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MAY 5, 2006

Caucus wants Cohen

Gay political group
taps House candidate
in early endorsement

By NANCY FORD

It's been a good week, politically speaking, for Ellen Cohen.

Based on the ovation she received at Human Rights Campaign-Houston annual dinner last Saturday, she can count on support from many gay Houstonians in her current race to represent District 134 in Texas' House of Representatives. The HRC crowd rose to its feet, cheering and applauding, as her name was announced as an attendee of the gala.

Less than a week later, Houston's GLBT Caucus Political Action Committee accelerated its endorsement process to name the Democrat its candidate of choice to unseat incumbent Republican Rep. Martha Wong in November.

On Wednesday evening, the PAC endorsed Cohen for receiving a 100 percent approval rating for her stance on issues important to Houston's GLBT community.

"This is an endorsement in a key race that we wanted to look at closely," Jenifer Rene Pool said of the District 134 race.

District 134 includes West University Place, Montrose and the Medical Center, as well as the Meyerland and South Braeswood neighborhoods.

Start the 'engines'

It is somewhat unusual for the caucus to make endorsements this early in the race, but because the caucus is targeting Wong for removal from the dis-



Supporters surround Ellen Cohen at Human Rights Campaign-Houston's gala dinner on April 29. Cohen, president and CEO of the Houston Area Women's Center, is running for Texas State Representative, District 134. (Photo by Dalton DeHart)

trict, Jack Valinski, a board member for the caucus, said the group wanted to make sure that Cohen, as the PAC's endorsed pick, had all the caucus' "engines" available to assure her win in November. Those engines include the caucus' voter ID lists, volunteers to do block walks, and related tools.

Pool, elected last month as presi-

dent of the Houston GLBT Caucus, said she believes that Cohen is the best person for the job.

"Ellen has shown through her efforts over the years in the community to be someone who is fair-minded, who is courageous," Pool said.

Please see **COHEN** on Page 3



With summer just around the corner, now is the time to plan a gay getaway.

The wide world of gay travel

Our picks for the top 10 old
and new gay travel hotspots
offer something for everyone

By GREG MARZULLO

FROM KEY WEST TO FIRE ISLAND AND IBIZA TO Amsterdam, gay tourists have helped transform once obscure destinations into mainstream hotspots.

Gay travel is a vast industry with myriad destinations—including tropical islands, urban oases and cruise

Please see **TRAVEL** on Page 19



'An Art Auction' is looking
for artists for its big
community center fundraiser.
News, Page 3

SPRY eases some of
the pain of growing older
for gay men and lesbians.
News, Page 5

Team-Houston members
love not only the game,
but the player, too.
Local Life, Page 8



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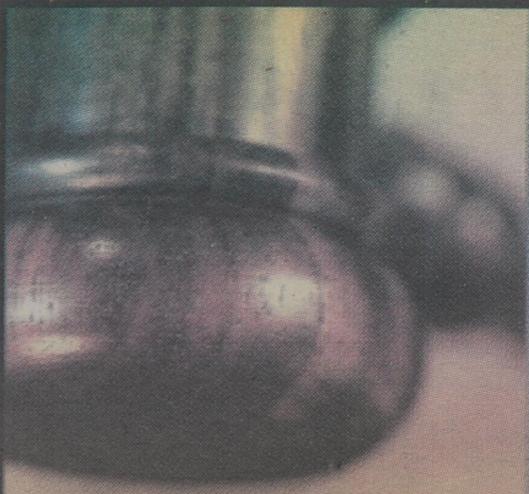
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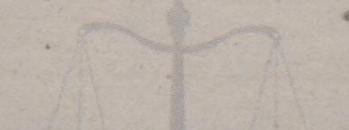


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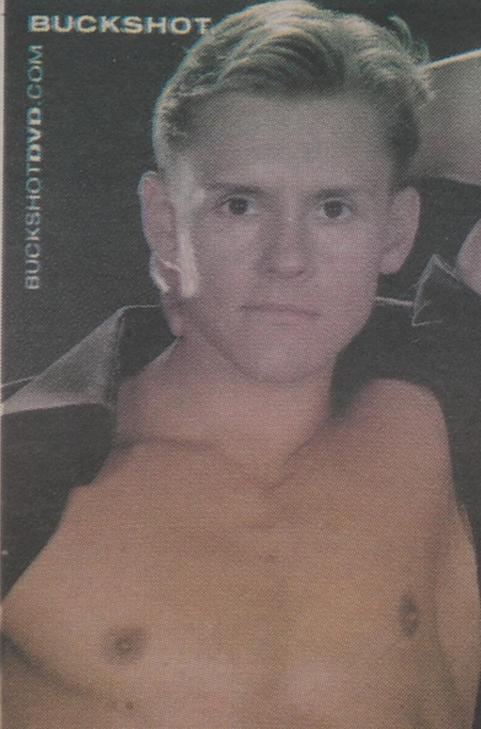


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'An Art Affair' seeks works for auction

The Houston GLBT Community Center has announced a call for GLBT and ally artists to contribute work to An Art Affair, the art-auction benefit event set for Saturday, June 3.

Artists who work in all media to participate in the event, which will feature a silent and live auction of art.

Proceeds from An Art Affair, set to take place at Winter Street Studios, 2101 Winter St., will support operations and programming at the community center, now in its tenth year.

Prominent artist John Palmer and community advocate Carol Wyatt are honorary co-chairs of the event.

Organizers said the event would also offer music provided by DJ Rick Ramirez as well as food and refreshments from community restaurants and caterers.

Artists interested in exhibiting their work are asked to contact An Art Affair co-chairs Tim Brookover at timbrookover@gmail.com or Marc Garcia at jmgarcia@hotmail.com.

Artists may also contact the community center at 713-524-3818.



The many and varied programs of Houston GLBT Community Center, now in its 10th year, are set to reap the benefits of 'An Art Affair.' The annual, often sold-out exhibition is scheduled June 3 at Winter Street Studios. Carol Wyatt and John Palmer are honorary co-chairs for the auction. (Photo by Dalton DeHart)

Future conference group continues with 'Gay Agenda'

Continuing the challenges set forth at last summer's Conference on Houston's LGBTI Future, on May 13, beginning at 1 p.m., the Houston GLBT Community Center will host the quarterly meeting to discuss follow-up actions to the conference.

Held in June 2005 in conjunction with Empower GLBT business expo, the Conference on Houston's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex Future was the culmination of several months' worth of work by community activists and allies who began planning it in November 2004.

Leaders said the conference was inspired by the 1989 Town Hall Meeting, an event led to the creation of prominent local nonprofit organizations including Montrose Clinic (now Legacy Community Healthcare Services), Montrose Counseling Center, and the Gay & Lesbian Switchboard.

Moderated by Phyllis R. Frye, Ray Hill and Jack Valinski, the 2005 conference produced a document with 54 resolutions addressing issues impacting Houston's gay community including aging, youth, healthcare, spiritual issues, sports and fitness, community organizations and political concerns.

The document, referred to by activists as their "Gay Agenda," can be read at the community center website, www.houstonglbtcommunitycenter.org.

The community center board, which organized the working group, invites the public to attend.

"We are honored to continue hosting this working group," center president,

Christopher Bown said. "We expect the group will develop into a wonderful resource for the entire community."

Houston's GLBT Community Center is located at 3400 Montrose Blvd., Suite 207. To RSVP for the meeting, call 713-524-3818.

Pride running events slated for June 10

It's not too late to begin training for some strenuous but worthwhile exercise planned during Pride month. Runners and walkers who plan to enter the 2006 Houston Pride 5K still have a little more than a month to get in shape. The 3.1-mile race, along with a one-mile walk, is scheduled for Saturday, June 10, beginning at 7:30 a.m.

The course starts at Sam Houston Park and follows a route along Allen Parkway.

An early registration fee of \$20 is available through June 2; the fee increases to \$25 June 3.

The ninth annual competition, sponsored by Houston Montrose Athletic Association, will benefit AssistHers, a volunteer organization that provides in-home non-medical support and care to lesbian women with chronic or disabling illnesses.

The Texas FrontRunners Challenge will coincide with this year's Pride 5K again. Members of various chapters of gay and lesbian running clubs around the state will compete in the Pride Run. For more information, call 713-864-4120 or log on to www.geocities.com/houston-pride5k/index.html.

From staff and wire reports

local news

Caucus hopes Cohen unseats Rep. Wong

COHEN continued from Page 1

"When she looks at all the information available and makes a decision, she has stood firmly on that position unless more information came along that would alter her decision."

Valinski said he is impressed that Cohen unequivocally endorses gay marriage, not hedging with terminology like "civil unions" or "domestic partnerships."

Cohen scored 100 percent in the caucus' screening review, answering a solid "yes" to the question, "Do you support same-sex marriage?"

"She understands the issues about our community and stands with us," Pool said.

Though Wong did not specifically vote to clear the way for the anti-gay Proposition 2 to be placed on the November ballot in 2005, she didn't vote against its placement, either, indicating "present but not voting."

"She stood by; she chose to do nothing," Pool said. "Present but not voting" says "I'm here, but I'm going to do nothing."

Proposition 2, which amended the state constitution to prohibit same sex marriage in the state of Texas, went on to be passed by voters by a nearly three-quarters majority.

"We did not expect Martha Wong to do nothing for her district," Pool said. "If she felt one way or the other, that's one thing. But she said nothing at all. That's not what she was elected for. Being present and not voting at all says 'I'm not going to do anything for anybody.'"

Pool believes it is important that Wong be turned out in this election because Houstonians "need someone in the legislature who will represent the district, the constituency, be there for every vote and vote her principles to represent the district."

Screening educates candidates

Wong has been invited to screen with the caucus PAC, Valinski said, but she had not responded to the invitation.

Though Mhair S. Dekmezian, the libertarian party candidate in the race for District 134, did not receive the PAC's endorsement, he was lauded for screening with the caucus.

"It's also about educating candidates to our issues," Valinski said.



Texas State Rep. Martha Wong, who unseated long-time District 134 representative Debra Danburg in 2002, declined Houston GLBT Caucus' invitation to screen with its Political Action Committee. (Photo by Dalton DeHart)

The HGLBTPC PAC intends to work for the remainder of the year to support voter ID efforts in key legislative districts as well working directly with local campaigns to ensure victory in November.

"Our investment and long-term vision in regard to voter ID work is a winning strategy. In some cases, we've had candidates winning with small margins and the ability to mobilize the HGLBTPC base during these elections has been pivotal," said Tammi Wallace, HGLBTPC PAC vice-president.

There is still time, Pool said, for independent candidates to enter other races in the November election, "in which case, we will be screening through May and June for an August endorsement meeting for the November election."

Caucus membership, Pool said, is open to anyone who is interested.

