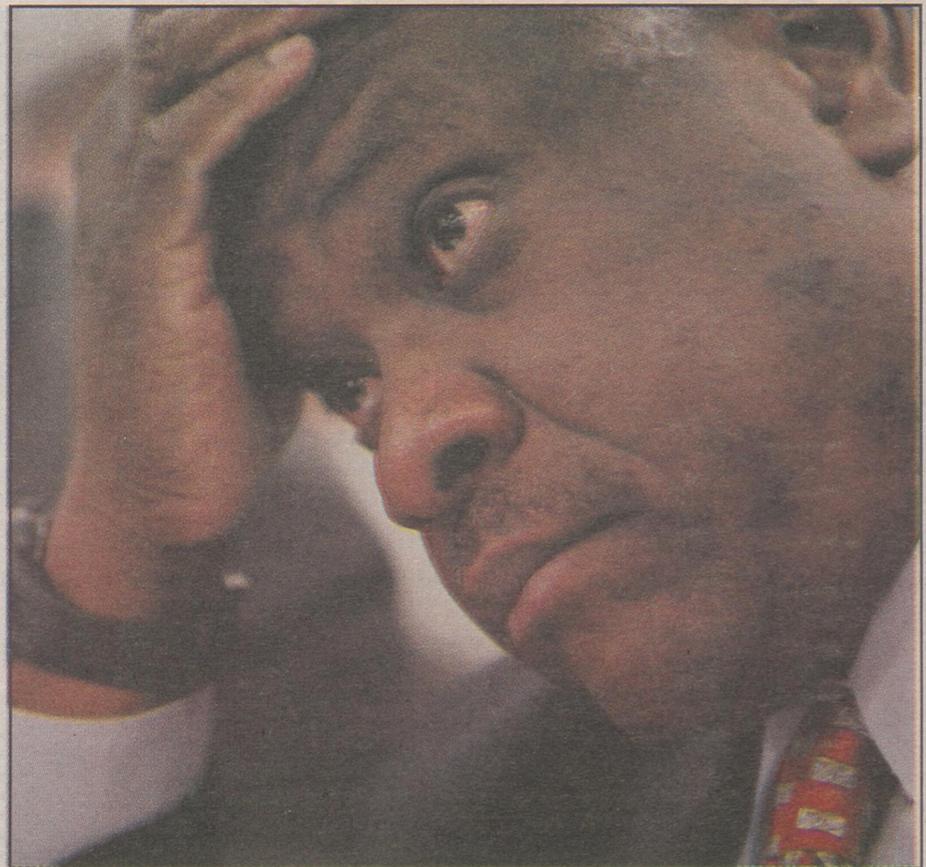
legislatures.

The article does not name these issues, and the Senate should ask him which ones he meant. Was *Brown vs. Board of Education*, which desegregated schools, an unwarranted intrusion? Was *Roe vs. Wade*, which established abortion rights? Was *Lawrence vs. Texas*, which struck down sodomy laws?

This "leave it to the legislature" philosophy is what guides Justice Thomas. Dissenting in the landmark *Lawrence* case that overturned sodomy laws, Thomas called the Texas law "uncommonly silly" and declared that as a legislator, he would not have voted for it. But he voted to uphold the law because in his view, it was not a judge's job to interfere.

As a federal appeals court judge, Roberts wrote an opinion that shows he was thinking along the same lines as Justice Thomas. In the infamous "french fry" case, a 12-year-old girl was caught eating one fry on a Washington, D.C., subway. She was arrested and detained for three hours, terrified and in tears.

Under D.C. law, an adult would only have been given a citation. The girl filed a lawsuit claiming that she had been treated unfairly because of her age and that her rights had been violated. Roberts ruled against the girl, noting that the city's treatment of her was unfortunate,



but the court would not second-guess it.

Roberts also noted approvingly that in response to public outcry, D.C. had changed its arrest rules for the subway. It is fortunate that future juvenile french fry offenders will be safe from unwarranted arrest, but Judge Roberts can't claim credit for that.

He believes the court cannot, and should not, flex its muscles to protect rights and insure equality. He sounds just like Justice Thomas.

WHEN LEGISLATURES PUNISH GAY people, we are unlikely to see the kind of public outcry that the french fry case inspired. Anti-gay forces use intolerance for political gain, and only the courts stand between us and second-class citizenship.

That's why anti-gay forces supported the so-called Marriage Protection Act, which would have insured that constitutional challenges to the Defense of Marriage Act could not be heard by federal courts.

Sound crazy? Not to Judge Roberts. In the 1980s, he wrote that laws limiting the courts' jurisdiction, at the time targeting toward abortion and school prayer, were perfectly constitutional.

The fact that Roberts has not been explicitly anti-GLBT is no more comforting, nor relevant, than Thomas' opinion that sodomy laws are "silly." What matters is whether, as a justice, Roberts would interpret the Constitution to protect us from such laws.

From what I've seen of his record, John Roberts would allow discriminatory laws to stand, and fail to recognize our fundamental rights. A fair-minded justice stands up for rights. He does not stand aside.

@ Joe Solmonese is president of the Human Rights Campaign and can be reached via www.hrc.org.

THE

Q What should President Bush do about Karl Rove in light of all the reports linking him to White House leaks?



I think it's time for "our" president to start cleaning house. Who better to start with?

