



A new era?
'Metrosexuals' like soccer's David Beckham take on gay sensibilities.

Page 15

HRC lobbying support against marriage amendment

HRC focusing on reaching 'magic number' to stop efforts

By RYAN LEE

Nine members of Congress from Texas — the most from any state — signed on as co-sponsors to a proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution mandating marriage shall "consist only of the union of a man and a woman."

But two Houston-area members of Texas' congressional delegation — Democratic Reps. Chris Bell and Sheila Jackson Lee — do not support the anti-gay marriage amendment.

"Rep. Bell is absolutely opposed to that legislation," said Bell's communications director, Eric Burns. "This legislation federalizes the issue of marriage, which has always been left to the states."

Bell does not support gay marriage, but does not think the constitution should be amended to explicitly ban gay marriages, Burns said.

"While historically he has opposed gay marriage, he thinks it's completely unnecessary to propose a change to the constitution," he said. "I think a constitutional amendment would be a little silly."

Bell supports civil unions, and "he believes there is no right that should be denied to gay people that is provided to everyone else," Burns said.

Jackson Lee is also concerned about altering the constitution, said her press secretary, Nkenge Harmon.

"She doesn't support the constitutional amendment because she thinks people should tread very lightly on the constitution," Harmon said.

Jackson Lee supports domestic partnerships and benefits, but Harmon said she was not sure if Jackson Lee supported gay marriages and civil unions.

"The Congresswoman is adamant about people being able to live their

lives," Harmon said.

Texas-based Reps. Ralph Hall and Charles Stenholm, both Democrats, and Reps. Joe Barton, Kevin Brady, Michael Burgess, John Carter, John Abney Culberson, Sam Johnson and Pete Sessions, all Republicans, all signed on as co-sponsors to the amendment.

Cornyn mulling Senate amendment?

The amendment is currently only proposed in the U.S. House of Representatives, but gay experts fear that may change soon.

"Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman," reads the House amendment. "Neither this Constitution or the constitution of any State, nor state or federal law, shall be construed to require that marital status or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon unmarried couples or groups."

In order to pass, the proposed constitutional amendment requires two-thirds sup-

Please see MARRIAGE BILL on Page 3



U.S. Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas) recently sent out a 'Dear Colleague' letter urging fellow senators to preemptively protect the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act from being ruled unconstitutional by a court. Cornyn fell short of advocating a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage, but said it is a possible option. (Photo by Harry Cabluck/AP)

Softball league places cap on straight players



The Montrose Softball League adopted a measure Tuesday limiting the number of straight players to two per team.

21 teams in Houston league now limited to two non-gay participants

By JOSEF MOLNAR

A local gay softball league's controversial decision Tuesday to place a cap on its straight membership showed that softball is not all fun and games.

The Montrose Softball League, whose motto is "unity through sports," voted to restrict the number of straight players to two for each of its 21 teams.

Mitchell Katine, a gay player who

objected to the change in the league's bylaws, said he was disappointed with the decision, which required a two-thirds vote to pass. Some 60 members of the league attended the meeting, a large jump in attendance.

"The league should be open to all people and not put a quota on the number of straight people per team," Katine said. "It sends the wrong message, and it reinforces discrimination."

The decision by the Houston league mirrors the controversy seen by the North American Gay Amateur Athletes Alliance, which oversees gay leagues across the country. Although NAGAAA doesn't require its affiliate associations to cap the number of straight partici-

pants, the local decision matches NAGAAA rules for its annual World Series, which also limits the number of straight players.

Past differences between NAGAAA and members of the South Florida Amateur Athletics Association prompted two teams to leave the SFAAA two years ago. The league's chair resigned when the board voted to uphold the policy.

On Tuesday, league members on both sides of the debate applauded speakers before the vote. Bill Samson, chair of the bylaws committee that recommended the change, said the two-

Please see GAY SOFTBALL on Page 3

CIRCUIT BOYS: Steel Weekend takes over where Grey Party left off in Houston. Page 19

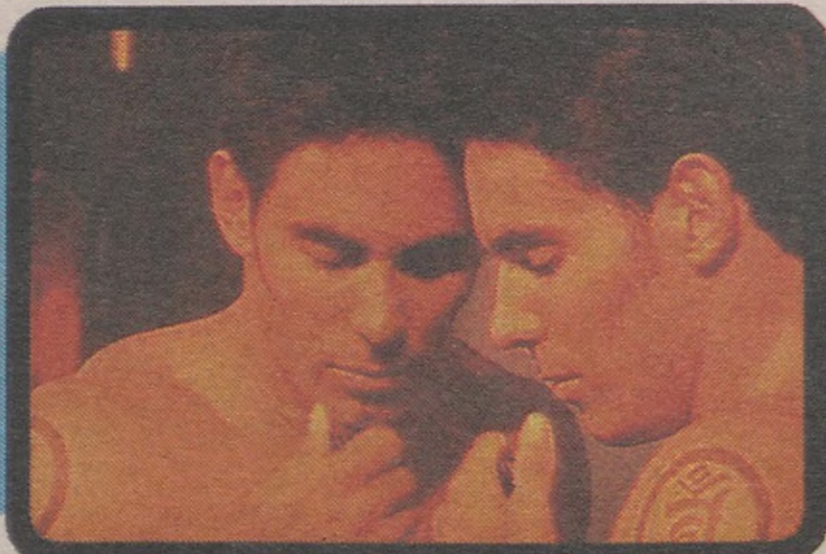
TOONFUL GOODBYE: Houston Voice political cartoonist Ron Williams dies at age 45. Page 4



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local news

HRC lobbying support against marriage amendment

MARRIAGE BILL, continued from Page 1

port, or 292 votes. It must also pass the Senate with two-thirds support, or 67 votes, and be adopted by the state legislatures in three-quarters, or 38, of the states.

"It's been slowly gaining support in the House," said Barbara Menard, deputy political director for the Human Rights Campaign, a gay rights group. "I would say in the very near future there will probably be something introduced in the Senate, as well."

The growing list of co-sponsors — at 91, as of Oct. 1 — is a major concern, but HRC is focusing its efforts on attaining the "magic number" needed to ensure the amendment will fail in both chambers of Congress, Menard said.

To defeat the amendment, 146 votes are needed in the House and 34 votes are required in the Senate.

To date, HRC has between 30 and 35 confirmed no votes in the Senate, and between 120 and 140 no votes in the House, according to Winnie Stachelberg, HRC's political director.

Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas), chair of the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights & Property Rights, sent a "Dear Colleague" letter to his fellow senators on Sept. 17, urging them to begin brainstorming ways to protect the anti-gay Defense of Marriage Act of 1996.

Noting the landmark Lawrence v. Texas U.S. Supreme Court case which recently struck down state laws prohibiting consensual sodomy, Cornyn wrote, "That decision presents a signifi-

cant threat to traditional marriage laws — a threat no state, on its own, can thwart."

Cornyn's letter followed a Sept. 4 hearing his subcommittee held entitled, "What is needed to Defend the Bipartisan Defense of Marriage Act of 1996?"

"He hasn't said he would support an amendment to protect traditional marriage, but he did say marriage is important enough to protect with a constitutional amendment," said Don Stewart, Cornyn's communications director. "We need to be prepared to protect traditional marriage if a court strikes down DOMA."

DOMA and a constitutional amendment won't "ban" anything, Stewart said, "It only protects the current bipartisan law."

The Log Cabin Republicans, a gay GOP group, continue lobbying Republican Congress members against the proposed amendment, said Mark Mead the group's spokesperson.

"Sen. Cornyn held a hearing on this issue, and no Republicans besides himself even showed up," Mead said. "It think it reflects how unimportant it is to Republicans."

Many officials who are speaking out in favor of the amendment are pandering to their political base, Mead said.

"They're going through the motions and throwing red meat to the conservatives," he said. "The next battle for civil rights for gays will be fought in the Republican Party. The Democrats are almost there, and it's a little more difficult, but [LCR] is not going to run away and close up shop."

Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchinson (R-Texas) did not respond to interview requests by press time.

Bipartisan effort needed to defeat amendment

Republicans far outdistance Democrats in the number of co-sponsors for the amendment at 83 to 8. But HRC's Menard said if the amendment is to be defeated, it will require help from both parties.

"To block this we're going to need help from both sides of the aisle," Menard said. "I think unfortunately there's conservatives in both parties supporting this amendment, but I think it's a good thing we have conservatives also speaking against amending the constitution over this."

Gay partisan groups are united against the amendment.

"The American family has changed and we need to accept that and protect it," LCR's Mead said. "I have yet to have someone explain to me how a gay marriage threatens their relationships."

The National Stonewall Democrats drew a line in the sand, establishing a policy that they will not endorse or support any candidate who co-sponsors the amendment.

"There are a lot of candidates we are still working with and educating them on this issue," said Dave Noble, executive director of the Stonewall Democrats. "Anyone who is actively trying to write discrimination into the U.S. Constitution — we will absolutely withhold support from them."

League tightens roster requirements

GAY SOFTBALL, continued from Page 1

player cap preserves the league's goal of providing a discrimination-free venue for gay softball players. The league's constitution, he added, includes a goal of advancing gay amateur softball.

"I believe that you need a limit on [straight] participation if you're truly going to advance gay amateur softball,"

Hansom said. "Otherwise, you're just talking softball."

He said the ruling may only affect one third of the MSL's teams as most teams either have one straight player, or none at all. The league also imposes an 18-player cap on rosters.

Katine, an attorney who was voted MSL's Most Valuable Player in his division, said in addition to the two-player cap on straight players for the World Series, the NAGAAA also requires that straight players be in a league for two years before they are eligible for the post-season play. The Montrose Softball League does not carry the same limitation.

"They have all these convoluted rules that discriminate against straight people and it's just softball," Katine said.

Leah Muilenburg, a straight player and team manager, said she was initially upset with the ruling, but supports the league's decision to place limits where it feels the need.

"There's a lot of misconception that a lot of straight people want to come in and

play in our league," she said. "I don't know why; we don't have it now."

Muilenburg said the league still supports its straight players, pointing to her selection as 2003 League Manager of the Year.

"When people ask me if I play softball, I say I play softball," she said. "I don't say I play softball in a gay league. I say, 'These are my friends, and I play softball with my friends in the Montrose Softball League.'"

Mike Harwell, commissioner of the Montrose Softball League, declined comment. Officials with the NAGAA commissioner's office could not be reached by press time.

i MORE INFO

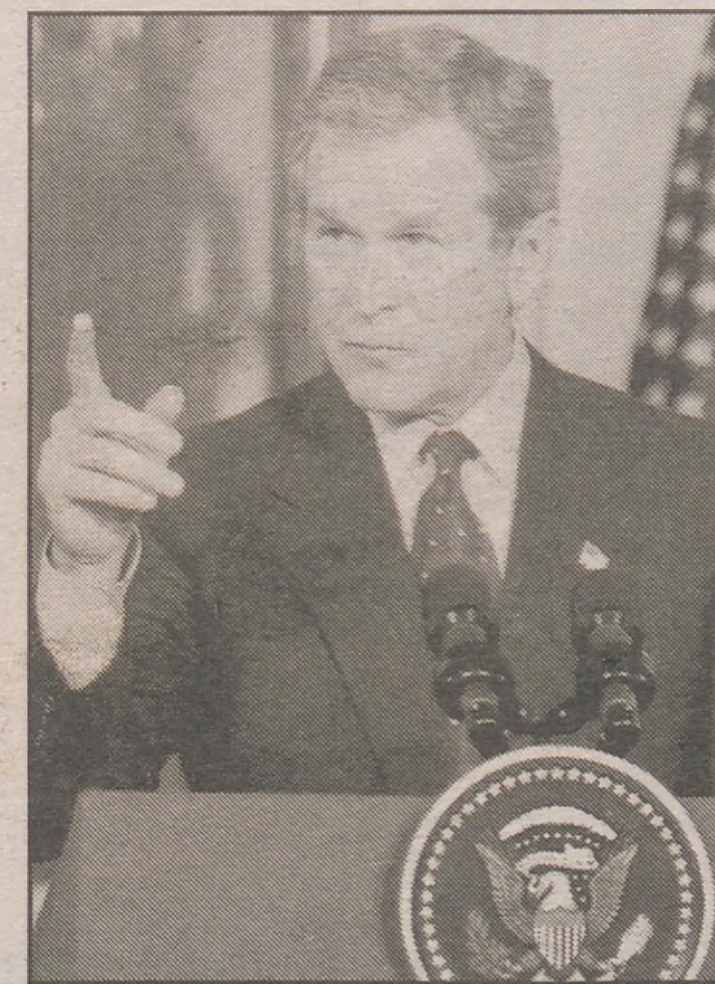
Montrose Softball League
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TIRELESS FAITH: The faith-based initiative from President George W. Bush failed to pass in Congress, but he is enacting portions of the plan through executive order. Page 9



LOVE STORY: Luke Kirby (left) and Peter Miller play star-crossed lovers in 'Mambo Italiano,' one of two new films that steer clear of gay stereotypes. Page 17



SOUL SISTERS: New CD from legend Aretha Franklin attempts to keep up with the times with a little help from Hip hop sensation Mary J. Blige, who also released a new disc. Page 16

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obituary

Gay cartoonist treated New Orleans as his canvas

Ron Williams brought 'optimism' to theater work, cartoons

By JOSEF MOLNAR

Whether on stage or with a pen or brush, Ron Williams made an impact, which is why the recent death of the artist, actor, political cartoonist and longtime resident of New Orleans was such a loss to friends and readers of gay newspapers where his work appeared.

Williams died July 25 in Santa Fe, N.M., from complications related to AIDS. He was 45.

Williams moved to New Orleans and started acting and designing stage sets shortly after leaving his home state of Pennsylvania. He graduated from Pennsylvania State University with a major in film.

"He was a great big, strapping kid from Pennsylvania, just laughing all the time," said David Cuthbert, who met Williams when both started working at the Bayou Plaza Hotel's dinner theater.

Ricky Graham, a playwright and fellow actor who knew Williams since their time together on the play "Women Behind Bars" in 1991, said they had a mutual interest in live theater and dead movie stars.

"Ron was by far the most optimistic and 'up' person I have ever known, almost to the point of nausea, I often pointed out, and he cheerfully concurred," he said.

"But it was always to him that I went when I needed sensible advice and a spiritual lift," Graham added.