"It's an example of real democracy in action where the candidates step forth and are questioned, and then voted on members by the caucus," Pool said, "so we can say, 'Yes, this person represents us — or can represent us — the best.'"

MORE INFO

Houston GLBT Political Caucus
3400 Montrose, Suite 207
Houston, Texas 77006
713-521-1000
www.hglbtpc.org

houston news

Caring for the golden years gays

Program reaches out to 'invisible' gay and lesbian seniors

By SHANA NICHOLSON

The Montrose Counseling Center has recently introduced Seniors Preparing for Rainbow Years), a program that sets out to change the way that GLBT seniors live.

Eight outreach workers — four from MCC and four from Legacy Community Health Services — were extensively trained in January in everything from needs assessment and peer support to counseling and case management. Currently, the counseling services are available and within a couple of weeks a peer support service will be introduced.

"What we're doing in Houston is important because it's an opportunity to build a model for organizations all over the country," said Legacy Community Health Services' SPRY outreach worker, Kanti Campagna.

Seniors in the general U.S. population easily slip through the cracks, but adding GLBT to the equation can be even more detrimen-

tal. GLBT elders are a segment of society that has been conspicuously absent from any in-depth research on the mental effects of aging. One of the latest studies on the subject, "Older Americans 2004: Key Indicators of Well-Being" does not mention the word "gay" in the entire document. They are called the "invisible community" and include members of GLBT society age 60 and over who may be experiencing depression, anxiety or other mood disorders and, for various reasons, end up suffering in silence.

SPRY has already conducted intensive needs assessment interviews with about fifty seniors and is targeted to reach 750 in three years.

MCC was awarded the grant for SPRY from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in November 2005. Out of 165 organizations that originally applied, eleven were granted money and MCC is the only group catering to the gay community out of those eleven.

Chris Kerr, program coordinator at MCC, said the biggest obstacle is conveying that the services are confidential.

"One of our elder members on our consumer advisory committee said, 'We've got this "adaptive camouflage" that is very instinctive and very powerful and it's hard to just let it go,'" he said.

i MORE INFO

Legacy Community Health Services
215 Westheimer Rd.
Houston, Texas 77006
713-830-3000
www.montroseclinic.org

Montrose Counseling Center
701 Richmond Ave.
Houston, Texas 77006
713-529-0037
www.montrosecounselingcenter.org

SPRY is designed to counter that concern by its unique approach to locating and assisting those in need. The outreach worker training is based on the Indigenous Leader Outreach Model. Researchers at University of Illinois-Chicago who were working with HIV positive intravenous drug users developed the model.

"They found that if they hired peers from that community, trained them and then sent them back," Kerr said. "It was a highly effective way of establishing trust and making connections. Our proposal was to adapt that model to this mental health problem with elders in the GLBT population."



Montrose Counseling Center executive director Dr. Ann Robison is already pleased with the initial progress of the SPRY program. She says outreach has been made to 150 people, with workers receiving more than 80 needs assessments from gay seniors seeking assistance. (Photo by Sally Huffer)

One caveat to the grant for SPRY is, if someone has insurance, the provider will be billed for services, but anything that insurance will not cover, the grant will.

Campagna added that people are grateful for being "found."

"One person called the outreach worker that had been working with him and expressed his gratitude telling him, 'You were in my prayers last night'.

"I think that's the beauty of this program," she said.

"It's just one on one, person to person." MCC urges anyone interested in finding out more about SPRY to contact them to set up an appointment.

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news in brief

New research tries to pinpoint how many gays would marry

NEW YORK (AP) — A new study attempts to gauge the percentage of gays who have chosen to marry in places where that option is legal, with estimates ranging from as little as 2 percent to more than 16 percent, depending on the location. A co-author of the report, released last week, said both sides in the gay marriage debate may take heart from the findings. The Institute for Marriage & Public Policy, which opposes gay marriage, reviewed data from the Netherlands, Belgium, Canada and Massachusetts, all of which allow same-sex partners to wed. In each case, the study offered a range of estimates of the percentage of gays who married, based on varying approximations — from 1 percent to 5 percent — of how many gays were in the general population. In Massachusetts, the study said between 5.9 percent to 16.7 percent of gays married. The study said calculations for Canada were difficult because nonresidents are allowed to marry there. Conservative columnist Maggie Gallagher, the institute's president and co-author of the study, said interpretations of the findings might vary based on underlying views on gay marriage. "That's why the debate is so contentious," Gallagher said. "In one view, if you treat gay couples any differently, that's akin to racism. There's another view that there's something special about the unions of husbands and wives.



Maggie Gallagher, president of the anti-gay Institute for Marriage and Public Policy, contends that a new study she co-authored might bolster those who favor and oppose gay marriage.

All-gay cruises booked on two of largest ships

SAN FRANCISCO — In what may be the most visible sign yet of the strength of gay travel dollars, a pair of rival travel firms have each booked all-day cruises for next year on the two largest cruise ships in the world, the San Francisco Chronicle reported. Both Atlantis and RSVP plan all-gay cruises: one on Royal Caribbean's new 3,700-passenger Freedom of the Seas, and the other on Cunard's 2,600-passenger Queen Mary 2. The Freedom will host an Atlantis seven-night cruise starting Jan. 28 out of Miami, while the QM2 will set sail on May 29, 2007, for a six-night RSVP crossing of the Atlantic and its first all-gay sailing. Both companies regularly plan voyages in the Caribbean, Mediterranean and other popular cruise destinations, in addition to offering resort stays and land tours.

Calif. police: Shootings of transients, gay A.A. meeting may be related

PALM SPRINGS — A pair of shootings minutes apart, including one that occurred prior to a gay Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, may be related, according to Palm Springs police, CBS News reported. Law enforcement officials are seeking a gunman who opened fire about 8 p.m. April 29 outside Palm Springs City Hall. "It's a gay A.A. meeting, and somebody shot at the meeting," Palm Springs resident Rick Heidorn told CBS. "We were sitting there and all of a sudden, we heard, 'Pop, pop, pop,'" Paul Granatos told the news outlet. One unidentified man was injured and taken to a local hospital, where he was listed in stable condition. A transient told police he was shot at while digging through a trashcan minutes before the city hall shooting. Police said the bullets and casings in both incidents are similar but it has yet to be determined if they are from the same firearm.

Gay rights march draws attacks by Polish nationalists

KRAKOW, Poland — Members of a demonstration of young nationalists attacked participants in a gay tolerance march in this southern Polish city, sparking police involvement, the BBC News reported. Law enforcement officers using riot shields and batons separated the two demonstrations, and several arrests were made. Members of the far-right All Poland Youth Group threw stones and eggs at the tolerance marchers, leading to the arrests. The march to promote tolerance toward gays drew more than 1,000, including an ex-deputy prime minister. The youth group counter-demonstrators carried banners saying, "Stop deviation." Some chanted, "Lesbians and gays, all of Poland is laughing at you." The gay rights march changed routes to avoid a clash, according to the BBC, but some counter-protesters followed. Gay activists say homophobia has intensified since the conservative Law & Justice Party, led by Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz, came to power last fall. Marcinkiewicz has said homosexuality is unnatural, and surveys found that nine out of 10 people in this heavily Roman Catholic nation agree.

Va. probes medical needs, fears of transgender people

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — For all the primping, powdering and pumping up many transgendered men and women will undergo to pass as the opposite sex, there's one thing health care experts say too many of them can't stomach: a visit to the doctor. A health study by the Virginia Health Department and Virginia Commonwealth University addresses the fears and prejudices hindering trans people from seeking health care. Officials estimate 1 percent of Virginians are transgender.

From staff and wire reports

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international news

U.S. laws separate thousands of gay couples

Uniting American Families Act needs approval, report says

By JOSHUA LYNSEN

U.S. immigration laws have physically separated thousands of gay Americans from their non-American partners and Congress should act so they can legally reunite, according to a new report.

The report — “Family, Unvalued” released May 2 — evaluates how U.S. immigration policies affect gay Americans and their families. It also criticizes U.S. officials for not offering gay foreigners an opportunity to live permanently with their partner in the United States.

“We want people to understand that this isn’t an accident or an oversight of the immigration law,” said Rachel B. Tiven, executive director of Immigration Equality. “It’s not a benign neglect. It’s really a nasty and pointed exclusion.”

The 191-page report was prepared by Immigration Equality, a New York organization that seeks equality for gay and HIV-positive immigrants, and Human Rights Watch.

“Family reunification is an express and central goal of U.S. immigration policy and has been for more than 50 years,” the report says. “But, lesbian and gay people’s families do not count. Their partners are excluded from the definition of spouse.”

Tiven said the report was written to unveil how difficult life is for the nation’s many binational gay couples, the term used for a relationship involving partners with citizenship from two different countries.

“This is not a minor inconvenience,” she said. “This is really a life-altering situation for the couples that are trapped in it.”

According to the 2000 Census, there are about 36,000 gay couples with one U.S. citizen and one foreign national. This represents about 6 percent of all gay couples in the country.

“Family, Unvalued” urges Congress to pass the Uniting American Families Act, a proposal that would allow binational gay couples to permanently live together in the United States.



Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Texas), speaks during an immigration rally in Guadalupe Plaza in Houston, Texas, Monday, April 10, 2006. In a statement released Wednesday, May 3, Jackson Lee calls for a more bipartisan approach to immigration reform. (Photo by Donna Carson/AP)

“The United States urgently needs to enact comprehensive immigration reform,” the report says, “ensuring adequate and fair avenues for immigrants to enter the United States both temporarily and permanently and offering reasonable roads to legal status for undocumented immigrants already living and working in the country.”

“Family, Unvalued” is considered the first comprehensive report on this topic. It will be cited as proof of the discrimination decried by organizations like the Love Exiles Foundation, a group for gay Americans living “in exile” abroad because they cannot bring their partners to live with them in the U.S.

Love Exiles spokesman Bob Bragar said the report “well captures that richness of the lives of U.S. citizens who love someone from another country.”

107 sponsors, no action

UAFA is not part of the immigration reforms now being debated by Congress.

Although there is support for UAFA from

at least some members from both parties, no Democratic or Republican leaders have indicated any strong interest in discussing it.

Introduced by Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and Congressman Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.), UAFA has 11 Senate sponsors and 96 House sponsors.

Nadler’s press secretary, Reid Cherlin, said the UAFA goes “part and parcel” with the ongoing immigration discussion. But it’s unlikely the gay-positive bill will be part of any reform passed by Congress.

“We’re fairly sure the Republican majority has no intention to bring a bill like this up for a hearing,” he said, “much less a vote.”

Leahy’s press secretary, David Carle, last month said he’s seen no signal that UAFA will become incorporated into pending immigration reform.

Calls to majority leaders Sen. Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) and Rep. John Boehner (R-Ohio) were not returned. Neither are sponsoring UAFA legislation.