STEVEN WAGNER, 35
Houston
Event Planner



If Rove is responsible for the leak, he should resign, even if he is an old family friend. Of course, we know better than to expect that to actually happen.

PATRICK MARTIN, 39
Houston
Nonprofit



Bush stated he "would fire anyone involved" in outing a CIA operative. He should stick to his word to maintain any credibility.

CARI CLARK & CARLYN
KLEMM, 46/47
Houston
Executive chef/geophysicist



Immediate termination.

LES STUBBLEFIELD, 28
Houston
Customer service



Fulfill his promise and fire him.

MATT GLAZER, 23
San Antonio
Political operative



Like a klutz
Madonna fell off the horse, but doctors say she should dance again.
Page 18

keeping the faith

TROY PERRY TO STAY ACTIVE IN GAY RIGHTS MOVEMENT AFTER LEAVING MCC

By KATHERINE VOLIN

IF SOMEONE IN SCOTLAND WROTE A LETTER TODAY AND addressed it to "Queer Minister, U.S.A.," odds are the post office would return it marked "address unknown."

In the early 1970s, however, the Los Angeles Post Office knew exactly where to send it.

When Rev. Troy Perry, longtime leader of the Metropolitan Community Church, an inclusive Christian denomination with a predominately gay following, received the letter, he stormed off to the local post office.

Perry's mail delivery had been spotty, so the irony of a prompt delivery of the "Queer Minister, U.S.A." letter struck a nerve with the usually jolly pastor.

"That broke the camel's back for me," Perry says from his office in Los Angeles, where he still lives. As he marched to the front of the line, he waved the letter at the clerk and barked, "Why was this letter delivered to me?"

The post office fell silent as customers turned to stare at the irate minister holding the letter.

The clerk referred him to the postmaster, who turned to Perry's letter carrier, who had chosen that unfortunate moment to walk through the door.

The letter carrier told the postmaster, "Well, you said he was the only queer minister you knew of."

"After that, I had no more problems with my mail," Perry says.

COMBATTING PREJUDICE IS

something that has marked Perry's tenure at the Metropolitan Community Church, which began with a meeting on Oct. 6, 1968 in Perry's Los Angeles living room with "nine friends and three strangers," he says.

Among those original 12, he says, "I had one heterosexual couple, one person of color and a Jew."

Over nearly 37 years, Perry's congregation has grown to more than 43,000 worshippers in 23 countries. There are churches in 46 states and MCC congregations have an aggregate operating budget of \$20 million. The church's leadership has an annual budget of \$3.2 million, according to Perry.

Perry, 65, has used his prominence to further the cause of gay civil rights over the years. He has sued state governments, protested proposed anti-gay amendments and laws and visited the White House during his years as moderator of MCC.

He also performed the first same-sex wedding ceremony in the United States in 1969, he says.

"I sued the state of California with two lesbians. I married them. They laughed us out of court. We didn't have the money to appeal. They're not laughing anymore. That's the good news for us."

THE BAD NEWS FOR THE METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES IS THAT Perry has announced his retirement and officially relinquishes his leadership of MCC this October at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C.

Perry says he will continue to stay active in the gay civil rights movement, including working for marriage equality and for AIDS groups.

On Oct. 28, Perry will hand the reins to Rev. Nancy Wilson, a senior pastor at Church of



(Clockwise from top) Phillip Ray De Blicke and Rev. Troy Perry at their June 13, 2003 wedding in Alberta, Canada; Perry in his vestments; Perry (right) blessing Rev. Nancy Wilson on July 24 after she was named his successor; and Wilson.

the Trinity MCC in Sarasota, Fla.

In July, days after MCC announced that Wilson would succeed Perry, the Disciples of Christ, a denomination based in Indianapolis, Ind., named its next leader, also a woman. They are the only two Christian denominations headed by women.

"We're kind of neck and neck in that," says Wilson. "It's very new territory. There are a lot of women clergy now in mainstream congregations."

Please see **PERRY** on Page 19

BRITISH MIXED NUTS: Gays galore populate 'Little Britain,' a TV series that finally arrives stateside on DVD. Page 14

'OPEN BAR': Logo's new reality show is not so different, but its star has some serious wattage. Page 15

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dvd VAN GOWER

Endearing oddballs and gays galore populate 'Little Britain,' an acclaimed British TV series that finally arrives stateside on DVD.

Britain's mixed nuts

IF YOU'RE A FLAMBOYANT GAY MAN, a transvestite or a rebellious teenage girl and think no one could possibly be more outrageous than you, prepare to meet your match.

Misfits like those are among the many oddballs who populate "Little Britain," the British sketch comedy show whose first season was released on DVD August 16. The show's second season debuts on cable's BBC America on Wednesday, August 17, at 10 p.m.

Already a runaway smash in England and winner of two BAFTA awards (the UK equivalent of an Emmy), the politically incorrect

"Little Britain" was created by its writers and stars Matt Lucas, who is gay, and David Walliams, who is straight. However, each portray a recurring cast of crazies, both male and female, gay and straight.

For example, Daffyd Thomas (Lucas) is a rotund, attention-craving diva of a gay man who proudly flaunts his gayness in skimpy, gaudy outfits to the complete indifference of his neighbors.

In episode one, Daffyd melodramatically complains to the local barmaid how hard it is being "the only gay in the village." But when another similarly dressed swishy gay man (Walliams) enters the pub, snooty Daffyd resents the stranger supposedly muscling in on his territory.