Williams' disposition made him an ideal match for light-hearted roles, and he established his reputation as Jeffrey in the play of the same name and Dash Daryl, in "Daryl's Perils." He later helped to found the True Brew Theatre at 200 Julia St., as well as the first dog-centered Mardi Gras



Ron Williams started out as an actor before turning to cartooning. The political cartoonist died of AIDS-related complications July 25.

Krewe of Barkus, for which his chow-retriever mix Tad served as king for two years in a row.

Williams also established a reputation for integrity when he had the opportunity to act in a play at Le Petit Theatre du Vieux Carre, the nation's oldest community theater. Even though none of the actors in the play would be paid, the company was willing to pay him for his talents.

He declined the offer.

"He said, 'I wouldn't feel right being paid when my fellow artists aren't,'" Cuthbert said. "He was a very principled person."

Williams' talent with a pen or brush gave him another creative outlet, and he painted colorful indoor and outdoor murals, illustrations and lettering for restaurants and other businesses around New Orleans. Cuthbert said there were few areas of the city that weren't touched by his brush.



"He did work everywhere, on everything," he said. "He once told me, 'I walk around and I feel like this whole city is my canvas.'"

The next phase of Williams' life came about 10 years ago, when he shifted his focus from acting to cartooning. His first political cartoons appeared in Impact, a weekly gay newspaper in New Orleans that closed in 2002, and other Window Media newspapers, including Southern Voice, the Houston Voice and the Washington Blade.

"Ron brought color and a biting wit to the op-ed pages of our newspapers," said Chris Crain, editorial director for Window Media. "His work is sorely missed."

Williams' cartoons ranged from the humorous to those with a cutting edge, poking fun at President Bush or drug abusing "circuit queens."

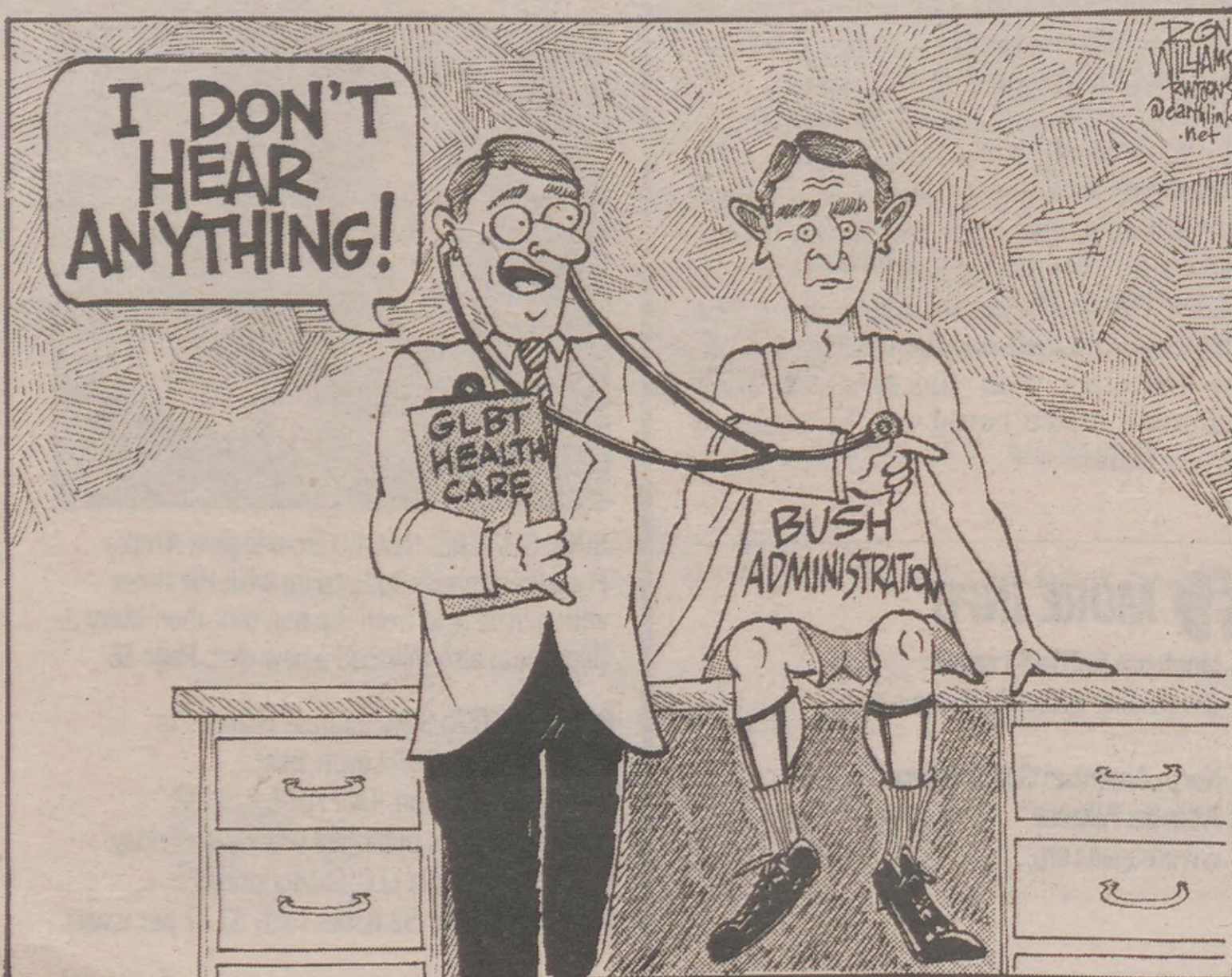
Although he continued to illustrate and paint, Cuthbert said Williams was satisfied the most with his new career.

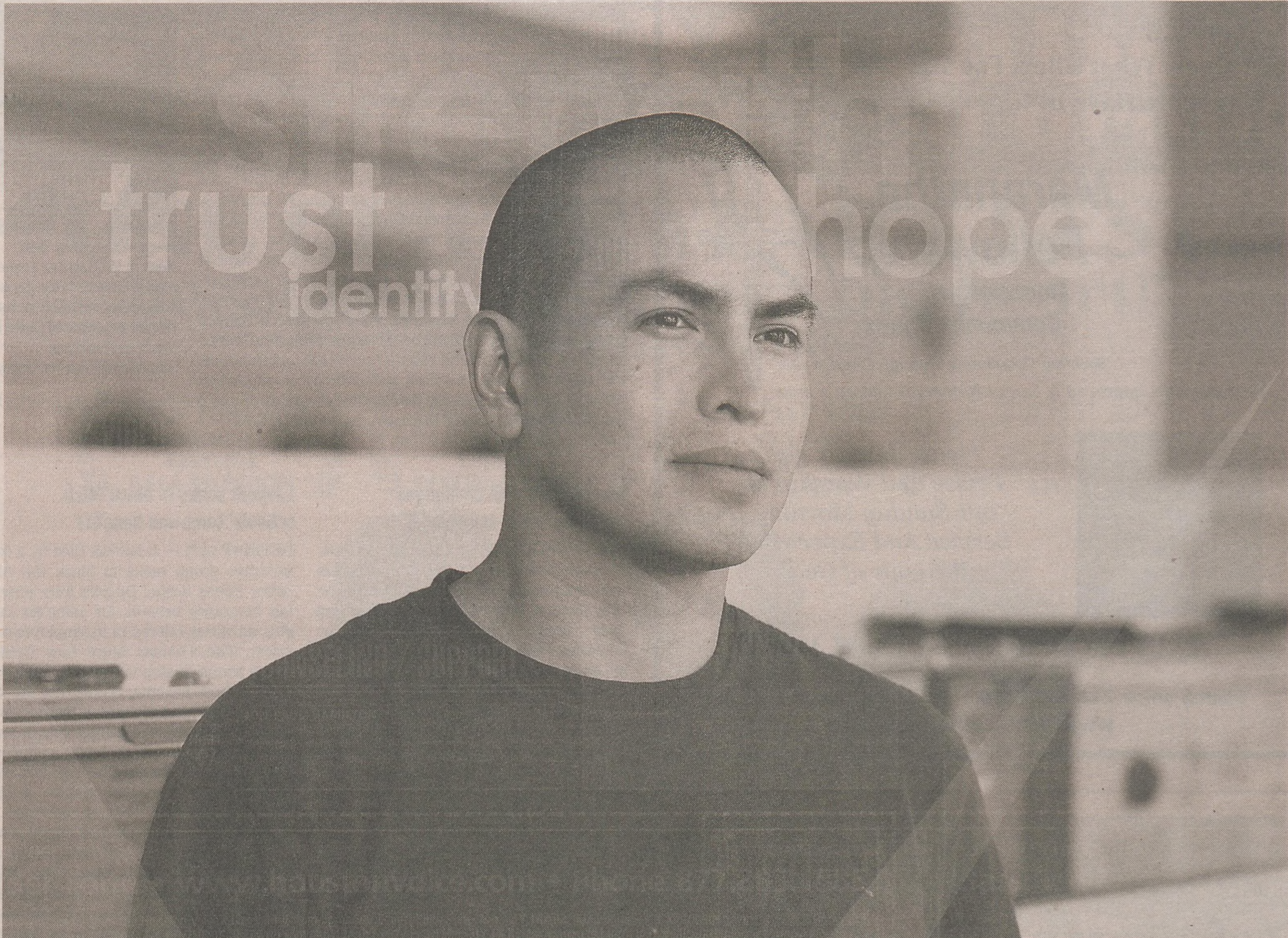
"I talked to him about it, and he said, 'I spent years trying to find my voice,' and finally this feels right. This is it," Cuthbert said.

Williams moved to Santa Fe, N.M. three years ago when his health deteriorated due to complications from AIDS. He drew cartoons for the Reporter and remained active in the community until his health declined.

Survivors include his mother, Ellen Williams Evans, and his stepfather, Sherwood J. Evans, both of Bangor, Pa.; his brother, Richard of Cincinnati, Ohio; his stepbrother, John Jr. of Hewitt, N.J.; his sister, Connie Treskot of Bethlehem; and several nieces and nephews.

Donations may be made to Aid & Comfort, P.O. Box 1981, Santa Fe, N.M. 87504.





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national news

Constitutional gay marriage ban bogged down in Congress

WASHINGTON — House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) told the Christian Broadcasting Network's 700 Club that the Federal Marriage Amendment is bottled up in committee and on the same broadcast, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) said that if the Massachusetts or New Jersey Supreme Courts legalize gay marriage, then there will be significant momentum to pass a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. Winnie Stachelberg, political director for the Human Rights Campaign, said that some House members are continuing to sign on as sponsors of the bill. "We are seeing less movement on this [amendment] from federal legislators and a serious movement from religious political groups," Stachelberg said. Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.) is firmly against such a change to the Constitution and a number of social conservative legal scholars remain opposed to the amendment, Stachelberg said. Last week, the Family Research Council announced that Oct. 12-18 will be "Marriage Protection Week." According to an FRC press release, "pro-family organizations will reach 2 million churches and millions of supporters nationwide with the message that the battle to preserve marriage must be the top priority for every American interested in preserving the family unit."



House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) said that a movement in Congress to ban gay marriage in the Constitution has been delayed as everyone on Capitol Hill awaits court rulings in Massachusetts and New Jersey.

Second Calif. suit challenges rights for same-sex couples

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Opponents of laws extending many of the rights of marriage to same-sex couples filed a lawsuit against Gov. Gray Davis and other state officials opposing their implementation. Campaign for California Families filed the lawsuit last week in Los Angeles Superior Court claiming that AB25 and the Domestic Partner Act, which grants rights to registered domestic partners, violate a state-approved proposition. Voters in 2000 approved Proposition 22, which states that "only marriage between a man and a woman is valid and recognized in the state of California." A similar lawsuit was filed earlier in the week in Sacramento. "Gray Davis and Cruz Bustamante have conspired to bring homosexual 'marriage' to California, disobeying the clear orders of the people," said Randy Thomasson, executive director of Campaign for California Families. "They have trashed the vote of the people and perverted the sacred institution of marriage."

Father: Calif. district allowed anti-gay slurs against son

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Alleging that educators failed to stop classmates from leveling anti-gay taunts against his son, the father of a 12-year-old competitive ballroom dancer filed a claim against the Pacifica School District, the San Jose Mercury News reported. The claim alleged that teachers and the principal at Ingrid B. Lacy Middle School allowed more than 30 students to harass the boy last year, the newspaper reported. The daily name-calling started during his first week in sixth grade and escalated into a death threat at the end of the school year, the claim stated. The complaint is similar to a suit that another 12-year-old boy and his mother filed in 1997. They alleged that the boy was harassed and discriminated against by students, teachers and administrators at the same middle school based on their perception that he is gay. The district, then called Laguna Salada Union Elementary, tentatively agreed to pay the family \$160,000 and to offer sensitivity training, the newspaper reported.

Lawsuit seeks to block Mich. schools' same-sex benefits

DETROIT (AP) — A lawsuit filed by a conservative group seeks to block the Ann Arbor Public School District from providing insurance benefits for same-sex couples, an option offered in its employee contracts. The Thomas More Law Center, which wants to stop tax money from supporting those benefits, claims that the district's policy is an attempt to institutionalize same-sex marriage. But backers of such policies say they ensure equal compensation among employees. The civil suit says the district's contracts violate a 1996 Michigan law that defines marriage as "inherently a unique relationship between a man and a woman" and makes same-sex marriages invalid in the state. "The school district's transparent effort to circumvent Michigan's law defining marriage is unlawful and all the more unfortunate because these funds should be used to serve the legitimate needs of the district's students," Patrick T. Gillen, associate counsel with the law center, said in a statement.