Cherlin said Nadler welcomed the atten-

tion that “Family, Unvalued” brings to binational gay couples, and UAFA.

“We’re not going to score a win until it’s law,” he said, “but every instance of mounting public pressure is a success.”

Tiven added that as public pressure mounts, more lawmakers are swayed. She noted that Congressman Christopher Shays (R-Conn.) recently became the third House Republican to sponsor UAFA.

Little push by immigrant groups?

But some political observers said such efforts have stirred resentment.

Glenn Magpantay, a gay staff attorney for the Asian American Legal Defense & Education Fund in New York, said some immigrant advocates have quietly criticized UAFA proponents for “jumping on the bandwagon at the last minute, and not having done the real alliance building work that came before.”

He said these advocates are consequently reluctant to include the UAFA in their agenda.

“I don’t think we’ve made the case for it,” Magpantay said, “and I don’t think that we’ve even shown demonstratively the gay community’s support for immigrants’ rights overall.”

Although many gays support comprehensive immigration reform and have participated in some of the recent protests, Magpantay said the “gay community” has not mobilized to support immigrants.

“It seems like the gay community is not engaged,” he said. “We should be fighting for the decriminalization of people. We did that with sodomy laws, why not now with undocumented workers?”

The apparent rift between gay and immigrant advocates was highlighted last month in a commentary by black lesbian activist and writer Jasmyne Cannick for the Advocate, a national gay magazine.

In it, Cannick said Congress should provide equal rights to gay U.S. citizens before “extending rights to people who have entered this country illegally.”

“It’s a slap in the face to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people,” wrote Cannick, “to take up the debate on whether to give peo-

Please see **IMMIGRATION** on Page 7

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international news

Gay immigration reform a tough sell in Congress

IMMIGRATION, continued from Page 6

ple who are in this country illegally additional rights when we haven't even given the people who are here legally all of their rights."

Several people asked to comment on Cannick's commentary declined to speak on the record, saying her statements were inflammatory.

But a response signed by 55 activists — including some who work with the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force, and the National Latino Coalition for Justice — rebuked Cannick's commentary.

"We reject any attempts to pit the struggle of multiple communities against each other and firmly believe that rights are not in limited supply," their response reads.

UAFA faces uphill battle

UAFA supporters concede that without broader support from advocates and congressmen, efforts to pass the legislation are an uphill battle.

Angela Kelley, deputy director of the National Immigration Forum, said many groups pushing for immigration reform consider the UAFA a lower priority because the proposal isn't politically feasible now.

Because pending reforms don't include UAFA, she said the act would have to be



Immigrants and their advocates gather to rally for immigration rights in Bayland Park in Houston's Heights neighborhood. (Photo by Jessica Kourkounis/AP)

offered as an amendment. Since each political party likely will be limited in the number of amendments they can offer, only the most viable will be presented.

Kelley said additional support could be garnered beyond the announced 11 Senate sponsors and 96 House sponsors, but UAFA probably doesn't have enough votes to pass.

"I think it's going to be a tough thing to

get passed in this Congress," she said. "There's a whole host of still-need-to-fix-it topics. ... This is one of the tougher ones."

Tiven said UAFA supporters also face another numerical disadvantage: The number of people who benefit is relatively small.

"When the mainstream immigration groups are trying to get Congress to act on things that would affect 11 million people,

this is a small slice by comparison," she said, "and that certainly is a factor."

Wednesday, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee wrote President Bush, requesting a White House bipartisan and bicameral immigration summit.

"The nation you lead has arrived at a critical moment in history. Hanging in the balance is whether the United States will continue into the 21st century a confident, unified forward looking nation proud of its ancient heritage as the global beacon of immigrants everywhere or renounce this heritage and attempt to seek refuge from the world behind barricades to be erected on its southern borders," wrote Congresswoman Jackson Lee, a democrat from Houston.

In her letter, Congresswoman Jackson Lee brought to the president's attention key provisions of the "Border protection, Antiterrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005," H.R. 4437. Jackson Lee said in a statement that some of the bill's provisions are unacceptable to a large majority of House Republicans and Democrats, and, judging by the public demonstrations presented over the past several weeks, to large segments of the American people.

The statement called the bill's section 203, which makes illegal entry into the United States a felony, "especially odious."

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For the love of the Gay and Outgames

Keith Wright hopes teams bring home the fun — not just the gold

By NANCY FORD

KEITH WRIGHT ADMITS HE HAS visited Montreal once for a bike ride. But though he has never attended a Gay Games before, either as a competitor or a spectator, this summer Wright will take part in the opening ceremonies of both Gay Games VII and Outgames as president of Team Houston, competing in and "spectating" both.

But he is more concerned with helping Team Houston make a Texas-sized splash at the world-class sporting events than how he will fare competitively in his sport.

"Everybody plays, everybody wins," he said. "If I don't come home with a medal, I'm OK with that."

Wright said that even though he calls himself a cyclist, he does not consider himself a competitive cyclist.

"I know it's all geared up to be competition, but even in my normal cycling, it's just 'avid amateur' kind of stuff."

His chief concern is organizing, getting people together and getting them motivated.

"We want to make sure that everybody has a good time," he says.

"WE KIND OF DO TWO THINGS," Wright said, describing the function of Team Houston. "One is to organize the Team Houston contingent going to Gay Games and the Out Games. And we promote gay and lesbian sports groups around town."

Wright said Team Houston acts as a "clearing house," of sorts, for local GLBT sports groups and to point individuals in the right direction to be supportive of



Keith Wright, president, mans Team Houston's information booth at Houston's 2006 Pride Festival. The group aims to promote not only itself, but Houston-area GLBT sports groups, the upcoming Chicago Gay Games and Outgames in Montreal as well. (Photo by Dalton DeHart)

and join the sports community.

"We can help people get hooked up, in terms of the new groups," he says.

"For example, we've got about 30 email addresses available of people who like to play golf, but we don't have a gay golf group, as far as I know.

"From my perspective, one of the saddest things is two or three hundred people sitting around who say 'Gosh, if only there were a gay such-and-such group.' Like, 'If only we had a gay swimming group.' Well, now, we've got one."

About two months ago, Houston's gay swim team decided on a new name, now calling itself the Houston Gaytors, Wright says. Cheer Houston is the name of Houston's GLBT cheer group, and the city's gay cycling group is Different Spokes Houston. The local GLBT bodybuilding/physique group is the Montrose Amateur Body Building Association.

Members from all will be attending and competing in the Gay Games VII and Out World Games under the Team Houston organizational umbrella.

"I think we've got as many as 120 people going to Gay Games," Wright says. "It may be as many as 130 or 140 when you add partners and friends."

Substantially fewer Houstonians,

approximately 50, Wright says, plan to attend the Outgames in Montreal.

"People know more about the Gay Games, and usually people can only do one of these events, so Chicago works out better for them," Wright says. Additionally, Team Houston is an a partner organization of the Gay Games.

"They've been very supportive," Wright says. "It's been a good thing."

TEAM HOUSTON IS RUN BY AN ALL-volunteer board of directors. The group was established in the '90s in preparation for the Gay Games in Vancouver, Wright says.

A 44-year-old computer professional, he says he got involved with Team Houston about three years ago.

"I was interested in going to the Gay Games in Sydney in 2002," he says. "But gosh, it was so far away so I just didn't do it."

But some of Wright's cycling friends who did make the journey to the land down under returned enthusiastic and inspired.

"About six months after the games, several of the athletes who were over there came back and said, 'You know, let's make Team Houston an ongoing concern — not just something that comes up when the Gay Games happen and then goes away for two or three years.'"

The group pledged to see what they could do to make Team Houston an active entity that would promote gay and lesbian sports in the community and have it as an ongoing, perpetual organization.

"Because they were involved, I got involved as well, and it's something I've been involved in ever since," Wright said. "I'm like a den mother."

"It's getting down to the wire, so I'm trying to make sure that people have all their travel arrangements made for Chicago and Montreal," he continues.

In addition to organizing the trips to Chicago and Montreal, Wright and Team Houston is busy preparing for Pride season.

"We'll have a combined entry of local gay teams in the Pride Parade like we did last year and a booth at the Pride Festival."

Team Houston meets this Sunday at 2 p.m. at Houston's GLBT Community Center, located at 3400 Montrose Blvd. The meeting is open to athletes and (we have to say it) athletic supporters, alike.

"We give updates about what's happening around with Team Houston," he says. "People will sometimes have questions about various groups — 'Do we have a group that does this, that or the other?'"

"And we'll be helping with travel plans." Spoken like a true den mother.

MORE INFO

Team Houston

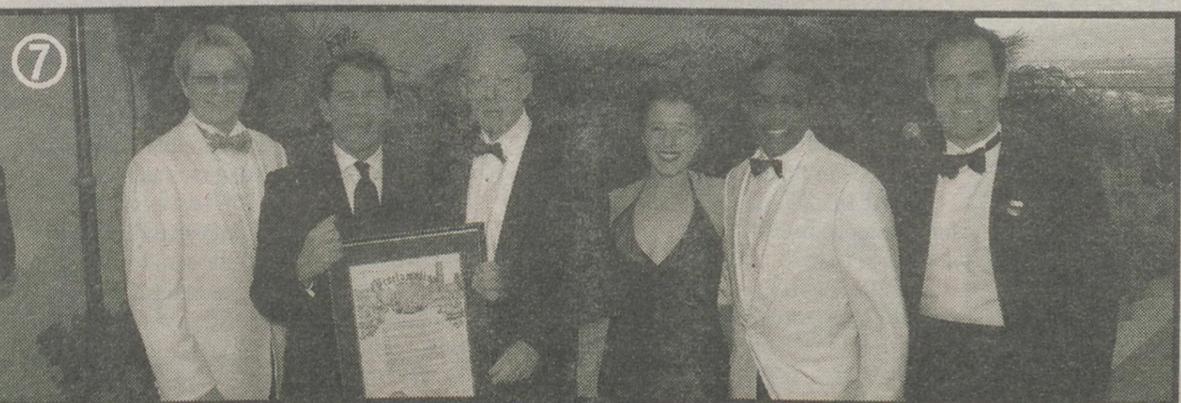
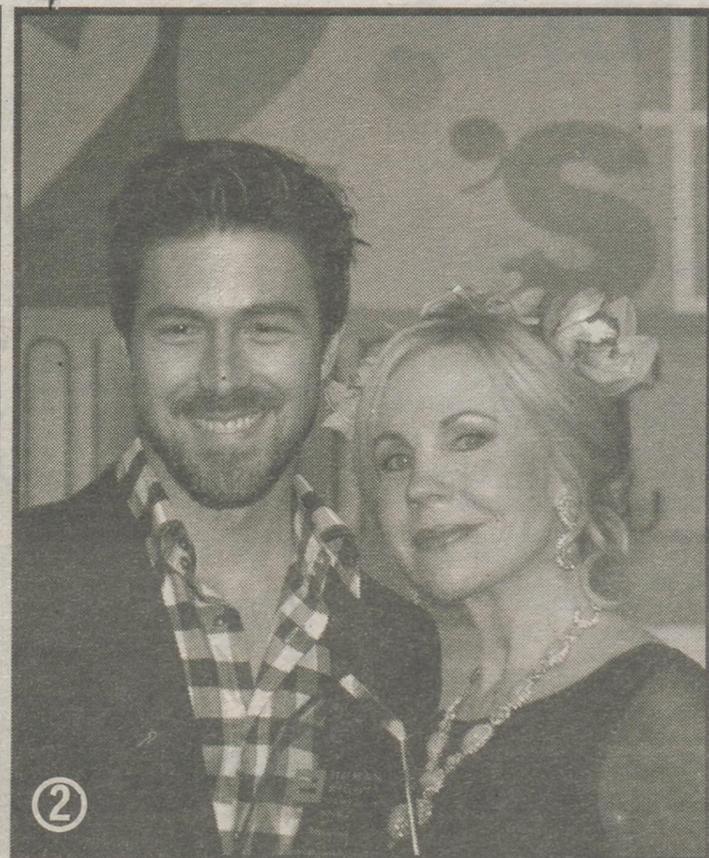
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www.chicago2006.org

Outgames

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www.montreal2006.org



out in houston

1. Friends and food of Pride

Chef Monica Pope, in apron, is surrounded by gourmands enjoying T'afia Restaurant's delectables during the Friends of Pride train crawl.