Throughout the series, even when confronted with proof that he isn't the only gay in the village, Daffyd refuses to accept it and does his best to expel all competition — a gag that is hilarious every time.

THE HUNKY WALLIAMS ALSO PLAYS "not very good transvestite" Emily Howard,



Dynamic duo David Walliams (left) and Matt Lucas write and star in 'Little Britain,' a sketch comedy show with a slew of gay characters that is being released on DVD this week. (Photo courtesy of BBC America)

resident of a quaint seaside town. A woman in her own deluded mind, Emily is far from femme with her linebacker build and scarcely credible dainty-lady's voice.

In episode four, during one of her funniest appearances, Emily is at the doctor's office seeking medical attention after falling off the bus (or, as she puts it, "taking a tumble from the motor coach") and injuring her groin. The doc wants to take

X-rays and, not fooled by Emily's outer appearance, gives her a small lead-lined sheet to shield "her" testicles.

Scandalized, Emily protests "But I'm a lady! I don't have testi-clay! ... Well, maybe small lady's testi-clay."

Walliams also plays gay as Sebastian, love struck aide to the prime minister (Anthony Stewart Head from "Buffy the Vampire Slayer"). Sebastian throws himself at his boss at every opportunity and seethes with jealousy whenever he thinks anyone — even the P.M.'s wife — is coming between them.

One of the most inspired characters in "Little Britain" is Vicky Pollard (Lucas), an unrepentantly vulgar trailer-trash teenager who, when challenged by authority figures, launches into rapid-fire, incomprehensible ramblings having nothing to do with the situation at hand in order to deflect responsibility for her actions. Vicky's conflicted "Yeah, but no, but yeah, but no" rant is already a popular catchphrase in England.

"LITTLE BRITAIN: THE COMPLETE First Series" includes many other deliriously daffy folk, and Lucas and Walliams breathe memorable, irreverent life into them.

Narration by Tom Baker ("Doctor Who" 1974-1981) gives the series' eight episodes an extra witty boost. The two-disc set includes loads of entertaining bonus features including audio commentaries, behind-the-scenes documentaries and interviews, pilot episode and deleted scenes, and a "What Does Britain Mean to You?" man-on-the-street style survey interviewing the series' characters.

i MORE INFO

'Little Britain: The Complete First Series'
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'Little Britain'
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television BRIAN MOYLAN



Logo's new reality show 'Open Bar' may not be all that different from what you're used to, but its star has some serious wattage.

The candy man can

HAVE YOU EVER NOTICED THAT, after a while, every night at your favorite gay watering hole is indistinguishable from all the others? Instead of a memory of individual occasions, thinking back on a night at Cobalt, Phase I or Chaos seems to get muddled with every other time you've entered the door.

Those interchangeable nights at the club are a bit like "Open Bar," a new reality show that debuts on Logo, the MTV-owned gay cable channel, on Monday, Aug. 22, at 10 p.m.

Logo is currently available on some cable providers in the metropolitan Washington area, like RCN and Adelphia, but not yet on Comcast. A spokesperson for Comcast said that while a launch date has not been set, the channel would be available in the D.C. area by the end of September.

The 30-minute reality show focuses on Tyler Robuck's effort to open his new gay bar, icandy, in West Hollywood. (If you want to skip watching the show, check out www.icandylounge.com for the finished product.) Judging by the first episode, it's a bit like NBC's "The Restaurant," but with a smaller budget and less drama.

Here, Logo is really showing its MTV pedigree. "Open Bar" is really indistinguishable from any of the other reality shows that are on its network. It's fast-paced, heavily edited and probably has lots of really poppy music, though this wasn't on the preview version sent to reviewers. So, it's the same as "Laguna Beach," the "Real World," "Made" or any of those other shows that crowded out music videos long ago.

The only interesting facet is Robuck's effort at being a gay business owner in a straight world. When the illustrations of his new design are drawn up, the bar is populated by male/female couples, which Robuck and his gay friends laugh about.

THE IRONY IN THIS IS THAT ROBUCK, 34, still isn't comfortable being gay. A captain of his high school football team, college frat boy and University of Southern California MBA graduate who worked for his family's company, he didn't come out until recently. Even then, he spent most of his time with his family and straight friends in his hometown, outside Los Angeles.



Hot 'Open Bar' star Tyler Robuck isn't always photogenic, but he's always interesting on his new Logo reality show. (Photo courtesy of Logo)

He went from being totally "straight" to moving to WeHo and opening a gay bar. The only thing gayer than that is walking down Christopher Street singing show tunes in Liza Minnelli drag.

Even though, as the friend I watched the show with observed, he is a bit of a "meat-head" when dealing with business matters, Robuck is the show's biggest asset. As eventful as getting his establishment off the ground might be, the real dynamism comes from watching him try to get comfortable with himself as a gay man and how that affects his interactions with those around him.

Oh, and did I mention that he's super hot? Well, sometimes the camera catches him from a weird angle and it makes this meathead look like he has no chin, but mostly he's smokin'. In the first episode, he goes running — shirtless. And, boys, he's single, so the line starts here.

Knowing gay men will watch anything if there's a hot guy in it, the show's success on Logo wouldn't be surprising. A visit to "Open Bar" may be just the same as other reality shows on the dial, but Tyler Robuck may make it worth your while, for reasons aesthetic and otherwise.