N.Y. Stonewall Club gives nod to Dean for president

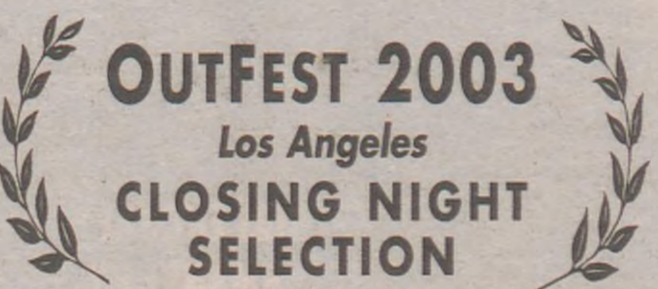
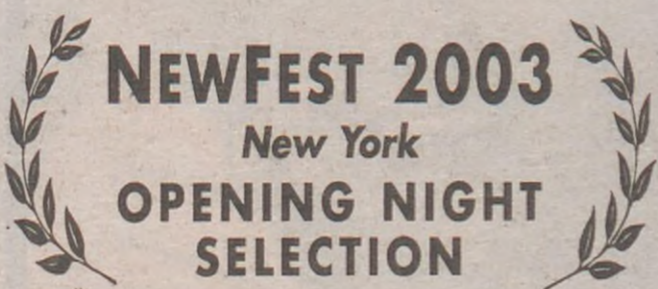
NEW YORK — The Stonewall Democratic Club of New York City endorsed former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean for the Democratic nomination for president of the United States, becoming one of the first Democratic clubs in the nation to endorse for president, the group stated in a news release. The move also makes the club the first gay Democratic club in New York City to announce its endorsement for president in the 2004 elections. The Stonewall Democratic Club is a gay partisan political group. "This was a historic night for Stonewall," club president Tom Smith said in the release. "We endorsed early, and we endorsed with a clear majority of members supporting Dean." According to Smith, Stonewall's support for Dean stems from his record as Vermont governor, including his call for federal recognition of same-sex civil unions.

From staff and wire reports

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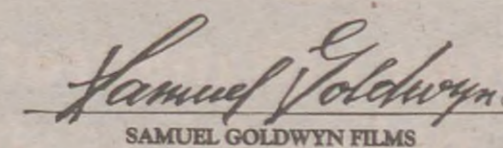
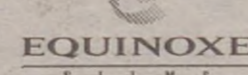


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'Boys Don't Cry' killer loses appeal for DNA tests

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Death row inmate John Lotter lost an appeal last week seeking DNA tests he said would prove his innocence in the murder of Brandon Teena. The Nebraska Supreme Court rejected his request for testing, saying the results could not produce evidence that he was wrongly convicted or sentenced. Lotter was convicted of the



John Lotter, on Nebraska's death row for 1993 killings including that of Brandon Teena, whose case inspired the movie 'Boys Don't Cry,' this week lost his appeal in a quest for DNA tests that he claims would prove his innocence. (AP file photo)

murders that inspired the critically acclaimed 1999 movie "Boys Don't Cry." One of the victims was Teena, who was born a female with the name Teena Brandon, but lived as a man in southeast Nebraska. Lotter claims that his partner, Marvin Nissen, actually murdered Teena and two witnesses in a farmhouse outside Humboldt on New Year's Eve 1993. Lotter claimed that Teena's blood or the presence of DNA from one or both of the other victims on Nissen's gloves, shoes or clothing would establish that Nissen was not where he described at trial. Prosecutors had said Lotter took Nissen's gloves after the killing and wrapped the gun and knife in them, meaning it would not be surprising if blood from all three victims was found on the gloves.

Iowa court upholds slaying conviction of homeless man

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — A jury was within its authority when it found a mentally disabled man guilty in the brutal beating death of an 82-year-old Des Moines man, the Iowa Court of Appeals ruled. The court rejected Bobby Ray Bailey's claim that his fragile mental condition and drug use caused him to snap when the victim refused to pay him for sex. Police found Alfred Comito brutally beaten at his home with a bloody hammer on the floor next to him on Dec. 21, 2000, court records show. Clothes found at the scene were traced to a local homeless shelter, where Bailey was arrested. Testimony at the trial showed that Comito often hired homeless people from the shelter to do chores at his home. "Bailey's account attempts to paint a picture of an old, rich homosexual man whose refusal to pay the money he had promised for a sex act caused a low-functioning homeless man who suffers from schizophrenia and hears voices to just snap," the court said.

Lawyers push for N.C. execution stay based on alleged anti-gay bias

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Attorneys for Edward Hartman filed a motion seeking a stay of execution for the convicted killer, arguing that the mention of Hartman's homosexuality during his trial created an anti-gay bias. Hartman, 38, was scheduled to be executed Oct. 3. He was convicted of the 1993 murder of Herman Smith Jr. Former district attorney David Beard, who prosecuted the case, could not be reached for comment. Hartman told authorities he consumed 16 cans of beer before he fired a pistol at close range into Smith's head while the man sat in a recliner and watched television. At the trial, defense attorneys argued Hartman was the victim of sexual abuse, Wells said. She said Beard diminished the impact of the sexual abuse pointing out that because Hartman is gay, the sexual abuse was not meaningful.

Three men sentenced for attack on gay man in West Hollywood

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. (AP) — Three men whose baseball bat attack left a gay man in a coma were given state prison sentences last week ranging from seven to 21 years. The victim, model and actor Treve Broudy, said he was attacked in September 2002 after embracing a male friend outside his home in West Hollywood. Broudy, 34, told the court he has memory loss and vision so poor that he cannot read or drive. The South Los Angeles men pleaded guilty last month to mayhem and conspiracy to commit robbery. Torwin Sessions, 20, who prosecutors say wielded the bat, was sentenced to 21 years. Larry Walker, 30, was given a 13-year term. Vincent Dotson, 19, was sentenced to seven years. Broudy believes he was targeted due to his sexual orientation. Prosecutors, however, declined to file hate crime charges after concluding the motive was robbery.

Geoghan conviction vacated because of death during appeal

BOSTON (AP) — The Massachusetts Appeals Court vacated the child molestation conviction of former priest John Geoghan, who was killed in prison while his appeal was pending. The ruling is customary under Massachusetts law when convicts die mid-appeal and attorneys seek to have their convictions voided. Several other states have similar laws. Geoghan was allegedly strangled and beaten to death in his cell at Souza-Baronowski Correctional Institute in Shirley by fellow inmate Joseph L. Druce on Aug. 23. Druce, 38, was indicted for murder for the killing earlier this month, and pleaded innocent. Geoghan's case triggered the sex scandal that has rocked the nation's Roman Catholic Church. Druce is serving a life sentence for the 1988 murder of a gay man. Geoghan was sentenced for molesting a 10-year-old boy. He told the Boston Globe after his conviction that he considered himself to be heterosexual.

From staff and wire reports



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national news

White House set to enact faith-based initiatives

Activists concerned plan allows anti-gay discrimination

By JOE CREA

WASHINGTON — Gay rights advocates expressed outrage over a recent White House statement that President Bush will soon unveil the first installment of his controversial faith-based initiative, which critics say will make it easier for religious groups to discriminate based on sexual orientation and religion.

The White House announced last week that officials are in the process of finalizing four regulatory changes to the faith-based initiatives plan, which was rejected by Congress earlier this year. The regulations state that religious organizations are able to hire job applicants based on their religion, which the ACLU said, is interpreted "very broadly."

"[It's] not just your formal religion, but it also means that they can make one comply with teachings or tenets of their religion," said Christopher E. Anders, a lobbyist for the American Civil Liberties Union. "It doesn't mean you have to be simply a Baptist or Catholic, but you have to be a good Baptist or Catholic. So for that reason they can say because you are gay or a lesbian, you can't be a member in good standing whatever the particular religion is."

The ACLU said that six federal departments are currently running eight different faith-based programs.

Anders said another impact of the initiative, which he calls "insidious," circumvents a constitutional protection that stipulates that federally funded programs be run in a secular manner.

"If you have an AIDS treatment program that's federally funded, there should be no difference by the way it is run at Whitman-Walker Clinics [in Washington, D.C.] and Catholic Charities," Anders said. "With those federal funds, you can't use them for proselytizing or worship but you will see a lot more of infusing religion into how the program is managed and carried out."

Anders said this would be a particular problem for smaller communities where, for example, substance abuse counseling centers are limited.

"In order to get substance abuse counseling, you might have to put up with someone else's religion," Anders said.

Anders also suggested that with the new regulations, the potential for a religious monopoly is possible, "in one particular area by a particular religion." He added that someone in the administration will likely end up "picking and choosing" which religions should get the money and suggested that some religious leaders would possibly take issue with funds being awarded to an Islamic group that provides social services.

"Basically, there will be people in the government determining what is and what

'Which religious groups will get the money and which ones will be shut out? We don't know. There are hundreds of thousands of such groups that provide social services, but who will make that determination?'

—Rob Boston, assistant director of communication for Americans United for Separation of Church & State

isn't a religion," Anders said.

Rob Boston, assistant director of communication for Americans United for Separation of Church & State, called the latest announcement "policy objective through executive fiat" and questioned whether officials have conducted a nationwide survey to determine if federal agencies are really changing their policies.

The National Stonewall Democrats, a partisan gay political group, denounced the White House initiative. Dave Noble, NSD's executive director, said that President Bush is "overriding state civil rights laws" to "pander to his right-wing base."

Mark Mead, political director of the Log Cabin Republicans, said that the faith-based initiatives should not be used to discriminate against anyone and added that if "ENDA was the law of the land, I would not be concerned."

"It's clear that ENDA should be a priority as we go forward," Mead said.

He added that it's something the LCR will watch closely and noted that all religious groups must monitor the faith-based proposal to make sure that no one is discriminated against.

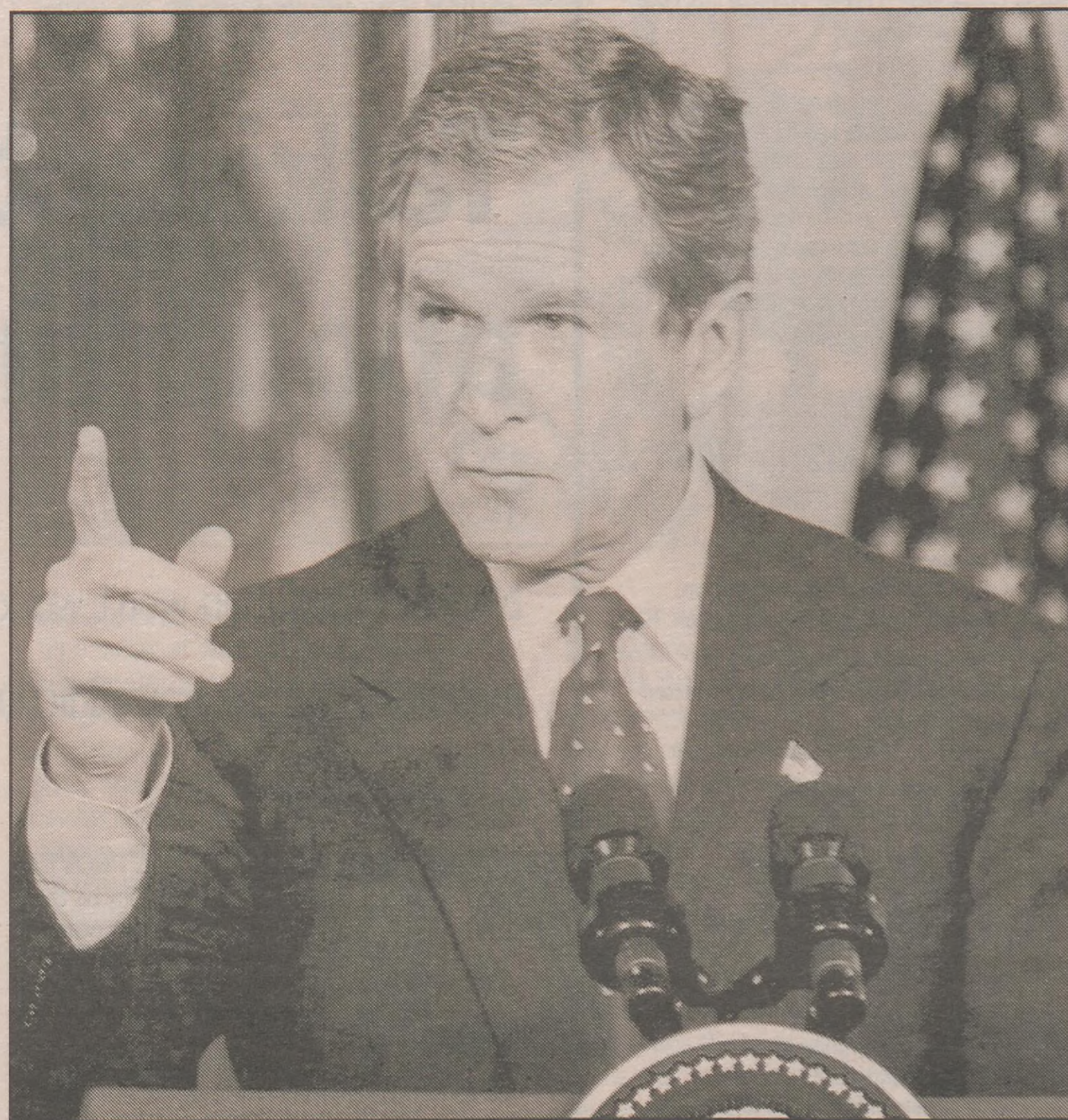
"Suppose some Muslim group didn't want to hire a bunch of Christians," Mead said. "It's an issue for all religious groups, like Christians, Muslims and Jews."

Gay religious groups eligible?

Boston said that under the current initiative, a gay religious group that provides social services nationally is eligible for federal funds. But he called that unlikely because it would cause political problems for the White House.

"[The Bush administration] would probably not fund something like that," Boston said. "Which religious groups will get the money and which ones will be shut out? We don't know. There are hundreds of thousands of such groups that provide social services, but who will make that determination? We are assuming that the more evangelical, conservative groups will get the money. If you play ball with this administration, you will get top aid. The proposal is too open to favoritism and political paybacks."

The ACLU said that one of these final changes would permit federal housing funds to go to the purchase, construction



President Bush's faith-based initiative failed to pass in Congress, but the president has worked to enact portions of the plan through executive order. Some gay activists are concerned that federal funds will be given to religious charities that discriminate against gays. (Photo by AP)

and upkeep of religious buildings, so long as they are not the denomination's "principle place of worship." As Anders explains, tax dollars could go to the upkeep of a meeting hall in which Bible study is held six days out of seven.

The ACLU said that other regulations will permit government-funded discrimination at the Department of Health & Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) program.

Federal vs. state laws

In a faith-based initiative position paper sent to congressional leaders in July, the White House asked Congress to clarify Title VII of the federal Civil Rights Act, which allows religious groups to discriminate in hiring but not with public money.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects Americans from employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age and disability. The law recognizes, according to the White House guidelines, "the fundamental rights of faith-based organizations to hire employees who share their religious beliefs." The guidelines also state that the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously upheld this protection for religious groups in 1987.

Boston said the guidelines suggest that federal law would trump state law in

this matter, even though some states have anti-discrimination employment laws on their books.

"You just don't limit civil rights federally and override them locally," Boston said.