2. Kyan and Carolyn

Queer Eye for the Straight Guy's Kyan Douglas with honorary co-chair Dr. Carolyn Farb at Human Rights Campaign-Houston's Roaring '20s Gala.

3. Three — they're out!

A little rain doesn't stop Frank Rojas, Leo Sifuentes and Brandon Appelt from having fun with the Montrose Softball League at Club Energy.

4. She got here

Oleta Adams serenades the audience at Human Rights Campaign-Houston's Roaring '20s Gala dinner.

5. Star power

Once Star Trek's Mr. Sulu but now a spokesperson for Human Rights Campaign, George Takei talks about coming out at Human Rights Campaign-Houston's Roaring '20s Gala.

6. Martine time

Rhonda Jones, Martine Locke, Christy Claxton, Deborah Bell, Sharon Bousquet, Donna Garnier, J.D. Doyle and Leslie Lawson at Locke's Diva House Concert at Houston GLBT Community Center.

7. Proclamation for equality

Houston Mayor Bill White, third from left, presents Human Rights Campaign president Joe Solmonese with a proclamation honoring the group prior to HRC-Houston's Roaring '20s Gala, surrounded by gala co-chairs Matt Burrus, left, Fiona Dawson and Alton LaDay, and Mike Holliman.

8. They are family

The crowd jams the dance floor at Kindred Spirits' 5th annual reunion.

(All photos by Dalton DeHart)

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Forum

editorial

Out of the spotlight but still in the glare

Is Trent Lott a true homophobe or just a good ol' boy, never meanin' no harm?

By KELLY CARSON

MY HOUSTON FRIENDS know that I don't hide the fact that I'm from South Mississippi, where the living is easy, most of the time, and people are connected to each other by a strong sense of community — of belonging. In fact, I'm mighty proud of my Southern heritage and the feeling of being a part of something genteel.

South Mississippi's favorite son is well known to gay and lesbian activists throughout the world, not for his support of reform that would change the restrictive society that relegates us to second-class status. He's better known for sticking his foot in his mouth about his beliefs on gay political topics.

I'm talking, of course, about U.S. Sen. Trent Lott, one of two long-time Republican senators who hold fast to the ties that bind back home. The other is Sen. Thad Cochran. Lott was a friend of my parents, who published several newspapers in Mississippi during the freshman and sophomore terms of both Lott and Cochran. I know Trent Lott, and I consider him a friend. I know his press secretary, Susan Irby, from our days at the Hattiesburg American newspaper, which covered most of South Mississippi each day. And I'm glad to say I like them both.

The first time I met Trent Lott, he was campaigning for Mississippi's District 5 seat in the U.S. House. I was working at the weekly Lamar County Head Block (don't ask) in Lumberton, a town of about 1,100 wonderful souls. It was deadline day, and I was doing the best I could with antiquated equipment in the days before laptop publishing and was running behind schedule.

Lott stopped into the newspaper office, which was located in the basement of an office supply store, and wanted to talk politics. It was obvious I was knee-deep in newspaper copy, so I did what any Southern girl would do. I threw up my hands and looked helpless.

Lott looked around and said that he would love to help. He'd done a bit of newspaper work before, and I could show him what he needed to do. He loosened his tie and rolled up his sleeves and together we pasted-up that week's edition of the Lamar County Head Block.

I was 22 years old and taken aback by this graceful gentleman politician who didn't think twice about pitching in when help was needed. Southern folks do that — help

when needed. As they say where I'm from, he holds a tender spot in my heart, darling.

SO WE FAST FORWARD A COUPLE OF years, and Lott has risen rapidly through the ranks of the GOP and becomes a part of his party's House leadership. When Sen. John Stennis, the grandfather of Mississippi politics for most of the 20th Century, hung it up, Lott the heir-apparent filled his shoes nicely.

In the Senate, Lott gave a repeat performance and quickly ascended to the Senate's post of grand poobah. That's really when things started getting fun.

Lott really pissed off the people at the Human Rights Campaign in June 1996 when he said homosexuality should be treated "just like alcohol ... or sex addiction ... or kleptomaniacs." He made the unfortunate, and uninformed, comment while recording an interview for America's Voice Network television networks "The Armstrong Williams Show."

Hey, the HRC had a right to be pissed. I was pissed off, too.

Not long after that, Lott said that he believed gay people chose "to be homosexual," which prompted Gannett News Service staffer Deborah Mathis to ask Lott that if he truly believed that people "choose" their sexuality, when did the senator "choose to be heterosexual"? Hey, it's a fair question. Lott didn't answer.

Then came the famous and final faux pas when Trent Lott wished "happy birthday" to Sen. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, the man older than dirt who refused to leave office until he was 100 years old. He first went to the Senate in 1954 and didn't leave until 2003.

Before his Senate days, Thurmond ran for president in 1948 as a Dixiecrat, a party dedicated to maintaining racial segregation and relegating African Americans to second-class status. Sound familiar?

Here is what Lott said about Thurmond at the old man's 100th birthday party on Dec. 5, 2002:

"I want to say this about my state: When Strom Thurmond ran for president, we voted for him. We're proud of it. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn't have had all these problems over all these years, either."

Ouch! Now he'd done it. Insulting African Americans just can't be tolerated by anyone, and Lott was forced from his leadership role as Senate Majority Leader and sent back to being a plain ole senator from Mississippi.



Mississippi Republican Sen. Trent Lott isn't a big friend of gays and lesbians, but he's helping where he can. (Photo by Rogelio Solis/AP)

INSULTING GAYS, HOWEVER, IS another matter. Yep, the HRC and several other gay activists condemned him as a homophobe. They may be right. But it took a blatant insult to the first group of Americans to fight discrimination to bring him down.

So Lott's been through some tough times lately. He's said some things that in hindsight I'm sure he regrets. Haven't we all? But today, Lott is doing what I think he does best, serving the people of Mississippi, whose lives were destroyed last year in the wake of two hurricanes. I haven't seen Lott comment too much on international affairs, and he's stayed away from commenting on issues of importance to gay and lesbian voters.

He's been championing insurance cases for Katrina and Rita victims who are fighting to rebuild their lives and their property in South Mississippi. Thousands of his constituents are gay and lesbian Mississippians who don't give one hoot about his beliefs on homosexuality right now. They just want their senator to do the best he can to get the federal government and insurance industry to live up to their responsibilities in the aftermath of the devastating storm.

Sure, this doesn't mitigate the fact that Lott is still seen as anti-gay. But whether he realizes it or not, he has at least one friend who is gay, and I'd love to sit down and have a chat with him.

@ Kelly Carson is news editor of the Washington Blade and can be reached at kcarson@washblade.com.



letters

Protesting is good, but voting is better

To the Editor:

The May 1, 2006 demonstrations should be a loud wake-up call to American gays and lesbians. Statistics show that there are approximately 11 million undocumented aliens in the United States and Monday's marches in every major US city flooded the news for days.

If we round off the general US population at 300 million citizens, and use the figure of 5 percent GLBT, that's 15 million Americans. But how many of those 15 million are registered to vote and do vote?

Imagine if the GLBT community "came out" in huge numbers on the day that Senator Frist plans to introduce his proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution on gay marriage the first week in June?

Our leaders should look very closely at the immigration marches and pay attention very closely, because it was a grassroots effort, done with minimal money and with none of the national networking that the GLBT community has established.

ALAN J. HURWITZ, MD
Houston, TX

Disgust for nelly homos is based on power

To the Editor:

Re "No one likes a nelly homo" (editorial by Mubarak Dahir, March 24):

I never cease to be amazed by the tendency of certain people for willful self-deception. Mubarak Dahir's column is a perfect example.

Let's cut through the P.C. crap and deal with reality for a moment. The near-universal admiration for masculine men and our common disgust for their feminine counterparts has nothing to do with pref-



erence or style or tolerance. It's about power, plain and simple.

As a school kid, Dahir wasn't singled out for attack because he was different. Nor did your bullies "feel threatened" by him in any way. They went after him because he was weak.

As any street-cop can affirm, human predators don't often look for challenges. They go after the easy mark, the soft touch, the one who can't or won't fight back. Masculinity is all about feigning and demonstrating power, about implying protection for allies, a threat to would-be enemies, and power over lessers.

Sissies, on the other hand, while occasionally colorful and distracting, invite attack. Bullies don't need a reason to bully. Their believing they can is enough. It's a cheap thrill, after all. The other dirty little secret is that there's a bully inside most of us.

Why then, shouldn't we admire mas-

culinity? And why should anyone be surprised that we denigrate our nelly queens? They cost us dearly.

Our bravos may be boring, but they garner some respect. Sissies, on the other hand, generate only contempt not only for gays as a whole but within and for our allies.

Since our beginnings at Stonewall (when a few of our dregs finally figured out they needed to hurt people to get respect), we've been very lucky, allowed to ride on the coattails of other, far more credible, civil rights movements.

Well, the '60s are long behind us, and we are finding ourselves increasingly alone in our fights. Our "tight and shiny and wonderfully outrageous" image is bleeding us badly. Don't like it? Tough. It is what it is.