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books RYAN LEE



Author brings black lesbian voices to table with 'Bliss,' a novel about a Jamaican woman's struggle with her sense of self.

A 'Bliss'-ful debut

FIONA ZEDDE IS A CULINARY ARTIST with words, cooking up spicy, flavorful tales that she hopes will satisfy the appetite of a malnourished audience.

After giving readers appetizers of her writing skills in anthologies like "Best Lesbian Erotica 2004" and "Va-Va-Voom: Red Hot Lesbian Erotica," Zedde serves up a full course in her debut novel, "Bliss," which was released in early August.

"There are so few books out that are written by or about black lesbians," says Zedde, a native of Jamaica who has lived in the United States since childhood. "It's an untapped market and an underserved community, and I really feel it's important that we put out some of our experiences as black lesbians."

Published by Kensington Books, the novel, which is available at Lambda Rising bookstore in D.C., chronicles the self-discovery of Bliss Sinclair, a young, hip, professional who is enjoying her journey through the good life.

"She has money and a hot boyfriend, and all these glamorous things, but there's something missing," Zedde says. "It's sort of an empty life."

Zedde says Sinclair's understanding of herself and her world are dramatically altered after she is seduced by a woman in high-heels, who brings to the surface all of the things Sinclair has denied herself before.

Following steamy episodes of carnal lovemaking in abandoned warehouses, private fetish clubs, even her own office, Sinclair finds herself alone and empty, fleeing to her family in Jamaica in search of peace and understanding.

"Bliss" is a story about self-acceptance, living an authentic life, and the importance and endurance of family, according to its author, who lives in Atlanta and works part-time at a feminist bookstore, Charis Books & More.

A 1998 GRADUATE OF NEW COLLEGE of Florida, a liberal arts honors school, where she majored in British and American literature, Zedde says she was surprised to have her first novel published so quickly.

She was working on the almost 300-page "Bliss" for about a year when she signed with an agent, who sent



Fiona Zedde explores food, sex and authentic living in her debut novel, 'Bliss.'

excerpts to different publishing companies and secured a deal with Kensington Books within two months.

Despite showcasing her work in a string of anthologies after her first published piece appeared in 2003, Zedde didn't expect to receive support from major publishing companies for her debut novel.

But the writer says she and her novel benefited from good timing, since the book came along as Kensington officials were specifically looking for black lesbian voices.

A COMMON THREAD THROUGHOUT "Bliss" is the intersection between sex and food, which Zedde called "a natural link" because of her island background.

"I love to eat and it's something that definitely shows up in the novel," Zedde says. "Food is sensual in general, and I wanted to link that to Jamaican food in particular."

The Cajun zest won't be the only part of the book that has readers fanning themselves and taking sips of water, says Sara Look, one of the co-owners at Charis Books & More, a 30-year-old lesbian-feminist bookstore with a non-profit women's programming arm in Atlanta.

"After finishing the first half of the book, I told [Fiona] that I didn't know I was going to be reading erotica," Look says, with a smile. "But I thoroughly enjoyed the book, and we're very excited to see her get it published."

MORE INFO

'Bliss'
By Fiona Zedde
Kensington Books
297 pages, \$14
www.fionazedde.com



nitelife JOHNNY HOOKS



Diana's duds, bits and pieces come to town, Carter Oosterhouse at the Home Show and Jill Jordan will continue to call H-town home

Things of a princess

WELCOME BACK TO HOVO ON THE Go-Go kids. This week we are all over the map.

WE LOVE LETTERS (OR EMAIL) HERE at HotGG so keep them coming!

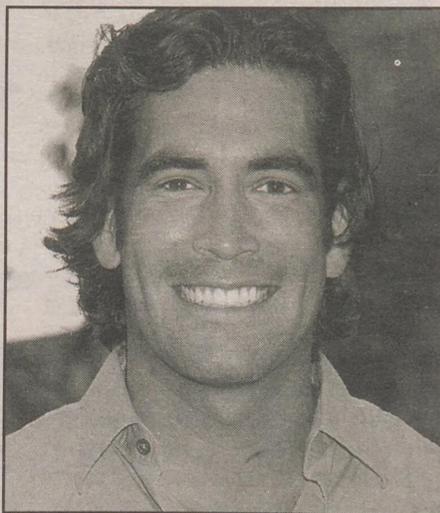
We received this note from **Jackie Evelyn Thorne, Empress 21 E.R.S.I.C.S.S.** She wants you all to know that she is hosting a show on Friday, August 19, starting at 7 p.m. at **Keys West**. The name of the show is "The Beach Bitch" with a theme of beach music and beach wear for performers. Beneficiaries are the **Montrose Clinic Women's Program** and the **Assistance Fund Insurance Program**. "Their Majesties Happy Hour" begins at 6 p.m. Blackjack for charity starts about 9-ish. Keys West is located at 817 Dallas. 713-571-7870.

NEXT UP IS THE ANNUAL **HOUSTON Home Show** at the George R. Brown on **Saturday, August 20**. Every year the powers that be trot out one of the endless wanna-be Ty Pennington's to satisfy the masses. However this year they have really done right by us. The gorgeous **Carter Oosterhouse** of "Trading Spaces" is appearing for one day only! In a word, yummy!