The guidelines state that, "With respect to states and localities, the president will urge the courts to provide guidance on whether faith-based organizations are required to comply with state and local ordinances that restrict their ability to participate in federally funded formula and block grant programs."

Anders said the administration has given up on going through Congress, since it's largely rejected the initiative.

He said that by late October, religious organizations will be able to discriminate based on their religion and that such discrimination could occur in welfare programs, federal housing programs and substance abuse programs.

H. James Towey, director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, reminded an audience in June that President Clinton signed four pieces of legislation — including the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 — that allowed for hiring on the basis of religious beliefs.

"But the difference is, when Clinton signed the welfare bill, he explicitly said that those three paragraphs were unconstitutional and he would not enforce them," Anders said. "He signed them because they were a part of a much bigger bill."

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Forum

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editorial

Talking trash about tina

Yes, crystal and GHB are huge problems but a blanket prohibition won't work. Only realistic messages will counter addiction and abuse.

By STEVE WEINSTEIN

d

DRUGS ARE THE PROVERBIAL 900-kilo gorilla in the psychic gay living room: Everyone knows they're there, but no one wants to admit it.

Of course, recreational drugs permeate every sector of society, from the White House to the crack house. The "war on drugs" has been the most colossal boondoggle in American history, a quagmire that makes the war in Iran look like a victory lap.

Substance abuse has always been a particularly fraught issue in American society; witness Prohibition. The United States remains the only Western nation ever to attempt the wholesale ban of liquor.

The fact is that the legality and morality of drugs in this country has always been fluid. In the 1800s, the use of opium and cocaine was widespread and accepted. (And yes, they did put coke in Coke, which is why soda fountains were located in drug stores — soda pop was considered medicinal.)

Then the government decided to crack down on these drugs. Consider that, in 100 years, people will probably look with equal bemusement at our present-day preoccupation with drugs like Ritalin, Prozac and Halcyon.

Today, we witness another form of prohibition, every bit as destructive and useless as the one in the 1920s. The war on drugs has been promulgated on the American people, although more and more people — including William F. Buckley — are calling for their legalization.

These people realize that in countries like the Netherlands, which have effectively legalized drugs, cases of addiction actually declined after legalization.

In the United States, however, the war on drugs has resulted in the highest per-capita prison population in the developed

world. One in four black men in this country will have served time at some point in their lives, mostly for drug-related crimes.

Meanwhile, the government relies on quacks like the university researcher who recently admitted that he mistook a vial of methamphetamine for ecstasy. The report, which warned of the perils of even a one-time use of ecstasy (MDMA) was widely quoted and used as "proof" for the RAVE Act (sponsored by a "liberal" Democrat, Sen. Joseph Biden of Delaware).

The RAVE Act — Reducing Americans' Vulnerability to Ecstasy — is a singularly destructive piece of legislation that rivals anything Homeland Security has come up with as a threat to basic civil liberties. And now Congress is poised to expand on this pernicious legislation. In the war on drugs, laws pile on top of laws.

AMONG URBAN GAY MEN, DRUGS have long been a fact of life. During the past few weeks, the *Blade* has written extensively about the problem of crystal meth use among gay men.

The other drug that has received a great deal of attention is GHB, a soporific that, taken in sufficient quantities or with alcohol, can cause death.

No one can doubt that crystal can be tremendously destructive. For some people, the drug triggers a craving that leads to a ravenous sexual appetite (and unsafe sex), sleep deprivation, loss of concentration and even a complete withdrawal from reality.

GHB, which began with bodybuilders who believed it chemically mimicked human growth hormone, quickly made its way into clubs.

The mid- and late-1990s probably marked the height of drug use in clubs, but the use of crystal and G remain serious problems in the gay world. And there is no indication that either one is going away any time soon.

BUT PEOPLE AREN'T EASILY SWAYED by anti-drug messages. In fact, they may even have the opposite effect.

I recently ran into one prominent 50-year-old gay New Yorker who actually started smoking cigarettes because of anger over the city's widespread ban. While I doubt that anti-anti-smokers constitute a new movement, I do believe that it's basic human nature to resist other people telling them what they can and cannot do.

Years of cynical messages guarantee that they won't reach the people who need to hear them the most.

Last year, I attended a forum on crystal use. I had hoped it would help me understand why so many people I knew were getting so strung out on this drug.

I heard reports on a couple of studies about crystal use among gay men, which, while interesting, didn't really explain the phenomenon. The one person who was working directly with users was a representative from a group called Dance Safe.

Dance Safe is a worthwhile organization that goes to raves and sends out messages about harm reduction, rather than preaching across-the-board abstinence. The poor man! The audience heaped abuse on him for "abetting" drug use rather than a blanket condemnation.

But telling people, as singer Rufus Wainwright did in a recent *New York Times* profile, that crystal is addictive to anyone who uses it, simply flies in the face of cold, hard facts.

Only if drugs are dealt with realistically will people listen to the real message: Many people have become addicted to crystal, and it is impossible to know which first-time users can walk away from the drug and in which ones the drug will trigger a response that results in addiction.

Similarly, blanket statements that GHB will inevitably kill you just won't work. Tell people the truth: That dosages of this drug are highly unreliable, that different metabolisms results in different reactions, that batches differ radically in potency; that too much of the stuff can kill you. Then people will listen.

Drugs are a huge and ongoing problem. But a shotgun approach will only turn off users and even lure potential ones. Until the government approaches drug use realistically — and don't hold your breath — the gay community will have to take its cues from organizations like Dance Safe and provide realistic messages about use and abuse.

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viewpoint ROBERT BUCHANAN



A N.C. prosecutor improperly emphasized a defendant's sexual orientation to get the death penalty for abuse victim-turned-killer.

Killed for being gay

IS THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA going to kill Eddie Hartman because he is gay?

Some may not think this a fair question since Hartman admitted killing Herman Smith in 1993. However, there were serious problems with the sentencing portion of Hartman's trial. He is scheduled to be executed on Oct. 3.

The penalty portion of a death penalty trial is the step in the legal process where family members and others are given the opportunity to plead for the life of a convicted murderer.

Often they may present history of family problems and abuse. They may show how the convicted had problems or events in life that may cause the jury to be sympathetic and allow life in prison rather than death.

Eddie Hartman's trial was no exception. His mother and aunt presented testimony to show a troubled life that may have helped influence the jury.

Prosecuting Attorney David Beard decided to counter this possible sympathy by injecting a bias into the deliberations. Every time a family member asked for mercy by explaining that Hartman endured a childhood full of sexual abuse, Beard responded

by questioning whether Hartman was gay. When, for example, Hartman's mother testified that he had been molested by an adult male at the age of 8, Beard replied, "Is your son not a homosexual?" The question was clearly intended to suggest that the sexual abuse of a child isn't damaging if that child later turns out to be gay.

The prosecutor played up to anti-gay bias to get the death penalty for Eddie Hartman. The judge asked the jury to disregard Beard's statements, yet the bias was already introduced. Ultimately, the jury refused to consider his upbringing when deliberating on mitigating factors.

THE PROSECUTOR EVEN ADMITTED TO emphasizing Hartman's homosexuality to get the death penalty. He discouraged the jury from considering that Hartman grew up in a violent and sexually abusive environment.

Eddie Hartman watched his own mother try to commit suicide twice, and he was beaten by three of his mother's six husbands — once so badly with a club that he was hospitalized for a week. Beard believed he was justified in asking the jury to overlook these critical facts



because he claimed Hartman is gay.

The tactic of introducing bias to get the death penalty is nothing new in the U.S. This case shows bias against sexual minorities, but a Justice Department reports shows that a large disproportion of those on death row are racial minorities.

Those who are not racial minorities are often sexual minorities. Overwhelmingly the people on death row are male and poor. Economic bias plays a critical role in whether someone will be put to death or simply receive life in prison.

JUSTICE OBVIOUSLY ISN'T TRULY blind in America, in spite of all the rhetoric that says otherwise. Often the conservatives who support the death penalty quote Scripture to justify their cause.

Yet this look at Scripture is selective. The ancient prophet Isaiah warned that God would bring justice on political leaders who would not uphold the rights of

the poor and those who are weak politically. Luke records a warning to St. Peter in Acts 19 that he should not allow himself to be prejudiced, but that God makes every minority clean in God's eyes.

Somehow, these passages are forgotten in favor of alternatives like, "An eye for an eye."

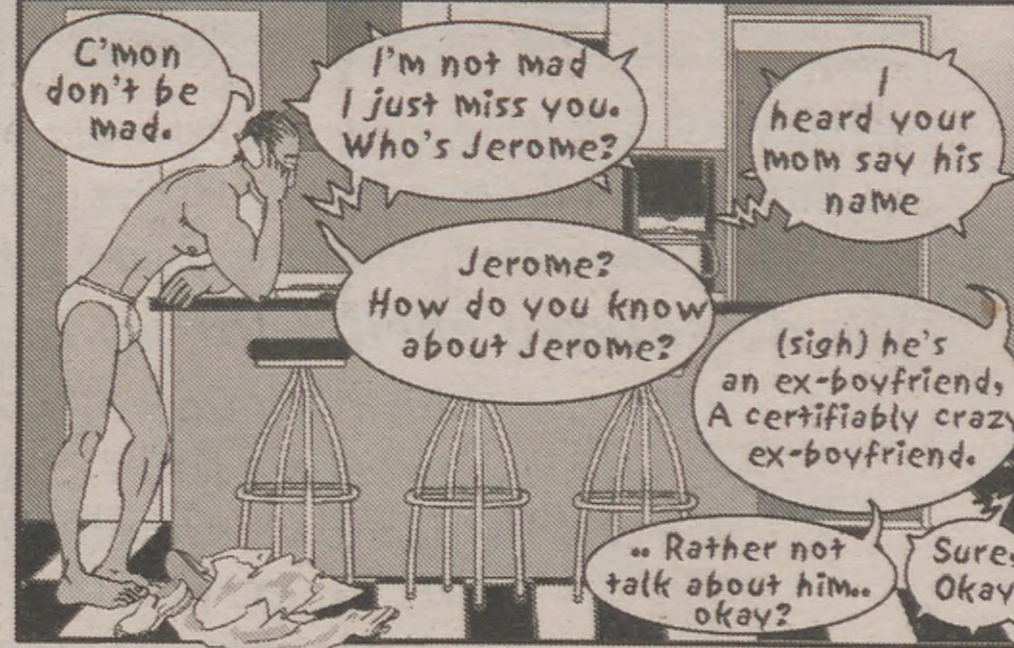
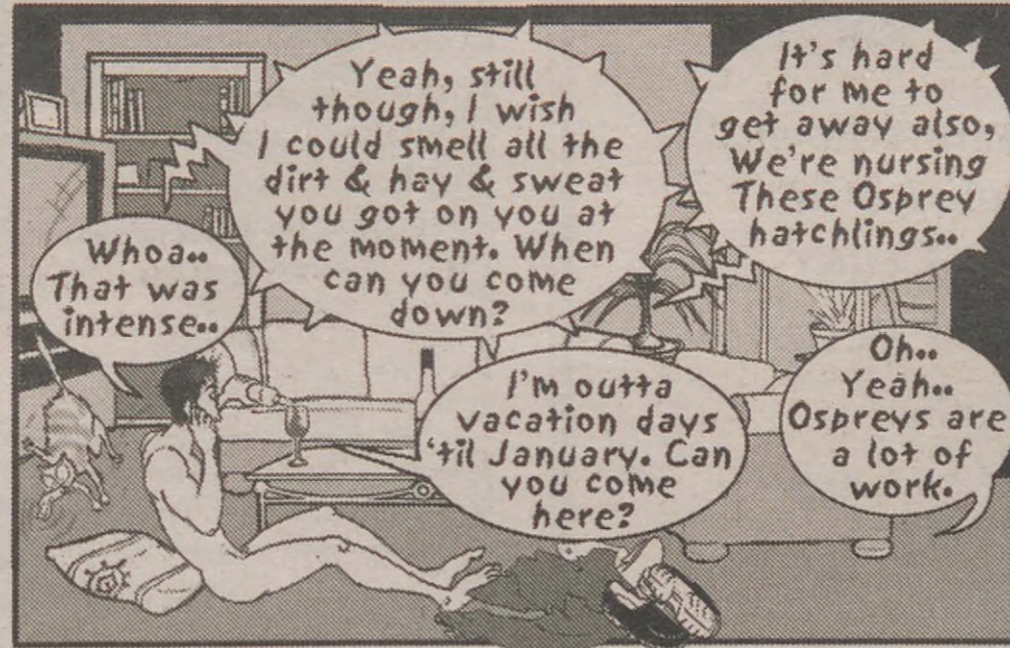
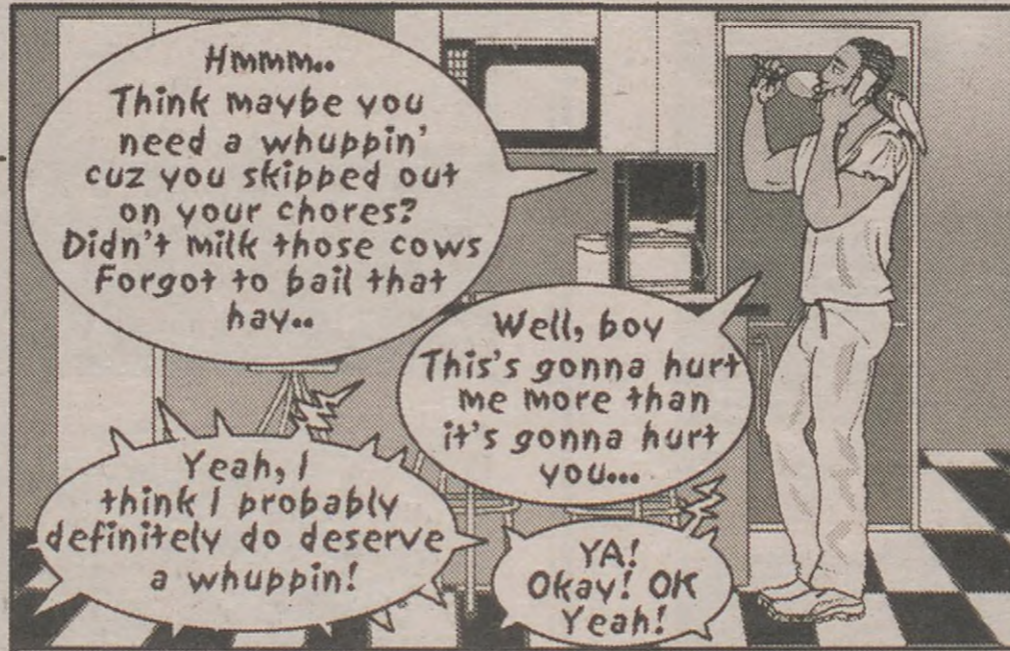
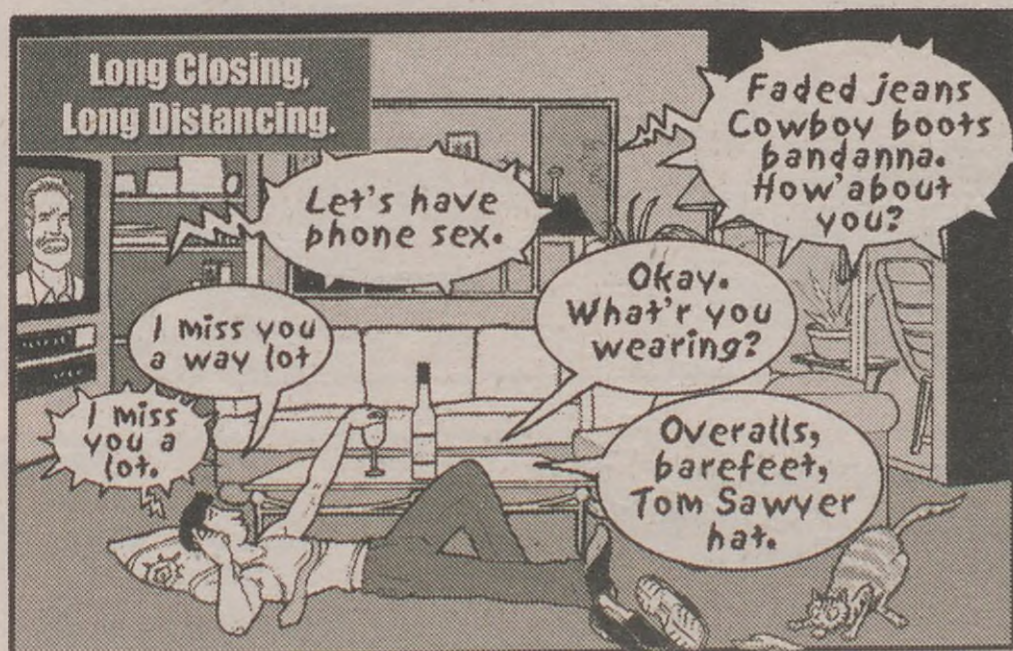
No doubt Eddie Hartman's crime was horrible and few if any would argue that the state must uphold law and order. However to bias a jury is just as horrible and to allow a man to be put to death because of prejudice simply compounds one evil upon another.