Dahir's last image was priceless. Paraphrasing, he asks, "wouldn't it be a terrible loss if all our nelly queens disappeared?" I say hell no. In fact, I think our

Pride events would be a lot more effective if we all showed up "in Wranglers and work boots."

Does Dahir think Gay Pride events are for his personal entertainment? Perhaps he's confusing them with a fashion show. These are political events where we put forth a unified image — for good or ill.

At this point in our history, with so much on the line, I'd rather create an image of power, determination and strength to be respected — not a joke to be ridiculed.

MATTHEW TYSON
Sandy Springs, Ga.

Democracy vs. theocracy at home and in Middle East

To the Editor:

Re "A tale of three Talibans" (editorial by Chris Crain, March 31):

Under our Constitution, all are created equal. But the paradox is how can you have freedom of religion while denying equal treatment under law to those with differing belief systems? That isn't freedom of religion. To prevent persecution from those who thought they worshiped the one "true" religion, our Constitution designated a place for religion: separate and apart from the government.

Our civil form of government with separation of church and state, is different from the theocracies of the Middle East, and quite different from what our own evangelicals would prefer. But it's at the heart of our democracy.

Conservatives would deny equal treatment under law to those who offend their sensibilities, whether they be Muslims, gays, immigrants or other minorities. They're free to practice their religion, but they have no right to force their religion on those with differing belief systems.

BRETT ROSENBERG
Aurora, Colo.

THE

Q

Now that gay men and lesbians have more acceptance and visibility, are Pride parades becoming obsolete?



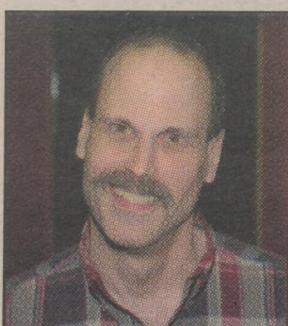
No. Pride parades remain an important, necessary and conspicuous celebration of perseverance, accomplishments and solidarity.

CHRISTOPHER B. TEAL, 35
Houston
Teacher



Pride parades represent a celebration of our culture. We have gained some acceptance and visibility, but there is a long way to go. Pride parades won't be obsolete 'til we have the same civil liberties as everyone else.

GLORIA SPENCER, 41
Houston
Senior analyst



No. It is important to continue to celebrate who we are. We must also let others know who we are and how important we are to society.

JIM JEMELKA, 47
Houston
Research assistant



No, they are a celebration of our lifestyle. Parades enhance our closeness as a community and help the rest of society accept us.

JULIE BABBS, 32
Houston
Teacher



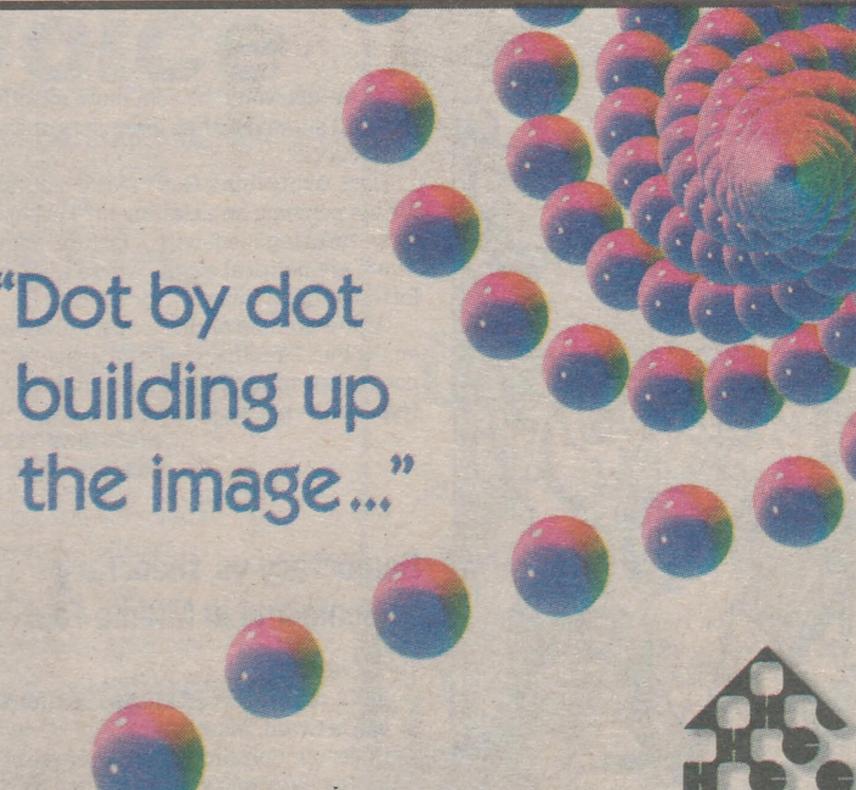
Acceptance and visibility are all the more reason to celebrate! Even though we are better off than we were 25 years ago, we are not where we need or want to be. Much progress has been made, but there is still much needed — like recognition of same-sex partners.

TOM FLOW, 43
Houston
Hospitality

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Interviews and photos by Dalton DeHart

"Dot by dot building up the image..."



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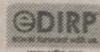
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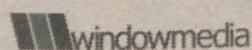
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"I'm not gay. But those stories did a number on my dating life for six months."
Republican Party Chair Ken Mehlman, responding to a question about his sexual orientation following the White House correspondents dinner last weekend (New York Daily News, May 2)

"On the days that I have disagreements with people like Jerry Falwell, I'm reminded that I disagree more with [House Democratic leader] Nancy Pelosi on a hundred different issues."
Log Cabin Republicans president Patrick Guerriero, during the group's annual convention (Cox News Service, April 30)

"It's the duty of the state to intervene when two people hate each other, not when they love each other."

Alan Duncan, the first openly gay Conservative in the U.K. Parliament, in a speech at the Log Cabin Republicans' annual convention (washingtonblade.com, May 1)

"Once before, the Constitution was amended to try to deal with matters of human behavior; that was prohibition. That was such a flop that that was repealed 13 years later."
Ordained Episcopal priest and former Sen. John Danforth (R-Mo.), speaking to the Log Cabin convention (Associated Press, April 30)

"Just go to Texas and suck George Bush's dick."
Madonna, altering the lyrics to her song "I Love New York," while performing at last weekend's Coachella festival (WENN News, May 1)

"Billy and me have never been onstage before and it was intense. ... It's me, him, Linda and 2,000 lesbians. ... Apparently there was speculation about whether I was wearing underwear. Look I've been wearing short skirts onstage forever and obviously I wear panties. Christ!"

Singer Courtney Love, referring to a gig she played with Billy Corgan of the Smashing Pumpkins and lesbian Linda Perry of 4 Non Blondes to benefit the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center (NME.com, April 29)

"Not once — in any of these cities — did someone talk to me about eliminating the estate tax, or flag burning, or gay marriage."

Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid, on weekend visits around his home state of Nevada, and how they demonstrate GOP legislative priorities are avoiding "more important issues" (CNS News Service, April 25)

"There are some strong moral Democrats. ... Barney Frank. ... I respect him greatly. He's a true liberal, and he's unashamedly a liberal. And I respect that."

Former House GOP Leader Tom DeLay of Texas, challenged by host Chris Matthews to name a "moral Democrat" (MSNBC's "Hardball," April 5)

"We were so excited about Clay Aiken appearing as a young man who promotes Christianity in the music industry, and then we started to be inundated with e-mails referring to scandal. We searched for his public response and couldn't find one, so at this time we will have to err on the side of caution until these matters are resolved."

Brenda Sharman, national director of the Pure Fashion show in Atlanta, in an e-mail explaining that Aiken was disinvited to the show and replaced with a Christian singer (New York Post, May 2)





Funny girls

In 'Laughing Matters... More!' lesbian comics are not afraid to poke fun at stereotypes

By ANDY ZEFFER

LESBIAN DIRECTOR ANDREA Meyerson knows a thing or two about funny people. For the past 10 years she has produced concert and stand-up comedy shows in the Los Angeles area through her company, StandOut productions.

Meyerson has witnessed first hand the impact gay and lesbian comics have on audiences, and it's what motivated her to make her first "docu-comedy" in 2003, "Laughing Matters." That film featured the four well-known lesbian stand-up comics Kate Clinton, Marga Gomez, Suzanne Westenhoefer and Karen Williams.

"I was so impressed that these ladies were out to the public for so long," Meyerson says. "Twenty-five years ago, Kate Clinton got up in front of the world



Andrea Meyerson



Sabrina Matthews, Vickie Shaw, Rene Hicks and Elvira Kurt were chosen as the four participants for 'Laughing Matters...More!' in part because of the diversity of lesbian life they represent.

and said I am a comedian, I'm funny, and I'm gay. In my coming out process she and Westenhoefer were significant. I saw them before I came out. Little did I know that one day I would be filming them."

"Laughing Matters" was a runaway hit when it played for appreciative audiences on the gay and lesbian film festival circuit. With so many other lesbian comics on the scene, Meyerson decided to film another docu-comedy.

"Even with gays coming into the spotlight with shows like the 'The L-Word' and 'Queer as Folk,' and with a gay character in every other sitcom, the world is still very heterosexual," Meyerson reflects on her decision to showcase more lesbian comedians.

This time around the four comedians consist of Toronto native Elvira Kurt, flannel shirt lover Sabrina Matthews, African-American Rene Hicks and Texas grandmother and local favorite, Vickie Shaw.

Having gotten her start in comedy in Houston, Shaw has performed in almost every state in the union over the last five years and has headlined prestigious lesbian comedy venues including Michigan Womyn's Festival, National Women's Music Festival, Monterrey Beach Women's Festival; and the Dinah & Lina

Shore Golf Tournament in Southern California.

Her material is drawn from true-life experience as not only mother, but also as an openly gay mother. Add to that mix her Texas roots, and comedy is sure to follow, as the nearly sold-out audience at Houston's Lesbian Health Initiative's annual Valentine's Gala learned earlier this year.

In addition to the "Laughing Matters...More" DVD, Shaw has recorded her own CD, "You're Funny?" My Mom," and is a featured artist on the "Best of Lesbian Comedy" release on Rising Star Records.

CASTING FOR THE SECOND FILM WAS much more difficult than the first time around, says Meyerson.

The first group focused on veterans who have been doing stand-up for 20 years or more. Now there is so much gay and lesbian talent on the scene, Meyerson says she could make dozens of "Laughing Matters", follow-ups. Meyerson deliberated for a month on who to include in the latest film, and she says diversity was a key factor in her decision-making.

"I like to embrace diversity in every-

thing I do," she says. "Even though we are all lesbians, we are still different. We all need our own voice. Without diversity, everything would be so boring. I like it in my life, and personally, I like it in the big picture."

Meyerson filmed all four stars in one night, performing their craft before a live audience. Yet the film also includes one-on-one intimate interviews, and a group discussion Meyerson called her "reality segment."