Cosmo magazine loves him, he made People's "Sexiest Man Alive" list, and HotGG loves him too. Oosterhouse will answer all your home renovation questions from 11 a.m. to Noon and again from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. Maybe if we're lucky he'll answer the big question: boxers, briefs or bare? George R. Brown Convention Center, 1001 Avenida de las Americas. For tickets and information, call 713-529-1616 or visit www.houston-homeshow.com. Tickets are only \$8!

AFTER ALL THE DIRTY THOUGHTS you'll have after seeing Oosterhouse, it'll be time to come clean. Beyond Entertainment's **Spoiled Boyz** have prepared a big load of...um, fun at this seriously fresh After Hour Party called "FAB." The spin cycle begins promptly at 3:30 a.m. on **August 20** (actually Sunday Morning,) at **Ultra Dance Club**, 108 Main Street. Producer/Remix Artist/DJ **Josh Gram** will be spinning the beatz in the main room, while **Andy "Champa" Moore** and **Brandon Silva** will be at the helm in the Ultra Lounge. \$15 advance tickets available at M2M Fashion. www.spoiledboyz.net.

IF FAB IS NOT YOUR CUP OF TEA, maybe this is! **The Gay/Lesbian History** series at the **Community Center** returns on **Sunday, August 21** with philanthropist **John Kellett** as the guest. The program is presented by the Gulf Coast Archive and Museum of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and



Carter Oosterhouse makes an appearance at the Houston Home Show.

Transgender History (GCAM) and the Community Center. **Jimmy Carper**, GCAM vice chair and producer/host of the weekly "After Hours" radio program on KPFT-FM, moderates. Admission is free. The Houston GLBT Community Center is located at **3400 Montrose Blvd., Suite 207**. The phone number is 713-524 3818 or log onto www.houstonglbtcommunitycenter.org.

HAVEN'T BEEN TO THE **CONTINENTAL Club** at 3700 Main Street yet? Thursday, August 25 the legendary **The Knitters** featuring **Dave Alvin, John Doe** and **Exene Cervenka** (both from X), **D J Bonebreak** and **Jonny Ray Bartell** are performing. The Knitters released their first album way back in 1985, and have just released the follow up. Even more impressive is their opening act, the lesbian/drag king, folkstar **Phranc!** Showtime is at 9 p.m. Call 713-529-9899 for the skinny.

GET YOUR TIARA POLISH OUT. **Diana: A Celebration** is coming to the **Houston Museum of Natural Science!** See her wedding dress with 25 foot train, diamond tiara as well as another 150 personal possessions, and correspondence when this extensive collection opens in October. Get your tickets now! 713-639-4629 or www.hmns.org.

FINALLY, **JILL JORDAN** IS STAYING in Houston for the time being, while the one and only **Miss Iona Monte Carlo** has left the Montrose for greener pastures. One heel forward, two heels back as they say!

@ 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!

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

Like a klutz

Madonna takes a fall,
Birch gets a new gig
and Emmy loves Ellen

Boys and girls, Dish has something to tell you, but you have to promise not to freak out. Promise?

OK. **MADONNA** had an accident.

Calm down, she's fine, but she broke a few bones.

Her publicist announced on Tuesday that the star fell off a new horse while riding at Ashcombe House, you know, the fabulous English estate where she and the family took all those pictures in the current issue of *Vogue*.

She was celebrating her 47th birthday, riding with an assistant, and fell off the horse.

She broke her collarbone and a hand and cracked three ribs. Yes, it seems entirely likely that she will dance again, so don't worry. Her New York assistant says it's too early to tell if the injuries will impact next summer's planned tour, but that the accident would likely affect the promotional tour for Madge's new album.

She better recover fast, because her new album "Confessions on a Dance-floor" hits stores and dance floors on Nov. 15. According to *Rolling Stone* magazine, the first single "Hung Up" has already had sneak previews at clubs in Europe.

STUART PRICE, better known as DJ Jacques Lu Cont, who played keyboards for Madge on her past two tours, helped the star fashion a sound she calls "future disco." The pair worked on the songs together in his London apartment and he took some of the dub versions (just music, no words) out for a test drive during his DJ gigs.

Talking heads

Dish had the pleasure of attending gay cable channel Here! TV's premiere of its new original show "Birch & Co." hosted by former Human Rights Campaign executive director **ELIZABETH BIRCH**. While those at the soiree saw a clip show of the first three episodes edited together, those at home will get to watch Birch interview one guest about gay issues for an hour straight — so to speak.

The first episode, in which Birch interviews **ROSIE O'DONNELL**, is currently available on the channel. To find out if and how Here! TV is available in your area, visit www.heretv.com. The other two episodes that debut later this month feature conservative **PAT BUCHANAN** and U.S. Rep. **JOHN LEWIS** (D-Ga.).

Other high-wattage guests planning to tape interviews with Birch include **MELISSA ETHERIDGE**, Democratic Party chair **HOWARD DEAN**, Sen. **EDWARD KENNEDY** (D-Mass.), former Vice President **AL GORE** and "Will & Grace" creator **MAX MUTCHNICK**.



Yes, sweetie, **Madonna** took a little tumble, but she's going to be fine. (Photo by Richard Lewis/AP)

Also tapped for gay news is hunky gay former CNN correspondent **JASON**



Jason Bellini

BELLINI who will be hosting the daily "CBS News On Logo" spots on the MTV-owned gay cable channel Logo. Both MTV and CBS are owned by Viacom, which is how the two networks got hitched.