Perhaps the state of North Carolina can find a way to charge the prosecutor in Hartman's case with a hate crime. He is no doubt guilty of hatred toward homosexuals.

@ Robert Buchanan is an Evangelical Anglican minister and author of "Love, Honor and Respect: How to Confront Homosexual Bias and Violence in Christian Culture"; he can be reached at bob@inclusivechristians.org.

The Mostly Unfabulous Social Life of ETHAN GREEN

by Eric Orner



viewpoint GWEN SMITH



The Department of Homeland Security is warning that cross-dressing terrorists may be infiltrating, but is that threat a real one?

Transsexual terrorism

NO LESS AN ENTITY THAN THE NEWLY formed United States Department of Homeland Security has decided that law enforcement needs to keep a strict eye out for "males dressed as females." It is one of the clearer examples of how transgenderism and gender variance is equated with deception.

The paragraph in question — pulled from an official Homeland Security press release — seems innocuous enough: "Previous attacks underscore al-Qaeda's ability to employ suicide bombers — a tactic which can be used against soft targets and VIPs. Terrorists will employ novel methods to artfully conceal suicide devices. Male bombers may dress as females in order to discourage scrutiny."

The most notable thing is what it doesn't say. It makes no attempt to say that a terrorist would not wear, say, the gar-

ments of a cleric in an attempt to "discourage scrutiny." It makes no attempt whatsoever to provide any other example than that of a man dressing as a woman to evade suspicion.

This concerns me even more as new screening devices, such as the Rapiscan Secure 1000, start making their way into more airports. This particular device creates a real-time X-ray image of a person — one that only penetrates as deep as our skin, providing a perfectly nude image of anyone being checked by this machine.

This is already invasive if one is transgendered: breast forms, packers, bindings, and the best tucks in the world will be revealed to any authorized personnel standing behind the machine. Add to this the concerns raised by the DHS, and a trans person could find themselves facing a very

difficult situation, especially with fresh allegations of the abuse of the "Patriot Act" in cases not involving terrorism.

Of course, the DHS release doesn't only speak of airports, but suggests that other "soft targets" could be at risk, including restaurants, gas stations, hotels, apartment complexes and shopping malls. Places that all people — including transgender people — are likely to utilize.

This homeland security warning could have big consequences to anyone who is perceived as "cross dressing." It won't matter so much how good the person looks, or how the person self identifies; any trans person is a potential target for scrutiny.

THIS IS NOT THE FIRST TIME WE'VE been through this.

In the era of Stonewall, laws against cross dressing were common. Indeed, the most recent case of such archaic laws being stuck down was in San Diego, just a handful of years ago. It would not surprise me if there are locales in the United States where such laws are still on the books.

Many of them required that a person, if so dressed, had to be wearing three items of their birth gender's clothing. Some were more stringent, with some biological females having to get special licenses in order to wear pants in public!

I'VE NEVER BEEN SURE WHERE THE assumption of deception comes from. While there are examples on record of just such actions, is it truly common enough to warrant as much concern that has been given to it?

Popular culture is rife with films and television shows — both comedies and dramas — that use cross-gendered presentations as part of duplicity. In recent years, there have been scores of big screen pictures that present transgendered behaviors in such a light.

The same can be seen in the talk shows, with the long-time antics of "The Jerry Springer Show" as a prime example of transgendered people being shown as deceivers. Though I assure you, I am expecting a new reality show to challenge Springer any day now. "Joe Transsexual," anyone?

The news media are not immune either, with tales of cross-dressed bank robbers and the like garnering greater-than-normal press coverage. For that matter, in cases where a transgendered person may be on trial for a crime, the issue of their transgender status often becomes the focus of the trial regardless of it having a relevance to the case.

As I said before, I know that there are plenty of examples of deception taking a cross-gender edge. I just don't see it as being the problem that some might have you believe. Specifically, I think this DHS release may do more harm to transgendered and gender variant people than any potential good it may do in thwarting terrorism on United States soil.

After all, I shouldn't have to prove that I am not a threat to national security.

@Gwen Smith is a San Francisco-based transgender activist and can be reached at gwen@gwensmith.com.

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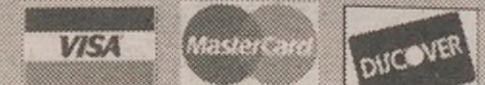
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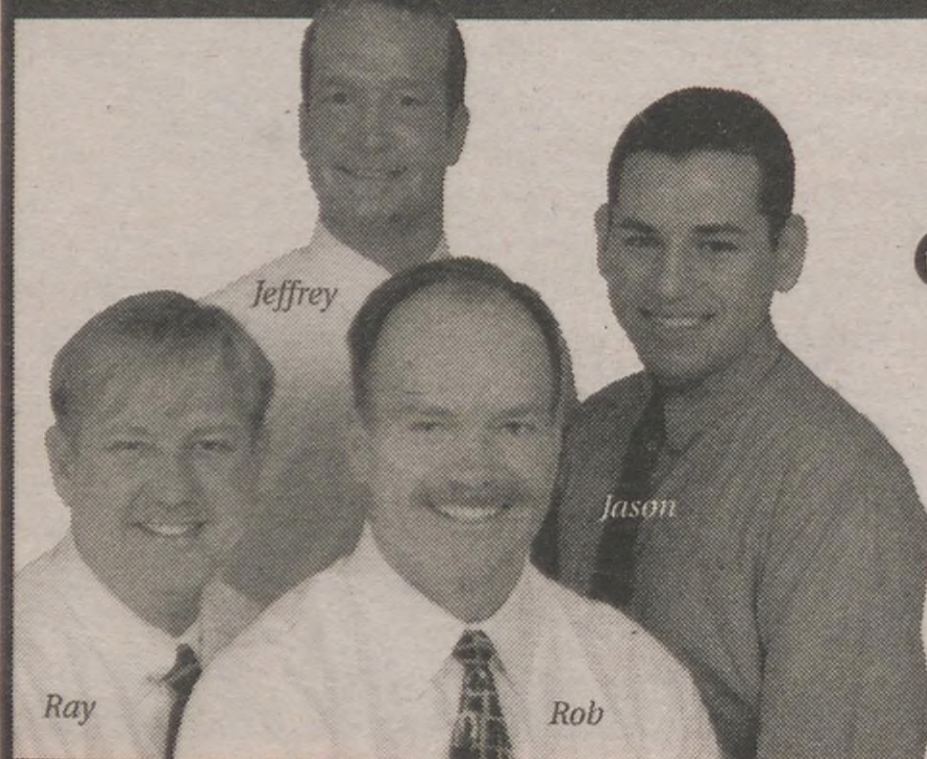
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on the record



"I miss accessorizing. I think I'm one scarf and three wristbands away from being gay anyway."

Actor **Lance Krall**, who has finished his role as Kip, a gay Hispanic character on Spike TV's fake reality show, "Joe Schmo" (Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Sept. 30)

"We are here to take a stand for the gospel of Jesus Christ in a time of great dissension and confusion in our church."

Episcopal Bishop **Jack Iker**, of Fort Worth, Texas, on the vote by his diocese to declare null and void the denomination's confirmation of a gay bishop in New Hampshire (Associated Press, Sept. 28)

"Homosexuality, as we understand it as an orientation, is not mentioned in the Bible. I think the confirmation of the bishop of New Hampshire is acknowledging what is already a reality in the life of the church and the larger society of which we are a part."

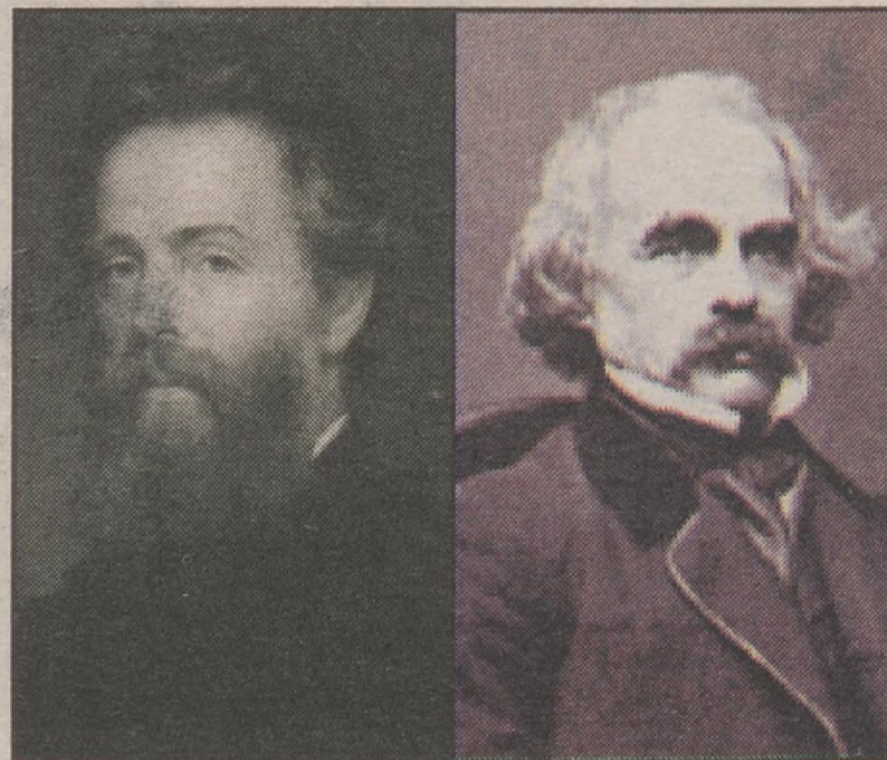
Frank Griswold, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, on the confirmation of the denomination's first openly gay bishop (Associated Press, Sept. 29)

"Our founding fathers wanted to keep the government out of the church. They didn't want to keep the church out of government."

Rep. **Mac Collins** (R-Ga.), a U.S. Senate candidate, appearing at a rally at the state capitol supporting the display of the Ten Commandments in public buildings (Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Sept. 30)

"I guarantee you the people sitting in the back room of the gay rights movement did not intentionally plan to bring America 'My Big Fat Gay Summer.' It's a simple confluence of events. History has decided to serve them up within a short period of time, and it gives the false impression that gays are taking over the world. That's not the case."

David Smith, communications director of the Human Rights Campaign, on the visibility of gay issues this summer in politics, judicial decisions and television (San Antonio Express-News, Aug. 24)



"Whence come you, Hawthorne? By what right do you drink from my flagon of life? And when I put it to my lips — lo, they are yours and not mine. I feel that the Godhead is broken up like the bread at the Supper, and that we are the pieces. Hence this infinite fraternity of feeling."

Author **Herman Melville** (left) ("Moby Dick") in a letter to author **Nathaniel Hawthorne** ("The Scarlet Letter"), taken as evidence of a sexual relationship by gay historian **Michael Bronski** (Boston Phoenix, Aug. 28)

"You have studio executives, who may be openly gay, telling actors not to come out, saying they will lose jobs because of the audience. That is just bull."

Gay actor **Sir Ian McKellan** ("Lord of the Rings," "X-Men") (Gay.com UK, Aug. 26)

"I knew you were gay. I didn't know how to bring it up. Let me just say, we're better friends than ever. Let me also say, I reserve the right to disagree with you on some stuff."

Bush family friend **Charles Francis**, founder of the gay-straight Republican Unity Coalition, on how his friend **George W. Bush** reacted to a coming out letter from Francis (Knight Ridder, Aug. 26)

"He's a guy who was raised in Midland, Texas. He just didn't have that much exposure to the gay community. I think his heart is in the right place. I don't know what that means in terms of politics and policy."