It was in the reality segment that the comedians acknowledged their differences.

The free flowing conversation touches on being butch, being femme, religious backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds and different walks of life.

MEYERSON FILMED THE FOOTAGE IN 2004, and sat on it for a while. She says the reasons were primarily financial, but there also was the underlying expectation of having to live up to the first version of the film.

Meyerson has plans for two more "Laughing Matters" films. "The Men of Laughing Matters" will focus on gay male comedians, while "Laughing Matters: The Next Generation" will feature up and coming gay and lesbian comedians.

theater RICH ARENSCHIELDT

Aural sex

HGO's 'Carmen' leaves audiences panting and begging for more

"CARMEN" IS THE STORY OF THE WOMAN who made the cigarette famous in opera, and after you see this Houston Grand Opera production you're going to want to burn one. Reviving her role from 2000, French Mezzo Beatrice Uria-Monzon smokes as the famous seductress who leaves a trail of broken hearts steeped in her own blood.

French composer George Bizet created quite a stir when the work premiered in 1875. Shocking audiences with its gritty portrayal of loose women and the men who love them, the work's visceral notoriety is what helped to maintain its place in the repertoire — and nothing succeeds like succ-sex.

Richard Bado's large and polished chorus luxuriates in this score. Directed by Brazilian born Ron Daniels, the singers seem pleasantly ubiquitous without making themselves obvious. In spite of appearing in various stages of undress, the women (and the men) sound excellent, blending perfectly producing that quintessential operatic sound: big and exciting



With legs that make the audience weak at the knees and a voice like café con leche, **Beatrice Uria-Monzon**, as Carmen, seduces Don José, played by **Marcus Haddock**. Drool cups should have been distributed by the ushers. (Photo by Jim Caldwell)

while still controlled.

Sets "a la sanguine" by Riccardo Hernandez are amazingly effective and uncluttered, with intense contrasts of red, black and crème dominating. In conjunction with lighting by James Ingalls, they

i MORE INFO

Houston Grand Opera presents 'Carmen'
Through May 6
Worham Theater Center
501 Texas Ave.
713-228-OPERA
www.hgo.org

frame and silhouette the principals perfectly. It's wonderful to see the stage filled with people instead of "stuff."

And what a cast! Who better than Uria-Monzon could sing the role of a Basque gypsy in a Spanish opera written by a Frenchman? It's impossible to tell what Monzon does more of: vocalizing or working out to maintain her "Grace Jones" physique.

Every move Monzon makes is calculated as to the effect it will have on her hapless devotees. Men are no match for this woman who prizes her freedom and individuality above all else. Her lust for life is like a laser beam; so intense it could interfere with passing air traffic. Some who play Carmen rely solely on sexuality — Uria-Monzon harnesses femininity for her true purpose, feminist independence.

THE CAST IS APPROPRIATELY hypnotized by Carmen. American Tenor Marcus Haddock, making his house debut as Don Jose, looks like a smitten lemming in the opera's early acts. This guy sings and acts with phenomenal passion and musical

precision. Initially enthralled by Carmen's allure and then subsequently crazed at her final refusal of love, Haddock gives us the dramatic gamut while at the same time remaining musically focused. His duets with Uria-Monzon are so steamy you'd think they just got off the dressing room sofa.

Not to be outdone by his more worldly rival, bullfighter Escamillo (American Bass, Raymond Aceto) blusters a bit more but is equally entranced by Carmen. As the guy with the "money song," this toreador gives us the classic tune with all the expected bravado and confidence. Last wonderfully heard here in "Boris Godunov," he is a reliably excellent performer (as are the vocal septet of friends that flank Carmen throughout the piece). Aceto also sings in the concurrent HGO production of Monteverdi's wicked "Coronation of Poppea."

German conductor Sebastian Lang-Lessing and his whirly baton propel this show with alacrity towards its devastating finish. HGO players sound as accomplished as ever with some especially poignant playing from the solo woodwinds tendering music infused with melancholy during the slower passages.

Operatic lovers seldom fit; however, everyone in this production looks as if they've just hopped out of bed from a Spanish television novella. But HGO's "Carmen" shares all the Latin "caliente" coupled with far better music. This show is an invigorated reprise of a classic.



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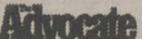
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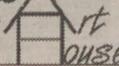
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Advocate



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Long Point Light, Chet Jones

television BRIAN MOYLAN

Wise guys who like guys

A gay twist on HBO's 'Sopranos' brings the best story of the season

FOR ME, THERE'S NOTHING BETTER than surprise gays. When watching what might be considered a mainstream movie or television show that will be presumably filled with heterosexuals and then suddenly a gay character pops up. It's expected that all sorts of orientations will be represented on "Will & Grace," but when there's a lesbian on "According to Jim," that's shocking and fun. It always makes me perk up, take notice and pay closer attention.

One of the best surprise gays of all time appeared on HBO's "The Sopranos" last season (two long years ago) when Finn (Will Janowitz) caught gangster Vito Spatafore (Joseph Gannascoli) going down on a guy in a parking lot. Not only was it out of the blue, but the macho mob drama was the last place the audience would expect to see a gay man.

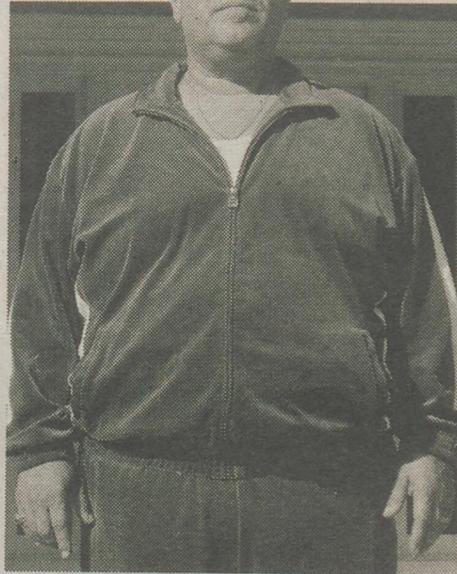
After the episode, the matter was dropped, but it's back this season, Sunday nights at 9 p.m. on HBO, to add some much needed excitement into what has

been a limp year for the show. When discovered by two hoods dancing with a man in a leather bar (certainly the hottest one I've ever seen), Vito goes on the lam fearing retribution from his fellow wise guys.

Vito travels north to find a cousin, but ends up in a small New Hampshire town after his car breaks down. In a brilliant evocation of what life both on the run and being in the closet is like, everything Vito sees reminds him of his predicament. Whether he's ogling the cook at the diner, looking at a waterfall or eyeing the state license plate's "Live Free or Die" motto, everything to him is about being gay.

In the episode that aired Sunday, April 30, the diner cook came on to Vito, who initially responds violently. Then he returns to apologize for his behavior, saying he's lived the lie so long, it's hard to break out of the pattern. As the episode ends, it seems like Vito might find something close to happiness with his new paramour.

WHAT WAS ALSO SURPRISING IS HOW the episode underscored the theme of a traditional establishment (the mob) trying to adapt to the changing world. When two gangsters go into a Starbucks-like coffee house to try to shake down the manager,



The story of gay mobster Vito (Joseph Gannascoli) has been a surprising and welcome development on HBO's 'The Sopranos.' (Photo courtesy of HBO)

he persuasively argues why their regular intimidation tactics won't work within the corporate structure.

Another shift is how the mafia will deal with gay mobsters. Vito's outing is met with disgust by most of the dons, but leader Tony Soprano (James Gandolfini), who points out that Vito can't be the first gay man in the mob, displays a tempered acceptance. While talking about his disgust at male-on-male intercourse and his opposi-

i MORE INFO

'The Sopranos'
Sundays at 9 p.m.
HBO

tion to gay marriage to his therapist, Tony comes around and decides that what happens behind closed doors can stay there and he just wants Vito to be happy.

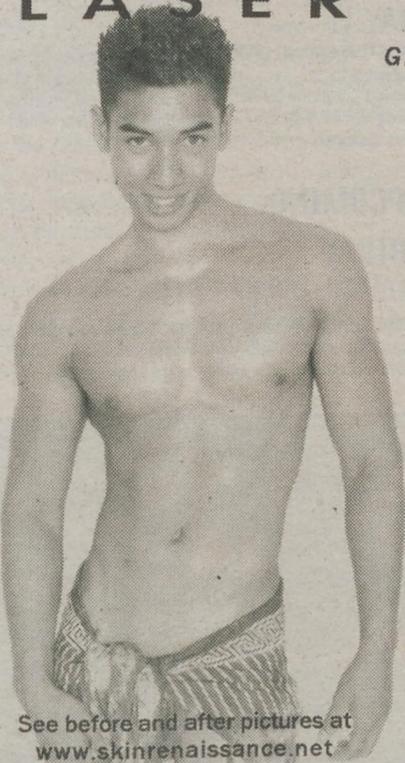
But his colleagues aren't so enlightened. They tell Tony that if Vito returns no one will work with him or respect him and they continue to plead with Tony to track Vito down and kill him.

That Tony continues to stall and is even considering letting the "Vito situation" drop shows us that if institutions with a long history and tradition of homophobia (the mob, the Catholic Church, Greek fraternities, the military) hope to survive, they're going to have to get with the times. Acceptance is always better than tolerance, but you can't have one without the other and a powerful figure always has to make a stand for what's right for either to transpire.

Odd as this sounds, the world needs more Tony Sopranos. Without men like him who come across gay men and lesbians in surprising situations and have the courage to back them up, those living in traditionally homophobic atmospheres will never be able to come out.

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Hot and wet

Try a Latin holiday chased with a Splash to liven up the weekend

WELCOME BACK TO HOVO ON THE Go-Go! May has arrived and this weekend we have two seminal events in Houston/Galveston and Austin. Keep reading to find out where you'll want to be for these throw downs and what else is happening around town.

SPLASH DAY BEGAN MANY YEARS ago in Austin at Hippie Hollow Park as a celebration of the arrival of summer. But when the girlz and bois couldn't make it to Austin, Splash Day came to Galveston, where it was also a celebration of the opening of the beaches. It was even mentioned once to a reporter by none other than President George W. Bush! The event has now has evolved into Houston's "Black Gay Pride Event," but of course everyone is welcome. **Derick Miles** is President of Houston Splash and has been the driving force behind Splash for 10 years now. **Sean Dawson**, vice president and promoter says that this year's Splash will be "...the biggest ever and most anticipated ever." They have taken the theme "VooDoo" this year, due to the impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. "We are embracing and welcoming our friends, neighbors and family from Louisiana," Dawson continues. Splash day itself is on **Sunday, May 7 at Galveston's East Beach**. Events associated with this years official 11th annual Splash (HotGG was there back in the late '80s!) will run from May 4 through May 8, with parties and fierce shows for him and for her at Toyz, 5322 Glenmont Dr.; Ultra, 108 Main St.;



Chanel Cartier, a.k.a. Sean Carter, strikes a pose for the benefit of two good causes at Brazos River Bottom on Sunday evening.