Starting earlier this week, Bellini began hosting the three- to five-minute spots that air throughout the day on the network.

Hostess with mostest

Speaking of hosts, lesbian talk show host and Daytime Emmy winner **ELLEN DEGENERES** got the good news that she will be returning as host of the Primetime Emmy Awards ceremony, which will be broadcast this year on Sunday, Sept. 18, on CBS, according to the Associated Press.

"You know me, any excuse to put on a dress," she joked in a release announcing her new gig.

DeGeneres was widely praised for hosting the twice-delayed awards show in 2001, which was put off due to the Sept. 11 attacks and the war in Afghanistan. She was also part of a group of nine co-hosts in 2003.



Ellen DeGeneres



Send comments, suggestions to
Dish@houstonvoice.com

eclipse cover story

MCC founder Troy Perry resigns church post

PERRY, continued from Page 12

gations. But the first woman in a clerical collar I saw was myself in a mirror."

Rev. Venson Phillip Mathews, associate pastor of D.C.'s MCC church, says that MCC's nomination of a female leader illustrates the denomination's commitment to equality.

"It's just a natural step for her to move in this position," Mathews said. "She's very capable, a scholar."

Wilson says that one of the first meetings of church elders she attended was in Los Angeles, but Perry did not attend because he was fasting on the steps of the L.A. courthouse in protest of the Briggs Initiative, which would have barred gays from working as teachers in public schools.

"When he believes something, it's 100 percent," Wilson says.

PERRY PREACHED HIS FINAL SERMON as moderator in July, during which he spoke of the first members of MCC as a "peculiar people," a term Perry says reflects outsiders' views of MCC congregants because they are a "people God called but the world doesn't understand."

Perry was raised in the Pentecostal faith and knew he wanted to be a minister at 13.

Two years later, he was ordained in the Southern Baptist church. He married his Pentecostal minister's daughter when he was 18, partially to advance his ministry career, he says.

"To be ordained in the Pentecostal church at that time, you had to be married," Perry says. But Perry had known for a long time that he was gay, something he tried to hide because he'd also been taught that homosexuality was wrong. After five years of marriage, Perry and his wife divorced and Perry was later drafted to serve in the Vietnam War.

Perry says that serving in the war changed him. He recalled that friends joked that when Perry left home he was "mild-mannered Clark Kent," but after Vietnam, "he was Superman."

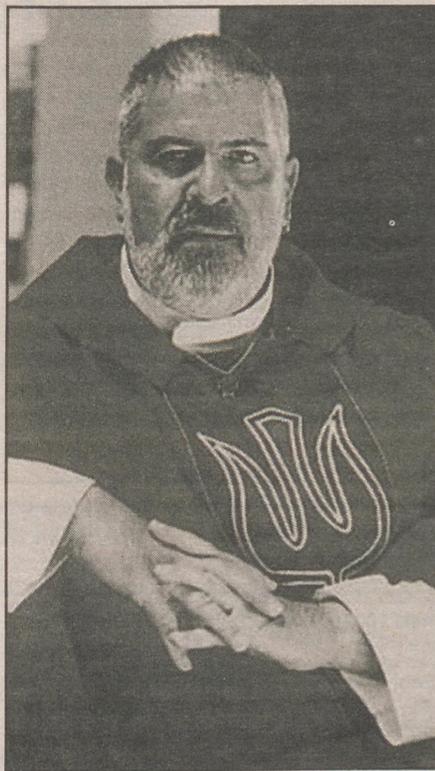
"There was just a difference," Perry says. "I stood up for myself." His return home began what Perry calls "six of the best and worst months of my life."

Perry began his first relationship with a man, a relationship of unbalanced affection, which ultimately ended in Perry getting dumped.

"We broke up, I climbed into a bathtub and cut my wrists," Perry says simply. "While I was in the hospital, I believed up to that point that God hated me. My church had told me that God couldn't love me — that was just impossible."

His hospital stay forced Perry to reconsider his choices. For the first time in years, Perry began to pray.

"God I want to ask forgiveness," he said.



After that, he says, "I felt a joy I hadn't felt in years." But Perry still believed he was undeserving of a relationship with God.

"I was on my bed, and I said, 'Wait a minute, God, this can't be you.' Immediately, I heard, 'Troy don't tell me what I can and can't do. I love you. You're my son. I don't have stepsons and daughters.'"

Perry flung himself back into Christianity, but his membership at traditional Christian services quickly came under scrutiny.

"I never lasted more than three weeks," Perry says. Members would find out he was gay and snub him.

Finally, Perry decided to start his own church. "If God loves me, God has to love other gay people, too," Perry says.

Perry has based his ministry and civil rights activism on that notion.

OVER THE YEARS, THE CHURCH HAS endured 29 cases of arson, countless pieces of hate mail and the loss of an estimated 6,000 members to AIDS.

AIDS is something Perry, like many members of his congregation, knows intimately. Phillip Ray De Blicke, his partner of 20 years, has lived with HIV for the last 18. Perry is HIV-negative.

"AIDS has lived in our home every day," Perry says.

Perry and De Blicke were married in Canada on June 13, 2003.

"There's just something about being married," Perry says. "I know it's crazy. I didn't think our relationship could be any stronger, but marriage made us stronger."