Former Congressman **Steve Gunderson**, a gay Republican from Wisconsin, on the president's attitude toward gays (Knight Ridder, Aug. 26)





Out on the Bayou

Metrosexuals: a gay conception

'There's nothing straight about metrosexuality,' says idea's gay father

By CHRISTOPHER SEELY

LIKE ANY SELF-RESPECTING METROSEXUAL, Adam Gurr is well versed in the lingo of male beauty.

Gurr regularly bronzes his face to look healthier, has his hair relaxed "to make it stick straight," works out, tweezes unwanted hair, and whitens his teeth.

He also proudly owns "every color of button down," 50 different shades of denim, loves accessories and has a compulsive weekly shoe-shopping habit

"I do it for me," Gurr says. "I like getting compliments. Who doesn't like getting compliments?"

Gurr's fashion and grooming habits are a primary characteristic of what mainstream media reports as a new breed of modern man — a straight man with a stereotypically gay sensibility getting in touch with his feminine side.

In a word, the metrosexual.

But there is a problem with the new media definition, says Mark Simpson, a gay man who coined the term "metrosexual" in his 1994 book "Male Impersonators: Men Performing Masculinity."

"There is nothing straight about metrosexuality," Simpson says in an interview with Houston Voice.

"Many journalists who ... fingered me as the father of metrosexuality have run screaming in terror when they realized what the metrosexual daddy was saying about his bastard child with perfect skin," Simpson says.

"The point of the mainstreaming and spaying of the original idea has been to turn what is actually a very disturbing phenomenon, effectively the end of sexuality — the law that identity is based on sexual orientation — into something reassuring, a restatement of sexual categories," he says.

Advertisers' dream

A PRIME EXAMPLE OF THE METROSEXUAL IS David Beckham, a British soccer star who married a former Spice girl and became an icon — to gays, among others — and an advertiser's "wet dream," according to Simpson.

"Beckham is the biggest metrosexual in Britain, because he loves being looked at and because so many men and women love to look at him," Simpson says.

The same holds true for Gurr, who works with Elite modeling agency, walking the runway for Versace, Texas-based Neiman Marcus and most recently Mercedes.

At a male beauty contest held on "gay night" at a straight bar last month, Gurr won top honors by flirting with the gay male judges, he says.

"I walked away with money and a good time," he



Metrosexual British soccer superstar David Beckham says in interviews that he has no qualms being considered a gay sex icon, even though he is straight. Beckham is pictured here in a homoerotic photo shoot that appeared in Arena Homme Plus, a European fashion magazine. (Photo by Steve Klein)

says. "I was in the spotlight."

Being mistaken as gay doesn't bother Gurr, he says.

"I'm secure," Gurr says. "They can think what they want to think. If I'm doing a show, I'm not modeling for me, but for everyone. If I get everyone to like me, I'll get more work."

The reason Beckham and metrosexuals like Gurr are so appealing to marketers, Simpson argues, is because "old-fashioned" and "unmoisturized" heterosexuals do not respond to consumer capitalism as much as the new breed of man who is more interested in his image.

"Fashion and grooming — that is a huge business if you can take these products and target them to heterosexual males who tend to have higher income than gay men or women," says Cindy Abel, a lesbian marketing executive who specializes in the gay market.

A study released in June by Euro RSCG Worldwide, an international marketing company, bolstered the metrosexual phenomenon and turned Simpson's concept into a buzzword amidst a flurry of heightened media coverage surrounding Bravo's smash summer hit "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy".

Nearly half of the 510 men surveyed said that there is nothing wrong with a man getting a facial or manicure, and 89 percent of the male respondents believe that grooming is essential for men in today's business world, according to the study, entitled "The Future of Men: U.S.A."

"Now we're seeing an emerging wave of men who chafe against the restrictions of traditional male boundaries," the report says. "They want to do what

Please see METROSEXUALS on Page 20

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music ARJAN TIMMERMANS



Positive vibes from two gay favorites keep audiences coming back for more from *Queens of Soul*, then and now.

Soul royalty loves life

ARETHA FRANKLIN AND MARY J. Blige are two of America's finest female soul singers. Franklin's uplifting classics and Blige's brutally honest crooning capture millions of hearts and grant the artists the respective titles of Queen of Soul and Queen of Hip Hop Soul.

Coincidentally, they both released new work last month that celebrates the joys of love and life. Franklin packs her positive vibe into the album "So Damn Happy," and Blige goes back to her inner city roots on her sixth studio record, "Love & Live."

The two actually join royal forces on Franklin's effort, with Blige contributing two tracks. On "No Matter What" and "Holdin Out," Blige provides a modern day R&B vibe that underlines Franklin's unlimited versatility.

OVER THE COURSE OF MORE THAN three decades, Aretha Franklin became a national treasure selling millions of records. She masters a range of genres, including blues, gospel, jazz and soul.

Even at age 61, this daughter of a Baptist preacher continues to tour around the world to share her music with hordes of adoring fans of anthems including "Respect," "Think" and "Freeway of Love."

On "So Damn Happy," the singer attempts to demonstrate that she is still in tune with contemporary taste. Besides Blige, she also gets help from other hit producers like Troy Taylor as well as Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis.

The album is a celebration of life, filled with songs about hope ("Holdin' On"), empowerment ("Good News"), happiness ("Wonderful," "So Damn Happy") and the ups and downs of love ("The Only Thing Missin").

Unfortunately, the album's unconditional feel-good vibe is lacking exciting hooks or any compelling meaning. Mediocre songs about chirping birds, holding hands and joining hearts do not provide the substance that fits her reputation.

WHEN MARY J. BLIGE SANG "NO More Drama" in 2001, she meant it. The album was the end of a series that served as a spiritual journey to deal with her pains, grief and depression. The music served as a musical catharsis that not only showed Blige's growth as a person but also as an artist.

"I was tired of suffering, of the hustle and hassle of every day life," Blige says in a recent press statement. "Right now, I am growing, I'm learning. ... What you hear on "Love & Live" is the truth and my willingness to embrace it."



'Respect'-ively acknowledged as the Queen of Soul and the Queen of Hip Hop Soul, Aretha Franklin and Mary J. Blige offer new CDs, with Blige joining Franklin on two of the legend's new tracks.

Blige also gained significant popularity among gay listeners with sweeping club mixes and her support for AIDS charities.

Hip-hop mogul Sean "P. Diddy" Combs produced the bulk of Blige's new album. The two previously collaborated on the singer's groundbreaking 1992 debut album "What's The 411" and the 1994 follow-up "My Life."

The initial teaming of Blige and Combs introduced the so-called "ghetto fabulous" soul music that fused old-school blues vocals with contemporary rap, hip-hop and funk.

But nine years later, this formula appears to have lost its edge.

Combs' lack in innovative production skills marginalizes the singer's distinct talent. His unoriginal hip-hop beats, overly dramatic interludes and plain rap duets compromise Blige's intense vocals.

Nonetheless, Blige pulls off a few high notes on this 18-track album, including the infectious "Let Me Be The 1" (featuring rapper 50 Cent) and the punctuating "Not Today" (produced by Dr. Dre)

The soaring ballad "Friends" is classic Blige, with the singer pouring out emotion to describe her pain and anger about people who betrayed her.

"Friends" is Blige at her best, showing off her biggest asset — that voice.

i MORE INFO

'So Damn Happy'
Aretha Franklin
Arista Records
www.sodamnhappy.com

'Love & Life'
Mary J. Blige
Geffen Records
www.mjblige.com

film STEVE WARREN

Mainstream release of 'Tuscan Sun' includes lesbians without exploitation, 'Mambo Italiano' does same for guys.



Sandra Oh and Kate Walsh play key characters as lesbian partners along for the ride with Diane Lane in 'Under the Tuscan Sun.' (Photo courtesy Buena Vista Pictures)

International delights

DIANE LANE FOLLOWS HER OSCAR-nominated role in "Unfaithful" with something lighter but still meaty, a comedy that calls for her to be depressed much of the time.

Lane plays San Francisco author Frances Mayes, who gets screwed in a divorce settlement. Tired of seeing her mope for months, her best friend Patti (Sandra Oh), a pregnant lesbian, gives her a ticket for a gay tour of Tuscany that she and her partner (Kate Walsh) were going to use.

After seeing Florence on the Gay & Away tour, Frances jumps off the bus near Cortona and buys a 300-year-old villa, then hires an Italian contractor with three Polish workmen to renovate it.

A day trip to Rome introduces Frances to Marcello (Raoul Bova). He lives in Positano, which cues more sightseeing. There's yet another side trip, to Montepulciano for the annual flag-throwing festival, described by Patti as "straight men — in tights — twirling flags."

It's hard to worry about Lane's character, despite being devastated by divorce and having to spend the rest of her life alone — whether she's in San Francisco, Tuscany or a phone booth. But once you buy the premise, the rest of "Under the Tuscan Sun" goes down easy.

Lesbian friend Patti continues to play a role in Frances' life, as does Catherine (Lindsay Duncan), a campy diva who met Federico Fellini when she was 18 and does an homage to the director's "La Dolce Vita" when she gets drunk.

Mayes' book was freely adapted and directed by Audrey Wells ("Guinevere"). "Under the Tuscan Sun" can't escape the "chick flick" label, but it can give chick flicks a good name.

THE PROVERBIAL CUP IS RUNNING over for moviegoers as films with some degree of queerness open on local screens. Stereotypical Mediterranean-

Americans, popularized in "My Big Fat Greek Wedding," return as Italian-Canadians in "Mambo Italiano," which also features the new gay stereotype: non-stereotypical gays.

Gay wannabe TV writer Angelo Barberini (Luke Kirby) lived at home until he was 27. Moving into his own apartment, Angelo is reunited with his gay boyhood friend Nino (Peter Miller), who deserted him in high school when the other kids picked on Angelo as a "fag."

Now in adulthood, they take their friendship to the next level. Nino moves in with Angelo, who decides they should come out. Nino isn't ready, and trouble ensues because it's hard for only one half of a couple to come out.

Nino starts exploring his sexual options until the inseparable mates go their separate ways. Will Angelo get over Nino, or will they get together again? Will the Barberinis rally behind their son? Viewers of "Mambo Italiano" have fun finding out.

Steve Galluccio adapted his play with director Emile Gaudreault.

i MORE INFO

'Under the Tuscan Sun'

★★★

Queer Quotient: Oh's role of the lesbian best friend is far from tokenism. She receives second billing and continues to be important after setting the plot in motion. In wide release

'Mambo Italiano'

★★ 1/2

Queer Quotient: The Italians are stereotypical, but the gays aren't. The queer romance is the serious heart of this ethnic comedy. Angelika Film Center
510 Texas Ave.
713-225-5232

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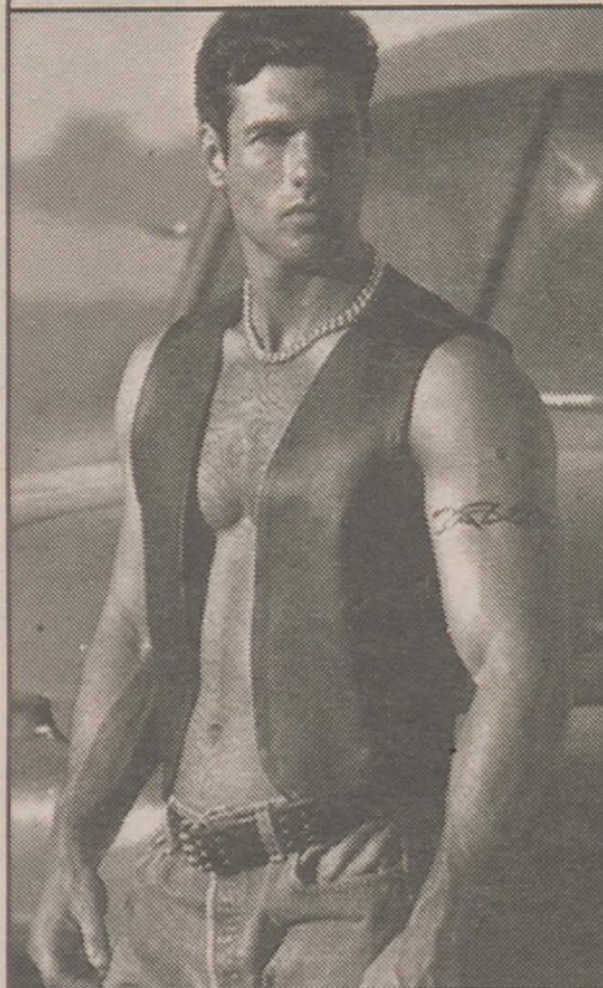
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books JAY STERNBERG

Book explores options available for men who are HIV-positive and don't know how to navigate 'Love in the Time of HIV.'

Dating tips for poz guys

IN A NEW BOOK TITLED "LOVE IN THE TIME OF HIV: The Gay Man's Guide to Sex, Dating, and Relationships," Michael Mancilla and Lisa Troshinsky provide a thorough roadmap through the often rough and complicated terrain of finding romance and relationships in the era of HIV.

Mancilla, an HIV-positive psychotherapist, is passionate about helping HIV-positive gay men find and embrace loving relationships, he says.

"There has been very little written for the HIV-positive community about how to date and find meaningful relationships," Mancilla says. "Lisa and I wrote this book to fill that niche."

The authors address this topic by engaging readers with personal anecdotes, highlighted text boxes, practical tips, quizzes and numerous references to additional resources.

"Love in the Time of HIV" describes a new era in the history of HIV, one where the authors say HIV-positive men have the luxury of worrying about how to date against the backdrop of HIV, instead of just coping with short-term survival.

With the recent arrival of new and successful drug treatments and longer life expectancies, they describe a phenomenon referred to as "the Lazarus syndrome." This term refers to people with AIDS whose prognosis was terminal until, metaphorically, they rise from the dead, recover and find themselves living with the possibility of a future again.