Gloria Trevi is also known as the Mexican Madonna. Check out Rich's Club Papi to win tickets to see her at San Francisco's Pride celebration.

The Meridian (home to the recent Jungle 14 party) 1503 Chartres St.; and Bartini, 1318 Westheimer Rd. The official After Splash party called the "Southern Diva After Party Show" at Rich's, 2401 San Jacinto St. Log onto www.houston-splash.com for all the juicy details and info on VIP packets and directions.

CINCO DE MAYO IS FRIDAY, MAY 5, natch, and most of the queer bars are planning parties of one kind or another. Of note for the ladies is the weekly **Throb** party at Club Discreet, formerly Sky Club & Bar, 2710 Richmond Ave. at Kirby Dr. where they are throwing a Cinco de Mayo bash with free pizza (what, no burritos?) from Godfather's and tequila specials all night! Check out www.throbpatties.info or call 713-526-5100. Also getting into the Cinco spirit is **Club Papi** at Rich's.

There you'll find two DJs (the muy caliente Alex C and San Francisco's Marco), two dance floors, free Club Papi Live CDs for the first 1000 peeps and a chance to win a VIP travel package to see Gloria Trevi in San Francisco for Pride 2006! More info can be had by visiting www.clubpapi.com or calling Rich's at 713-759-9606. \$15 tix get you in and the party starts at 9 p.m. 18+

THE LAWNDALE ART CENTER'S 20th Century Modern Market is the Southwest's only antiques show of its

kind, featuring 20th century designs. The preview party is Friday, May 5 from 6 until 9 p.m. You'll get the jump on the throngs that arrive each year during Market's regular hours, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday, May 6 and Sunday, May 7. Preview party admission is \$35 for non-members and general admission on the weekend is \$5. Lawndale Art Center, 4912 Main St. www.lawndaleartcenter.org or call 713-528-5858

THE FINE FEMALES OF THE IMPERIAL Court of Houston (ICOH) and the delicious daddies of the **Misfits** are throwing a carwash on Saturday, May 6 at Mary's, Naturally, 1022 Westheimer from 10 a.m. till 3 p.m. benefiting the Lazarus House, with 15 percent going to The Lexy Bowen Community Fund. The bubbles will cost ya \$5. Call Mary's at 713-527-9669 or visit www.spacecityempire.org for more info.

ICOH CONTINUES THEIR "FUN-RAISING" on Sunday, May 7 at the BRB, 2400 Brazos St. with Chanel Cartier hosting "Works the Runway...An Evening of High Fashion, High Hair and High Drama!" also benefiting The Lazarus House and The Lexy Bowen Community Fund. Reception is at 7 p.m.; showtime at 8:30 p.m. A limited number of reserved tables are available for \$100 and can be reserved by contacting Sean Carter at 713-204-3161.

appts.

FRIDAY MAY 5

The merchants of 19th Street in the Heights' **SPRING FLING**. 19th Street is home to a variety of antique shops, cafes, restaurants, boutiques, and art galleries. 6-10 p.m. 19th Street, between Yale and N. Shepherd Dr.

SATURDAY MAY 6

DESANTOS GALLERY presents "The Veiled Mirror," an exhibition of contemporary Iranian photography curated by Soody Sharifi. The opening reception is tonight, 6-9 p.m. 1724-A Richmond Ave. 713-520-1200. www.desantosgalleries.com.

THE KREWE OF OLYMPUS GARAGE SALE. Get there early. 4630 Waycross St. www.mardigrastexas.com. **PEEL GALLERY SHOP** presents "Nest" featuring modernist birdhouses, contemporary birdhouses, feeders, birdbaths, prints, and other items. Also featured is a ceramic wall installation from Jennifer Prichard. Opening reception, 10 a.m.-7 p.m. 4411 Montrose Blvd. 713-520-8122. www.peelgallery.org. **PROGRESSIVE DINNER**. 6 p.m. \$75. Benefits Assisthers and Uncommon Legacy-Houston. 713-521-4628. www.assisthers.org.

SUNDAY MAY 7

AIDS FOUNDATION HOUSTON AND MUKURU: ARTS FOR AIDS presents a Latin Fusion Party with jazz pianist Jose-Miguel Yamal Octet. 6 p.m. \$50. Benefits HIV prevention programs. Newberry Campa Architects, 708 E. 19th St. 713-623-6976, ext. 278. www.mukuru.org. **HAPPY TAILS DOG SPA** Houston's GLBT Chamber open house and ribbon cutting ceremony, with Houston SPCA mobile pet adoption. 1-4 p.m. 1315 Waugh Dr. 713-522-8144. www.happytailsdogs.com. **PFLAG-HOUSTON** presents Bill Taylor, author of "God's Acquittal," discussing the myths attributed to the Bible. 2 p.m. St. Paul's United Methodist Church, 5501 S. Main St. in the Jones Building. www.pflaghouston.org. **SPEED DATING FOR LESBIANS**. 9-10 p.m. Chances, 1100 Westheimer Rd. 713-523-7217. www.chancesbar.com.

WEDNESDAY MAY 10

ROAST AND TOAST OF BOB BOUTON, presented by Wishful Thinking Fund. 7 p.m. Benefits the fund. Brazos River Bottom, 2400 Brazos St. 713-5238-9192.

THURSDAY MAY 11

HOUSTON GRAND OPERA adult chorus auditions. Be prepared to sing two arias of contrasting style in their original language by memory. 6-10 p.m. 510 Preston Ave. Call 713-980-8679 for appointment. www.houstongrandopera.com

UPCOMING

FRIDAY MAY 12

PRIDE HOUSTON open house for current volunteers and those interested in becoming volunteers. 6-8 p.m. 1415 California St. 713-529-6979. www.pridehouston.org.



DeSantos Gallery plays host to works curated by Soody Sharifi, an experimental artist and photographer living in Houston.

dish

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

Lesbian takeover

Ellen and Rosie own the day, 'Lost' actress likes it gay, and warm up that runway

Lesbians are successfully taking over daytime television with award-winning programs and highly anticipated face-offs.

ELLEN DEGENERES nabbed two top prizes at the Daytime Emmy Awards on

Friday night, April 28, in Hollywood. This was the

first year that the show was held outside of the Big Apple, but Dish is sure all the closet-case soap actors still got to experience the debauched pleasures offered by the locals.



Ellen DeGeneres

DeGeneres won Outstanding Talk

Show Host for the second time in a row and her syndicated daily program, "The Ellen DeGeneres Show," took home the prize for Outstanding Talk Show for a third time. And the lucky girl gets to sleep with **PORTIA de ROSSI** too!

In the same evening, it was revealed who would replace **MEREDITH VIEIRA** on the girl-power show loved by gay men everywhere, ABC's "The View." Our very own **ROSIE O'DONNELL** joined **BARBARA WALTERS** onstage during the awards show and made the announcement that she would be joining the klatch as its moderator.

One can only wonder how **STAR JONES** shriveled inside — another gay person to cope with in her daily life!

The New York Post's Page Six reports that sources close to the show are leaking Star versus Rosie drama already, and Jones might be taking her star to another galaxy. Supposedly Jones wanted to be the moderator of the show, but Walters put her foot down.

Walters commented on the supposedly tense relationship between Jones and O'Donnell to the New York Times on May 1.

"The only concern would be Star's," said Walters. "If Star wants to continue to be there, she is welcome."

Lost in boobs

Dish reads reports from tabloid News of the World with a wary eye, but most rumors do have a grain of truth to them, no matter how miniscule.

"Lost" actress

MICHELLE RODRIGUEZ is getting her lesbian



Michelle Rodriguez



Rosie O'Donnell (left) and Barbara Walters announced during the Daytime Emmy Awards that O'Donnell will join 'The View'. (ABC photo by Tim Ogier)

street cred again, reports the rag, and this time, she's getting it in a bar.

Lesbian rumors have steadily swirled around the actress, and the whisperings amped up to a roar this past January when Rodriguez was photographed holding hands with singer **BLU CANTRELL** in West Hollywood. (Whatever happened to Cantrell? Is she working in retail now?)

On April 30, News of the World reported that Rodriguez was seen at New York's Duvet club on its gay night. She reportedly danced like a naughty girl with another woman on one of the club's king-sized beds.

One onlooker was quoted as saying, "[Rodriguez] was certainly not a shy girl as she pushed her breasts against the other girl's boobs and moaned in her ear."

How this onlooker could hear a moan in a nightclub is beyond Dish, who can't even hear herself moan over the pounding bass. Maybe this innocent bystander was really the object of Rodriguez's affections.

Work that outfit

What better way to celebrate Gay Pride than by watching a bitch-fest among fashion designers? The second season of Bravo's smash hit and gay fave "Project Runway" will be available on DVD starting June 27.

The press release says there's extra footage, including a section following up on the designers. Dish personally hopes **SANTINO RICE** has gotten into the regular habit of washing his greasy hair and admitting that he's a big old queen instead of "equal opportunity" as he lamely said in his interview with Instinct magazine for the March issue.

Also, big on the runway news is the start of the third season. A Bravo flack confirmed it will be starting this summer, so sharpen your claws, ladies!

@ Send comments, suggestions to Dish@houstonvoice.com



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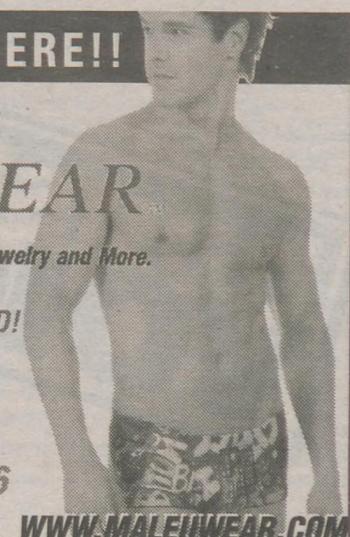
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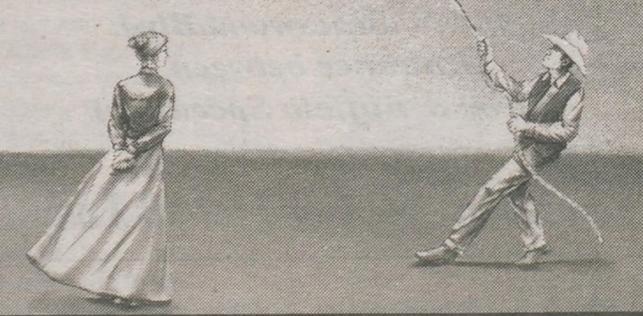
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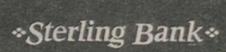
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Aries (March 21-April 19): Kristin Davis of "Sex and the City" is a fabulous-looking 40. She's afraid to have plastic surgery because she might end up looking like a clone. Good. You're already traumatized from looking at Greta Van Susteren and Katie Couric's eyelifts every day. You couldn't bear it if the mighty Kristin fell under the spell of the knife. As Venus marches proudly through your sign, you'll embrace growing older.