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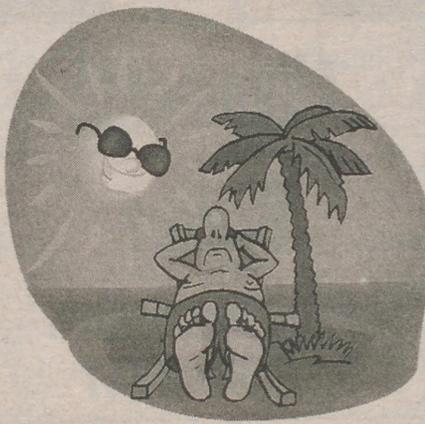
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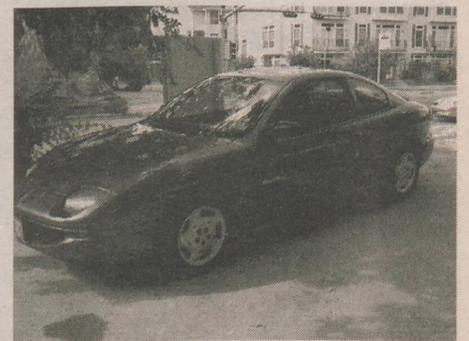
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Dykes To Watch Out For by Alison Bechdel

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IN KEEPING WITH OUR NATION'S NEW MORAL MANDATE, THIS COMIC STRIP HAS CHANGED ITS FORMAT TO **RELIGIOUS ALLEGORY**.
CAN OUR HEROINE FIND HER WAY TO SALVATION DESPITE THE MANY ABSTRACT-CONCEPTS-EMBODIED-IN-HUMAN-FORM THAT LITTER HER PATH?

HERE SHE IS, **MS. SECULAR HUMANIST**, FLOUNDERING IN THE SLOUGH OF DESTINY.
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WHAT SHALL I DO TO BE SAVED?

WHY'S THE MEDIA IGNORING THIS? WHY ARE WE ALL JUST ROLLING OVER? MY MOTHER COULD HACK AN ELECTRONIC VOTING MACHINE. I REFUSE TO ACCEPT THE ELECTION RESULTS!

I WISH I COULD REFUSE TO ACCEPT THIS CREDIT CARD BILL. TELL ME YOU DIDN'T GIVE \$500 TO THE DNC AT THE LAST MINUTE.

IT'S UP TO US TO BREAK THROUGH THIS CULTURAL POLARIZATION. TO CONNECT WITH RED STATERS, WE NEED TO GET COMFORTABLE TALKING ABOUT OUR FAITH.

MS. LITTLE-FAITH AND MS. LOVE-LUST WEIGH IN.
YEAH, I'M SURE TELLING SOME KNUCKLE-DRAGGERS ABOUT YOUR KABBALAH MEDITATION GROUP WOULD HEAL THE RIFT RIGHT UP.
LOOK, PEOPLE VOTED REPUBLICAN BECAUSE OF THE GAY MARRIAGE THING. THEY'RE TERRIFIED OF SEX.

UPON FLEEING, OUR HEROINE RUNS INTO **GIANT DESPAIR**.
I'M MAKING WHEN MY PANIC ABOUT BUSH PROVOKING A NUCLEAR TERRORIST ATTACK GETS TOO INTENSE...

... I SWITCH TO MY FEAR OF BEING ROUNDED UP AND SHIPPED TO A GULAG FOR INTELLECTUALS IN KENTUCKY.

ONWARD SHE TREKS, BUT BEFORE REACHING HER FINAL GOAL, OUR PILGRIM MUST PASS THROUGH THE TEMPTATIONS OF **VANITY FAIR**.

ON SECOND THOUGHT, MAYBE SHE'LL HANG HERE FOR A WHILE.
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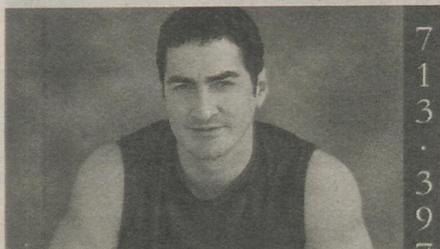
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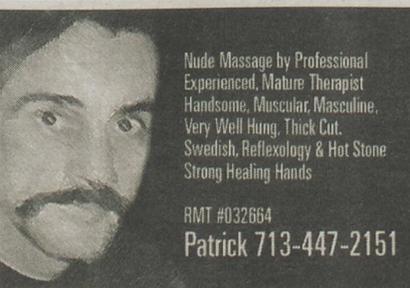


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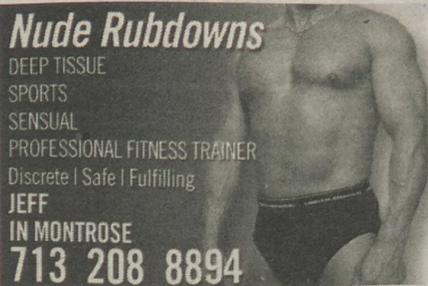
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bitch session



So it's "be who you are" unless you're a fat guy in a Speedo? Nice community.

WHEN I SEE GAY COUPLES WHO LOOK exactly like each other, I understand the rap on homosexuality being a form of narcissism. Do you enjoy having sex with yourself that much?

THERE'S NO BIGGER BUZZ KILL THAN a masculine guy whose voice lilts three octaves higher under the sheets.

VERY LAME FOR SENDING YOUR SLUT friends to come to my place of work and call me a "ho." You're the one who wanted it, heifer!