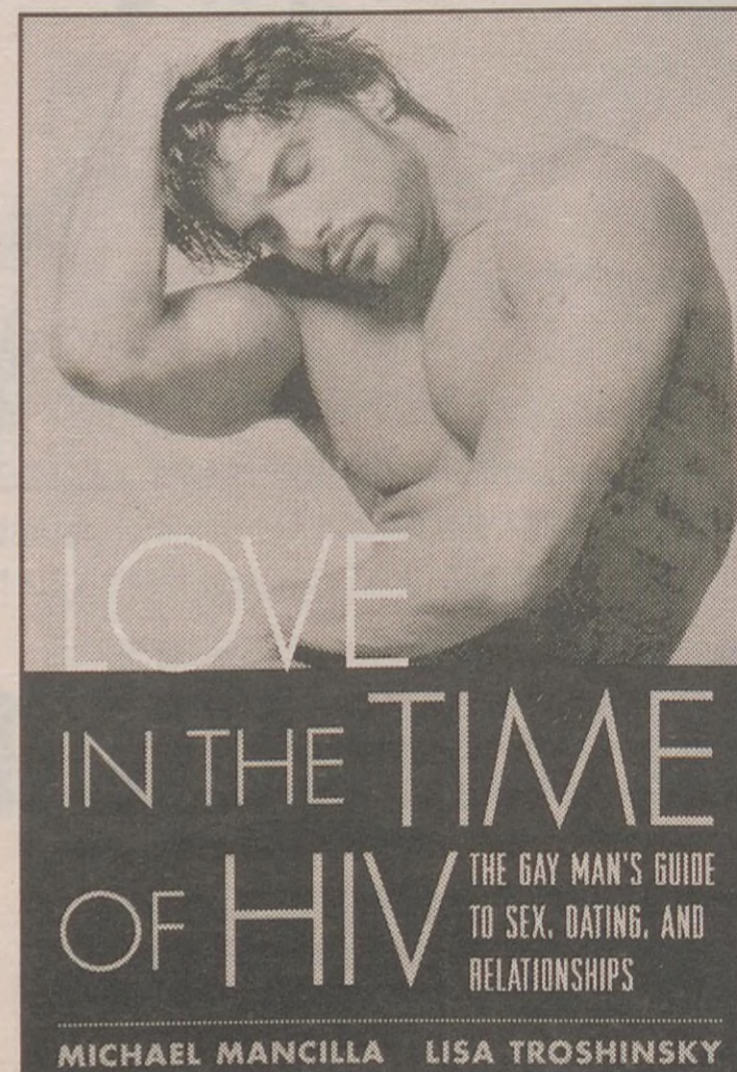
MANCILLA SHARES A PERSONAL story about his now-deceased partner, Jerry, to illustrate the need for the book. In 1996, Michael and Jerry, who was also HIV-positive, were featured in three front-page stories about AIDS in major newspapers.

One story described how Jerry spent two weeks in the hospital and was told to start preparing for the end of his life. But soon he "unretired" and returned to his job as an attorney.

"Jerry became the poster boy for the Lazarus phenomenon by returning to work and allowing the media to follow his progress," Mancilla says.

Troshinsky, a Washington, D.C.-based writer and editor on HIV/AIDS and gay issues, decided to help Mancilla with the book for personal and professional reasons, she says.

"I had a few dear, very close friends of mine die from AIDS," Troshinsky says. "Not being in the medical profession, I found that I could make a contribution by doing what I do best — by writing." IN THE BOOK, MANCILLA AND



Tom Collins, an HIV-positive ex-'Playgirl' model, appears on the cover of a new book about sex, dating and relationships among gay men. (Photo by Reed Massengill)

Troshinsky encourage men to consider the dating model "Score on Four," developed by Dominic Capello. It essentially encourages men to slow down the dating process and get to know potential partners over a succession of at least four dates.

They contend that by going through the dating process, daters build an atmosphere of trust and intimacy, an environment more conducive to sharing one's HIV status with potential mates.

The book also highlights social alternatives where HIV-positive men can meet people who already know their status. They cite a monthly social for singles, the Internet and personal ads that include HIV status.

The book contains valuable references to other resources as well. The authors recommend such Web sites as www.hopedc.org, where one can learn about parties for HIV-positive people, and www.positivepersonals.com as well as www.livingpositive.com for personal ads geared toward the HIV-positive population.

i MORE INFO

'Love in the Time of HIV:
The Gay Man's Guide to
Sex, Dating and Relationships'
By Michael Mancilla and Lisa Troshinsky
Guilford Press
235 pages, \$16.95
www.hivandrelationships.com

nightlife JOSEF MOLNAR

First 'Steel Weekend' picks up where Houston's color-themed circuit event left off, with fun for three full days.

Grey Party gets makeover

THE FIRST ANNUAL STEEL WEEKEND Oct. 10-12 marks the birth of a new kind of party at several venues around Houston.

The event, which is sponsored by Grey Party, Inc., a non-profit organization, is an expanded version of the annual Grey Party circuit boys came to know over the last 20 years.

"This is the 21st year the Grey Party has put on a party," says Tom Urban, Steel Weekend president. "But this is the first time we've done an entire weekend."

The lineup features world-class DJs and partiers, kicking off Oct. 10 at M Bar with Iron, which showcases the anthem and progressive house mixes and latin beats of DJ Steel from Miami.

Saturday's all-night Steel Party at Rich's sees the return of DJ Sandra Collins, who recently won the Best DJ of 2003 award at the Dancestar Awards among stiff, international competition. Collins shows off her signature progressive house, industrial techno and trance beats.

Her unique blend makes her perfect hit, Urban says.

"She's noted for original trance mixes," Urban says. "She's very edgy, but she also knows how to play at parties."

The show also features Canadian DJ Brad Copeland as well as Phealan and Robert.

HUNGRY PARTIERS CAN HEAD FROM Rich's to the noon brunch at 1415 Bar & Grille before going to Numbers for the closing party. The finale event features New York DJ Susan Morabito.

Discount advance tickets are available online, and Hotel Derek, a boutique hotel near the Galleria, signed on as the official hotel of the event.

Urban says opening the party at the spectacular M Bar is the first attempt to make the event a mainstream party, but that doesn't mean gays are no longer front-and-center. The spirit of the event now includes everyone, gay and straight.

Opening the party to everyone creates a larger, more festive event that will put Houston on the map, Urban says.

"We want to present Houston as a destination, one where gay folks would travel to party," he says. "We're the fourth largest city, we have one of the largest GLBT communities, and we should have that recognition."

ORGANIZERS EXPECT THE EVENT TO raise more than \$80,000 for the Grey Party's five charities, even after the Weekend's \$25,000 overhead cost is deducted. Local gay charities submitted requests in the spring, and the group received more than 300 applications.



Steel Party used a numbering system to bring the final number down to a list of 10 charities, and then five for first priority: the Lesbian Health Initiative of Houston, Montrose Clinic HIV Testing Program, Bering Omega Community Services, the LIFE Counseling Program of the Montrose Counseling Center and Milam House.

Milam House is run by the People With AIDS Coalition of Houston. The program provides homeless HIV positive people with a place to go to start a new life. It uses a three-step method which helps its clients to recover from drug addiction, learn basic life skills and have access to support groups and a medication regimen.

"All of our programs and services support and empower them to take control of their lives," says Melissa Flores, the House's development coordinator.

This year's federal subsidies were cut by 50 percent, so the Steel Weekend donations as well as private benefactors have to make up the difference, Flores says.

"We're trying to maintain the same continuity of care," Flores says. "We're doing it, but it's been difficult."

If the party is as successful as Urban predicts, the Grey Party should be able to fulfill the five applicants' needs and even take care of others, he says.

"We may actually increase the number who will be getting money," Urban says. "We may be able to fully fund all requests, and most likely will be able to fund the next five foundations."

Grey Party, Inc. is rebuilt this year to be more inclusive, Urban says.

"We revamped it, and one of first things



(Photos by Dalton Dehart)

we did is to expand the board of directors from four to 13," he says. "People were making remarks that this was a grey haired party, but our party isn't grey haired anymore."

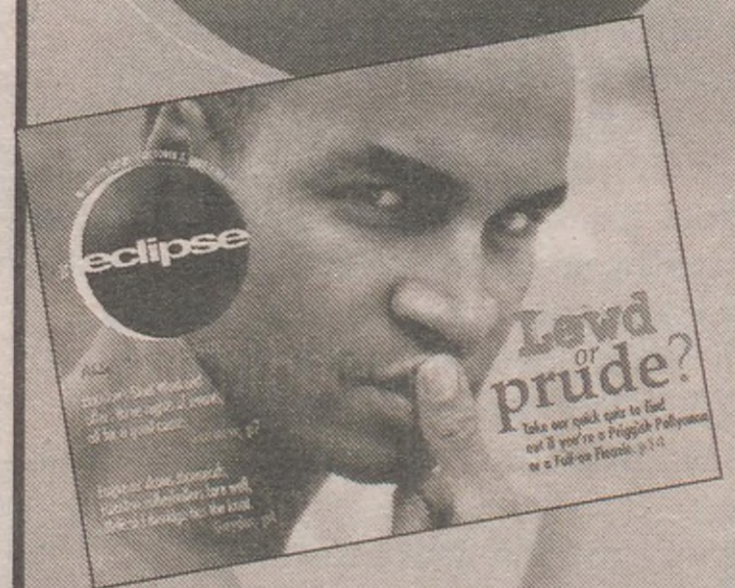
i MORE INFO

Steel Weekend
Oct. 10-12
www.steelweekend.com

Friday, 9 p.m. - 2 a.m.
M Bar, 402 Main

Saturday, 9 p.m. - 9 a.m.
Rich's, 2401 San Jacinto

Sunday, 5 p.m. - 2 a.m.
Numbers, 300 Westheimer



THIS WEEK IN ECLIPSE

STEEL WEEKEND

Three days of parties are about to hit Houston. And it's all for a good cause.

LEWD OR PRUDE?

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BEHIND THE SCENE

DJ Michael Tank is a fixture on the Bayou City's gay music scene.



PLUS

Nightlife photos, news blips that need to be on your Gaydar, Bitch Session, Need Wood, Troy and Chelsea Boys.

out on the bayou

Secure in their masculinity, metrosexuals are new niche

METROSEXUALS, continued from Page 15

they want, buy what they want, enjoy what they want — regardless of whether some people might consider these things unmanly.”

THE RAMPANT CONSUMERISM ASSOCIATED with metrosexuals makes social class one of the defining characteristics of metrosexuality, according to Dr. Mindy Stomblor, a sociologist at Georgia State University.

“We’re not talking about working class guys taking the day off, crackin’ a Pabst Blue Ribbon and going fishing,” Stomblor says. “It’s a different kind of pampering, an upper-class and urban aesthetic.”

The power of heterosexual metrosexuals with money could bode well for the social acceptance of gays, Stomblor says.

“The fact that men of power are able to come out to be not anti-gay — it has to have somewhat of a positive effect,” she says.

But it could also negatively impact gay men’s wallets, says Bill Overall, a 34-year-old gay man.

“All it means to me is that a decent razor is going to continue to cost too much if straight men start buying them too,” Overall says.

Metrosexuals’ gay roots

IN ADDITION TO BEING THE “BASTARD child” of a gay man, the metrosexual ideal developed from a prototype originated by gay men in the 1970s, Simpson says in his essay “Meet the metrosexual” from his recent book “Sex Terror: Erotic Misadventures in Pop Culture.”

Three decades later, urban men of all sexual orientations with a dispensable income adopt a look pioneered by gay men, Simpson says.

But the mainstream media altered the definition to place an emphasis on straight men, as evidenced in an article that appeared in the Atlanta-Journal Constitution earlier this year, based on the Euro RSCG Worldwide study, which describes metrosexuals as primarily heterosexual.

The paper defined metrosexual as a “hot new marketing term describing straight men who are on easy terms with both women and feminine ways,” which falls out of line with Simpson’s all-encompassing definition.

“I think the general public has little interest in going beyond its current understanding of gayness (where gay equals femme), so the term only works in a category of people where the behavior is unexpected,” Stomblor says.

PART OF THE MEDIA’S FOCUS ON straight men as metrosexuals stems from the assumption that all gay men are inherently metrosexual, which is reinforced in pop culture, most notably with “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy,” Simpson says.

On “Queer Eye,” unkempt straight men

are spruced up in an hour, learning from gay experts in fashion, personal grooming, interior decorating, culture as well as food and wine.

“[The general public] has come to accept Jack from ‘Will & Grace’ or their gay florist, or gay hair dresser,” Stomblor says. “But they are uncomfortable with other gay images because they are masculine and because masculinity is associated with power.”

But the way mainstream society relegates gay men to the fey mannerisms of Jack on “Will & Grace” completely ignores masculinity inherent in gay men, and no where is that more evident than in gay sex, Simpson says.

“I could argue that heterosexual metrosexuals are less masculine than all homosexuals since they have adopted all the effeminate characteristics associated with homosexuality, but they disdain the literally all-too-masculine rough and nasty side of that world — male-on-male sex — preferring instead the intimacies of the gentler sex,” he says.

Sometimes the clothes do not make the man

THE RISE OF THE METROSEXUAL could result in a gay movement toward machismo, according to Michael Alvear, a gay Houston Voice columnist and author of “Men Are Pigs But We Love the Bacon.”

“It’ll be like straights moving into neighborhoods gentrified by gays,” Alvear says. “We’ll welcome them and move out to work our magic somewhere else. Meaning, we’ll probably get butchered, play more sports and shoot more guns.”

Or it could have no affect whatsoever, Overall says.

“I’m not sure the label ‘metrosexual’ is useful to anyone outside of Madison Avenue,” he says. “I suppose there is some value in straight men realizing that it is artificial to consider some things as masculine or feminine, but gay people and straight women worked that out some time ago.”

But for heterosexual metrosexuals, being outed can lead to ridicule and a dislike for the term.

Uneasiness with the term could stem from its similarity to the word “homosexuality,” Stomblor says.

“Metrosexuals, who don’t mind being mistaken for being gay (based on their fashion sense) or being hit on by gay men, still are not necessarily ready to take on a new label like ‘metrosexual’ that sounds a lot like an old and stigmatized label, ‘homosexual,’” she says.

But for some metrosexuals, the label doesn’t matter so much as looking good.

“If being a metrosexual is coming out to look good for the public, then I don’t have a problem with it,” says Derek Wortham, a 25-year-old metrosexual.

community calendar

SATURDAY OCT. 4

BI-Net Houston. Social group for bisexuals includes a movie and light snacks on the first Saturday of each month from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Houston GLBT Community Center, 3400 Montrose Blvd., Suite 207. 713-524-3818.

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

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

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

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

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

SUNDAY OCT. 5

BABBLE. Boys And Bois Blending Life Experiences is a group predominantly for submissives in the Houston leather/lewi community that meets 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. on the first Sunday of each month at the Houston GLBT Community Center, 3400 Montrose Blvd., Suite 207. 713-524-3818.

S.T.A.G. Some Transgenders are Guys is a female-to-male support group that meets from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. on the first Sunday of each month at the Houston GLBT Community Center, 3400 Montrose Blvd., Suite 207. 713-524-3818.