TO THE DORK WHO PLAYS DUNGEONS & Dragons with straight men: be serious. The complete lack of decent gamer guys pushed me into dykedom. Don't be a gamer; be gay, dammit!

I WAS OUT AT A T-DANCE AND SAW someone in low-rider jeans that covered only half of his ass. Is this the new accepted fashion? We 28-inch waist queens are having a hard time shopping and still paying next month's rent.

TO THE SKANK GOING AROUND putting his hands down people's pants: Grow up and learn what sex is really about!

I DON'T UNDERSTAND GAY MALE couples who've been together for years and still keep all their money separate. Are they commitment-phobic or is the wealthier one just plain stingy?

WHY DO NON-WHITE GUYS REFUSE to post their race in their online profiles?

IF YOU'RE NATURALLY SKINNY, YOU'RE not supposed to be bitter that muscular guys don't find your body type attractive, and you're not allowed to take steroids to level the playing field.

I LOVE IT WHEN A "HOT" GUY returns my smile with a look of aggrieved disappointment, like he obviously deserves Superman, and I'm personally depriving him of it.

WHAT HAPPENED TO BOOKSTORES AS a meeting place for hot gay men? These days all the hot men in bookstores are

homophobic or with women.

DO YOU HAVE DRAG QUEENS AT GAY functions because one of them called you out on something that is most likely true about yourself?

YOUR "THANKS FOR YOUR BITCH!" Web submission confirmation page is too cheery. You should change it to say, "Because you're stupid and no one cares!"

TO THE COMPLAINT ABOUT FLIP FLOPS: I forgot how totally butch it is to stand around in 90 degree heat in long jeans and boots whining about how hot they are. Get real!

THERE'S ALL THIS PRESSURE TO BE normal, even from the gay community. Well, I'm not.

I AM SO SICK OF SEEING ALL THOSE damn magnetic ribbons. I "support our troops" and "breast cancer awareness," but it blows my mind how people have to run out and jump on mindless bandwagons.

I'M TIRED OF LISTENING TO TWINKS bitch about me not taking them seriously when they (a) don't have a job, and (b) their only asset is their ass.

I'M A TEEN LESBIAN, AND MY BEST friend is gayer than I am. I sleep over at her house so often her parents call me her other daughter. So why haven't we kissed yet?

THE GAY WORLD ISN'T SHALLOW unless you hang with shallow people. My gay friends are the salt of the earth, never take drugs, and do not obsess over looks.

STRAIGHT GIRLS CAN WEAR RAINBOWS, but you have to be ready for girls to think you're gay. More importantly, ask yourself why it bothers you that people think you are gay.

FRANKLY, I'D RATHER SMELL A BIT of male sweat than some foofy perfume. Man smell is hot!

SEEING OTHERS IN BAD relationships has only made me happy not to be in a relationship. I may write a book on how to end relationships and call it "Heave Ho!"

TO THE GUY COMPLAINING ABOUT modesty at the gym: Being discreetly nude has nothing to do with a lack of "gay pride." It has everything to do with not wanting to be ogled and propositioned by every voyeur in town.

YOU NEVER HEARD FROM HIM AGAIN because your date was five hours long!

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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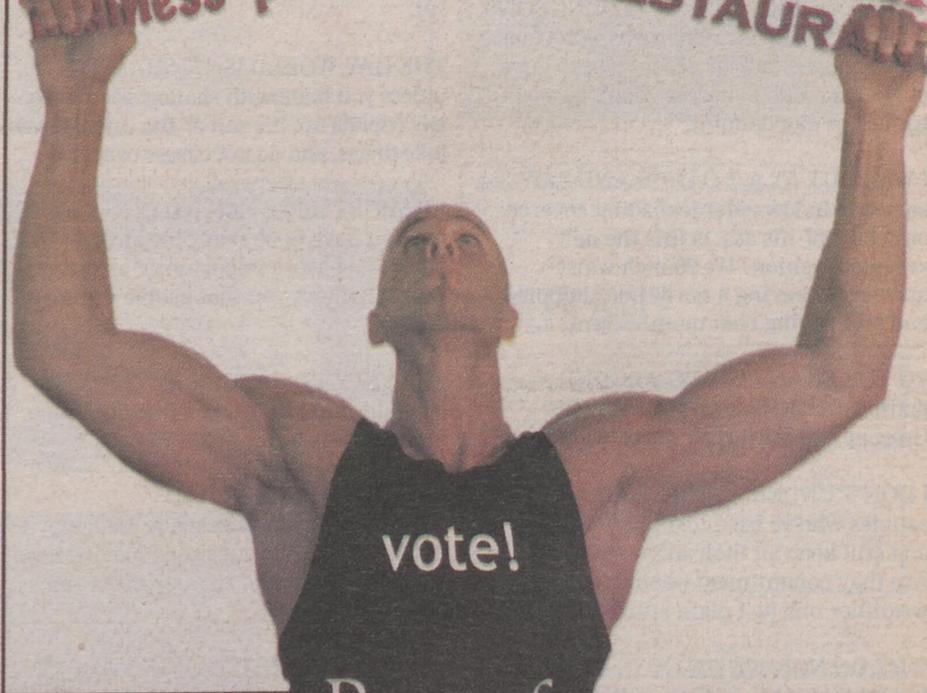
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