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

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

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

GLOBAL. Gay Lesbian Or Bisexual Alliance. University of Houston GLBT student group meeting, 2 p.m. at the Houston Lesbian & Gay Community Center, 3400 Montrose, Suite 207. 713-524-3818. www.uh.edu/~global. E-mail: global@bayou.uh.edu.

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

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

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

Sunday Brunch. For HIV-positive men. 11 a.m. Riva’s, 1117

Missouri St. Paul, 713-880-0690. e-mail: PoznBuff@aol.com.

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

Unitarian Fellowship of Houston. Adult forum, 10 a.m. Service, 11 a.m. 713-686-5876.

Houston GLBT Community Center. Drop-in, 2-6 p.m. • GLBT Community Church with Rev. Melissa Wood: Bible study, 10-10:45 a.m., worship 11 a.m. www.geocities.com/glbtc • GLOBAL meeting, 6 p.m. • 3400 Montrose, Suite 207. 713-524-3818. www.houstonglbtcenter.org.

MONDAY OCT. 6

American Veterans for Equal Rights. An advocacy and support group for GLBT veterans meets from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. on the first Monday of each month at the Houston GLBT Community Center, 3400 Montrose Blvd., Suite 207. 713-524-3818.

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

Frost Eye Clinic. Free eye exams for people with HIV. 713-830-3000.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Houston GLBT Community Center. Drop-in 2-9 p.m. • 3400 Montrose, Suite 207. 713-524-3818. www.houstonglbtcenter.org.

TUESDAY OCT. 7

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Houston GLBT Community Center. Drop-in 2-9 p.m. • Lesbian Coming Out Group, 7 p.m. • 3400 Montrose, Suite 207. 713-524-3818. www.houstonglbtcenter.org.

WEDNESDAY OCT. 8

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

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

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

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

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

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

Houston GLBT Community Center. Drop-in, 2-9 p.m. • Free HIV testing, counseling, 7-9 p.m. • Houston Pride Band rehearsal, 7:30 p.m. • 3400 Montrose, Suite 207. 713-524-3818. www.houstonglbtcenter.org.

THURSDAY OCT. 9

Montrose Writers Project. support group for novice and experienced writers meets from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month at the Houston GLBT Community Center, 3400 Montrose Blvd., Suite 207. 713-524-3818.

FrontRunners. Running club. 6:30 p.m. 713-522-8021. Web site: <http://home.swbell.net/lorathon/houf.htm>. E-mail: lorathon@swbell.net.

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

GLOBAL. Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual Alliance at the University of Houston-Central Campus. Weekly meeting, 6 p.m. e-mail: nguyen0023@hotmail.com.

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

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

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

Lake Livingston GLBT Support Group. 7 p.m. dinner and discussion. Grace Assembly Church, 567 Cedar Grove, Livingston, Texas, 77351. 936-646-7214. E-mail: leol1@easttexas.net.

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

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

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

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

Houston GLBT Community Center. Drop in 2-9 p.m. • “Mending and Stitching,” 2 p.m. • 3400 Montrose, Suite 207. 713-524-3818. www.houstonglbtcenter.org.

FRIDAY OCT. 10

Women’s Game Night. Evening of board games, dominoes and cards for lesbians occurs on the second Friday of each month from 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. at the Houston GLBT Community Center, 3400 Montrose Blvd., Suite 207. 713-524-3818.

In Our Own Write. Poet Thomas Blanton facilitates poetry night with local gay poets on the second Friday of each month from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. at the Houston GLBT Community Center, 3400 Montrose Blvd., Suite 207. 713-524-3818.

Free HIV Testing. Montrose Clinic. 10 p.m.-2 a.m. at The Meatrack, 2915 San Jacinto; 10 p.m.-1 a.m. at E.J.’s and at Midtowne Spa. 713-830-3000.

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

Frost Eye Clinic. Free eye exams for people with HIV. 713-830-3000.

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

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

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

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

Houston GLBT Community Center. Drop-in 2-9 p.m. • 3400 Montrose, Suite 207. 713-524-3818. www.houstonglbtcenter.org.

VOLUNTEER/SELF-HELP

Peer Listening Line. Youth only. Staffed by GLBT youth for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth. 5-10 p.m. Monday-Friday. 800-399-PEER.



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

dining J.A. CHAPMAN

Combo platter at Yan Sushi is by far the best deal, but without options for content, diners may prefer a la carte.

Value vs. choice

A PREVIOUSLY EMPTY LOT ON LOWER Westheimer Road has a new resident. With an eye-catching new building in bright yellow and sage green with funky angles, Yan Sushi opened a second Houston location that is cheerful and welcoming.

If you're expecting a drive-through like the original, think again. This version is an attractive, full-service restaurant.

A large, three-sided counter surrounding the sushi chef provides ample seating to watch the artistry. Tables for four or more fill the remaining space and can easily be re-arranged to accommodate larger parties.

The large laminated menu offers a wide array of choices but is confusing to navigate. Even with the multitude of photos, it isn't easy to figure out what some of the unfamiliar dishes are.

Descriptions aren't given, so you either guess or ask for an explanation. Luckily, the waitress said new, easier to read menus are coming soon.

An appetizer of shrimp tempura (\$4.95) offers three huge shrimp and a few assorted vegetables. The airy coating has a satisfying crunch, and the shrimp are fresh and tender.

Barbecue skewers (\$2.50 each) are a fun choice. Tender chunks of chicken, green pepper and onion are slathered in a sweet soy sauce glaze, barbecued and served sprinkled with sesame seeds, with a sweet and smoky result. Other meats are available on this dish, or mix and match.

FOR SUSHI OR SASHIMI, THE COMBINATION dinners are definitely the best deal. The assorted sushi (\$13.50) comes with nine pieces of sushi, soup and your choice of salad or rice.

The a la carte sushi ranges in price from \$3 to \$8 for two pieces. You definitely get more for your money with the combo dinner, but diners don't get to select the fish.

The miso soup that accompanies the sushi dinner is excellent. A rich miso broth filled with chunks of tofu, seaweed and spring onion, it provides a warming start to the meal.

On the other hand, the salad — iceberg lettuce and an unripe tomato wedge swimming in a sea of spicy dressing — is best left untouched.

The assorted sushi plate provides a nice variety. Familiar items like salmon, tuna and shrimp appear, as well as the more exotic sea urchin.

The sea urchin is butterscotch in color, with a slightly grainy look. Tentative tasting shows a buttery, caramel flavor, with a pudding-like texture.

The waitress said it was a fixture on

the assorted sushi plate, and very popular with about half the customers. Remember, diners can't pick and choose the items on the sushi dinner.

THE A LA CARTE SASHIMI MENU offers more selection with 23 items. The excellent smoked eel (\$3.50 for 2 pieces) is a winner. The crab (\$3.50 for 2) is a disappointment, apparently pressed pieces rather than fresh crab legs.

Overall, the sushi and sashimi is fresh and of generally high quality, although not quite at the level of some of the best sushi restaurants.

EVEN WITH SOARING CEILINGS AND tile floors, it was still amazingly easy to have a conversation at Yan Sushi — even with most of the tables full. Perhaps the sound proofed ceiling and the potted plant groupings provided enough padding to keep the noise down.

Little touches add visual interest, like the steel palm leaves atop the support columns, and the cat motif that pops up in various guises. The lighting is bright but not intrusive.

Service is exceptionally friendly and helpful, but not quick. There was trouble getting the waitress's attention, and plates were never cleared.

On the other hand, the waitress was very informative about plans to expand the menu to offer lunchtime and weekend Japanese dim sum starting in November.

Yan Sushi is a casual, friendly place, whether diners come in shorts and a t-shirt or are dressed for the opera. Open until midnight on Friday and Saturday, it provides an alternative for those looking for late night eats and is a welcome addition to the lower Westheimer restaurant scene.




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JAPANESE RESTAURANT

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SATURDAY OCT. 4

In preparation for their participation in the citywide Oct. 12 'Moonlight Ramble,' members of new gay biking team **Bike For A Better City** meet at 11 a.m. at Hollywood Book & Café, 2409 Grant St. 713-523-6381.

For a suggested donation of \$25 to this year's worthy local charities, join the **Krewe of Olympus Fais Do Do Party** with Cajun fare and a cash bar from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. at L'Alliance Francaise de Houston, 427 Lovett Blvd. 713-526-1121

SUNDAY OCT. 5

AssistHers sponsors 'Decadent Dessert' with treats from some of Houston's best chefs and restaurants to raise funds for year-round AssistHers programs from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. at Meteor, 2306 Genesee. 713-521-4628, option 1.

THURSDAY OCT. 9

Gay Men's Chorus of Houston continues to celebrate its silver anniversary season with a **CD release party** for the group's new disc 'Grateful' at 6 p.m. at the Lovett Inn, 501 Lovett Blvd. 713-521-7464.

FRIDAY OCT. 10



Singer, songwriter and comedian **Kacey Jones**, who is best known for her work with the gay-popular Sweet Potato Queens, promotes her CD 'Sweet Potato Queens' Big-Ass Box of Music' from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at Borders Books Music & Cafe, 12788 Fountain Lake Circle in Stafford. 281-240-6666.

Poet Thomas Blanton facilitates 'In Our Own Write' poetry night with local gay poets from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. at the Houston GLBT Community Center, 3400 Montrose Blvd., Suite 207. 713-524-3818.

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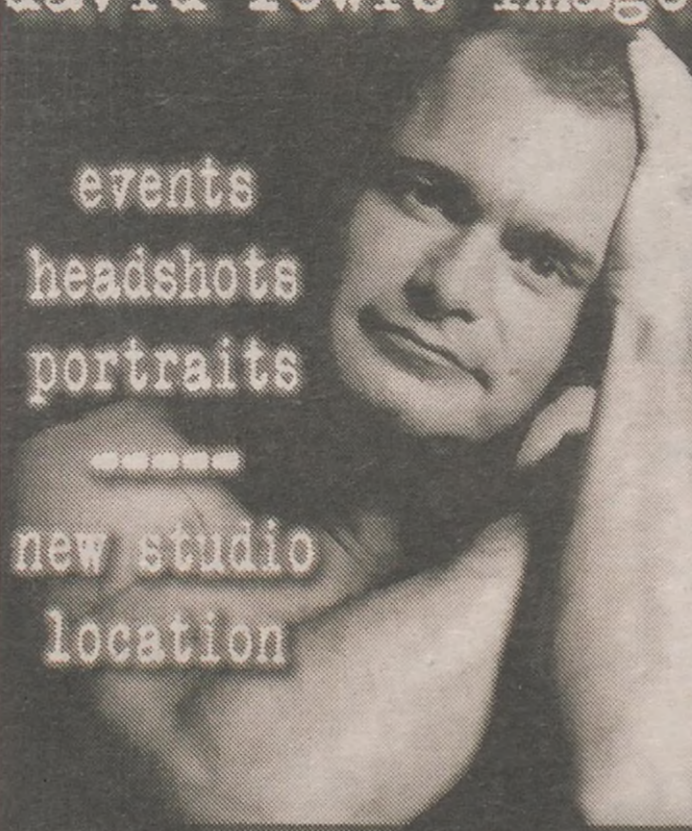
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Even Aries can't live with self right now,
friend still watches Scorpio, and Taurus
needs to explore the artistic side.

Lay low, Aries

♈ Aries (March 21 to April 20):
The moon is close to Saturn in your house of home and family Oct. 17. Take time to communicate your needs and fears to the people closest to you. Living with you is hard right now — even for you. Give yourself and a Libra a break. This may be a good time to take a week off, or at least lay low.

♉ Taurus (April 21 to May 20):
Jupiter in your house of creativity is giving you a devil-may-care attitude about the so-called real world. Yes, bosses are demanding more of you, but you don't have to take them seriously every time they toss the word "emergency" around. You've heard it too many times before. Explore your artistic side.

♊ Gemini (May 21 to June 21):
The Sun meets your ruler Mercury in your house of creativity during mid-October. That means you can get what you want by thinking outside the box and drawing outside the lines. Translation: act on your breakout ideas, instead of just talking about them. A Libra gives you the support — and seduction — you need.

♋ Cancer (June 22 to July 22):
Your emotions may run hot-and-cold on the work front, so don't make any drastic moves in one direction or another. Pay attention to your home life, which is important right now. A Scorpio needs your attention.

♌ Leo (July 23 to Aug. 22): The Sun and Mercury transit your house of communication, so start reaching out to people you want to see. You have been too withdrawn this year. Share what's going on in your life with a Sagittarius. Stop censoring yourself.

♍ Virgo (Aug. 23 to Sept. 22):
Don't make any grand proclamations this week. "Never" and "forever" are loaded words, so avoid throwing them around carelessly. Instead of trying to force relationships in one direction or another, try focusing on money — something concrete you can handle. A Taurus wants to be your treasurer.

♎ Libra (Sept. 23 to Oct. 22):
This is a productive time for you, so take advantage of it. Work hard-

er than you ever have, and keep your goals in mind at all times. With your ruler Venus in your house of finances, money should not be an issue. Treat a Capricorn to a night on the town.

♏ Scorpio (Oct. 23 to Nov. 21):
Your sense of the absurd takes you far in mid-October. Someone you dissed comes back to tell you what an ass you are. Accept the truth with dignity. A Capricorn is sick of you, so start working harder on the relationship. Open your eyes and get ready for tender good times with a friend who's watching you later this month.


♐ Sagittarius (Nov. 22 to Dec. 21):
Do whatever you need to do to simplify your life. You have been creating complex messes in your relationships. It's time to clean them up. A Cancer needs a calm experience with you, not a chaotic one.

♑ Capricorn (Dec. 22 to Jan. 19):
Mars' transit through the social sector of your chart should bring you many dates and dangerously tempting flirtations. Enjoy all the attention you're getting, but don't take an Aquarius' cries of passion too seriously. You may be drawing people to you who only want what they want till they get it.

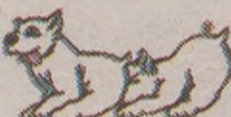
♒ Aquarius (Jan. 20 to Feb. 18):
Art and commerce blend well for you this week. You can convince the moneyed to part with their bucks and the talented to dedicate their time. The question is, for what? A Virgo can help you figure it out.

♓ Pisces (Feb. 19 to March 20):
You need to pay special attention to finances and contracts this week. You are a babe in the woods, surrounded by wolves. Don't worry. A Cancer wants to rescue you from the bad-guys. Allow yourself to be taken care of.

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



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