Taurus (April 20-May 20): It's rumored that Jennifer Lopez will play Sue Ellen to John Travolta's J.R. Ewing in the film version of "Dallas." Jennifer would be much better off playing Alexis Carrington if they did a movie based on "Dynasty." A sun opposition has you searching for your own larger-than-life role. You're feeling a bit Norma Desmond these days, lonely and desperate. Strive for Mary Tyler Moore instead.



Gemini (May 21-June 21): Sienna Miller is really moving on after her failed romance with Jude Law. She's been spotted enjoying a cozy hideaway at a Mexican spa with DKNY model Nico Malleville. A frisky moon is providing you with ample opportunities to enjoy guilt-free hookups and notorious flirtations. So pinch the Senator's wife at a fund-raiser or play footsie with a colleague at your next board meeting.



Cancer (June 22-July 22): Hip-hop star Cassidy has been writing Lil' Kim letters while she serves her jail term for giving false statements to a grand jury. He feels for her after going through his own eight month jail term. Could it be love for these two? Impulsive Mars has you reaching out to people who attract you, too. You'll send passionate emails to Cute Cheerleader D.D. Cup or Hot Cowboy Wearing Spurs on MySpace.com.



Leo (July 23-Aug. 22): Supermodel May Anderson, who has been featured in the Sport Illustrated swimsuit issue and modeled for Victoria's Secret, was arrested for hitting a male flight attendant on a trans-Atlantic flight. When will the skinny girls realize that they can cure those diabolical mood swings? They need to try this hot new thing called eating. Saturn has you in major "fix it" mode, solving all the world's problems.



Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): Shannen Doherty will star in a new reality show called "Breaking Up with Shannen Doherty." The concept? People will hire Shannen to do their dirty deeds for them, like breaking up with significant others or gossiping about former friends. Shannen has always been the greatest role model for girls who want to learn how to embrace their inner bitch. Unapologetic Mercury has you mouthing off and enjoying every minute of it.



Libra (Sept. 23-Oct. 23): Everybody's talking about all the summer movies that are supposed to be blockbusters. These include "Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest," "Superman Returns," and "X-Men: The Last Stand." But the only movie you want to see is Samuel L. Jackson in "Snakes on a Plane." You hope that the snakes eat the people. As Venus meanders opposite your sign, you're accessing your cynical and antisocial side.



Scorpio (Oct. 24-Nov. 21): "Celebrity Cooking Showdown" has been cancelled by NBC after just four shows. Diddy must be sad, since it was his Bad Boy Entertainment that helped create it. Naomi Campbell was supposed to appear on the show, but then she got too busy throwing phones at people. Mercury is creating some snafus and setbacks in your own career, but they're only temporary. Keep dreaming the big dreams.



Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): Rod Stewart is finally divorced from supermodel Rachel Hunter seven years after they split up. Stewart's fiancée Penny Lancaster should be pretty happy about that, especially since she gave birth to Rod's seventh child last November. Saturn has you playing the waiting game with something important as well. You're convinced that your hairline will grow back in, what with all that carrot juice you've been drinking.



Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Hugh Grant swore he was quitting acting. But he grew bored traveling around the world with girlfriend Jemima Khan. Now he's starring in "American Dreamz." Practical Mercury could have you reversing a decision you've made about your life just like Hugh did. You're not all that keen on joining the Peace Corps after you found out about the wardrobe and the plumbing arrangements.



Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): Nick Lachey told MTV that he was "blindsided" by his wife's request for divorce. Moral of the story? It pays to read Star magazine. Neptune is smacking you in the head and demanding that you pay attention. It could be time to face facts in your personal life. If your girlfriend has an Adam's apple bigger than Ann Coulter's, you might want to find out why.



Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20): Matt Dillon says that fame has gotten in the way of him finding true love. As the full moon amps up your frustrations, you might be tempted to blame your failure on outside influences, too. "The reason why I'm not CEO of some company is because my mom fed me Fruit Loops as a child!" "I'm no good at basketball because my dad liked music, not sports!" Quit your whining, already.

arts cover story

These new travel destinations will have you hot and bothered

TRAVEL, continued from Page 1

lines — now marketing directly to gays and lesbians. According to Community Marketing Inc., a gay travel market research and development company, 97 percent of gay men and lesbians surveyed went on a vacation within a 12-month period while the national average is 65 percent.

So where are gays headed this spring and summer?

Whatever your preference, there's something new in each of our picks for the top 10 old school gay travel destinations and the top 10 newest hotspots.

Old school favorites

Key West: Known for individually owned guesthouses like the Island House and Big Ruby's, Key West's pop-and-pop places are expanding their luxuries, including gyms, full service bars and restaurants to compete with the chain hotels. For single — or just open-minded — travelers, don't miss Tropical Heat weekend, starting May 4, an adult party, celebrating the islands' hottest bars.

Provincetown: Along with regular gay cultural events like the Annual Family Pride Week, the Annual Bear Week, and the Provincetown International Film Festival, the city has procured a special exhibit for book lovers.

"The most exciting thing [this year] is the Out at the Library exhibit," says Bill Schneider, administrative director of tourism for the city. Included in the literary installation is Harvey Milk's final diary and a set of memoirs from a turn-of-the-century lesbian surgeon. The event runs May 10-June 8.

Rehoboth Beach, Del.: D.C. gay folks flee every summer to the beaches of Rehoboth. This year, don't miss the new country music festival, June 2-4, The inaugural Blues Fest starts on June 5 and features B.B. King.

South Beach, Fla.: South Beach has long been a gay destination for those seeking to display rippled bodies in the Florida sunshine.

This year gay tourists can finally take a peak inside slain gay fashion designer Gianni Versace's palazzo, Casa Casuarina. It used to be a members-only kind of place, but now tourists can actually stay at the estate. For only \$4,000 a night, you can sleep in the room Madonna occupied when visiting her designer friend.

Fire Island, N.Y.: If you weren't of age in the '70s or hadn't gone to Fire Island during that time, rent "Gay Sex in the '70s" to see what this little getaway was like in its orgiastic heyday. Today, it's not as hot a spot as it might have once been, but there's still plenty to do.

Wine tastings, an annual boat-decorating contest and weekly community barbecues all help to create a friendly and relaxing atmosphere.

Palm Springs, Calif.: The town is home to more than 30 gay hotels, so comfortable accommodations are not a problem.



Olivia Cruises is a lesbian vacationers' dream. Entire luxury ships are chartered across the globe, providing a friendly and pampered vacation.

Be rugged on one of the many hiking trails, including the Tahquitz Canyon, featured in a famed 1937 flick "Lost Horizons." Then ease those aching muscles with massages and a facial at the gay patron's dream, the East Canyon Hotel & Spa. Top it off with a cocktail from one of the many gay bars.

Ibiza: Technically part of Spain, Ibiza is full of gorgeous people, lovely restaurants and sandy beaches.

Parasailing, day cruises and, of course, shopping are all part of the scene. After partying hard at the big gay club Anfora, make sure to relax by renting a car and taking a picnic into the surrounding countryside's groves of olive trees.

Amsterdam: The capital of the Netherlands is a dream for those into the club scene. No matter how many times you go, you'll always be able to experience something new, from fetish worship to mega-disco nights. Amsterdam is known for its sensual intensity, so check your prudery at the door.

New Orleans, La.: Although the wingnuts love to say that God struck down New Orleans because of its sinful gay ways, many gay bars were spared the wrath of Katrina. Since the hurricane, accommodations have been a bit tricky, but after doing some hotel-hunting homework, head down to the Big Easy and support reopened gay bars like the Bourbon Pub & Parade and Oz.

Mykonos, Greece: Super Paradise beach is the sunbathing destination for gay travelers, although gay people can feel comfortable just about anywhere on the island. Mykonos might not have a lot of new options, but then again, its eternal beauty is part of its charm.

New gay hotspots

Fort Lauderdale, Fla.: Once the poor stepchild to South Beach and Key West, Fort Lauderdale has come on strong in recent years, shedding its Spring Break image in exchange for what locals call,

"Sodom by the Sea."

With dozens of gay guesthouses catering to gay men, many of them clothing optional, Fort Lauderdale offers a unique mix of party-determined travelers and a large and rapidly growing local gay population.

Phoenix: Rope yourself a cowboy or cowgirl and enjoy Phoenix's innumerable spas and resorts. The city boasts more than 30 gay bars and clubs, plus a number of gay-owned and operated businesses.

Don't forget Pride events in other Arizona towns: Flagstaff's Pride in the Pines, and the gorgeous Lake Powell's Pride events.

The Dalmatian Coast: Touring the coast of Croatia along the Adriatic Sea offers the gay traveler something unique, says Nicholas Jempetti, owner of gay travel resource, Postcard Destinations.

"Gays being such great travelers they've been to a lot of places," he says.

Many people cruise down the picturesque coastal towns, full of historic architecture and art, making their way to the city of Dubrovnik and the country of Slovenia.

Sitges, Spain: Located southwest of Barcelona on the Mediterranean coast, the town is a well-known gay tourist destination. Spanish families tend to rule the town in July and August but the early summer and fall months are primarily gay.

The town has a rich arts and culture scene, plus beautiful beaches — nude and otherwise. Gay hotels, clubs, restaurants and shopping all lie within minutes of each other.

Vancouver, British Columbia: Vancouver is a stunning city with a rich cross-cultural heritage ranging from indigenous American Indians to Chinese and standard Western cultures.

In July, the city holds the Celebration of Light and fireworks artists from all over the world dazzle the crowds with pyrotechnic conjurations. Luckily, this coincides with the city's Pride festival, which is held on the last Sunday of July.

Nude beaches, cafés and clubs are all part of the city's gay scene. And you might see some of the cast of "The L Word," which tapes in town.

Costa Rica: Full of diverse landscapes and relaxing scenes, Costa Rica can meet everyone's demands. Greenway Tours, owned by two gay men, Mario León and Jerry Ruiz, has been operating gay and straight tours of the country for 14 years. Aside from standardized packages including aerial trips into the rainforest canopy, the company can custom design your vacation.

Philadelphia, Pa.: In 2003, the City of Brotherly Love launched a gay tourism campaign, and the city's aggressive courting of gay travelers has continued.

May is now the month for both the Blue Ball, the city's annual circuit party, and Equality Forum, a week of events celebrating and promoting gay culture and civil rights. The city holds a gay and lesbian theater festival in June and an international gay and lesbian film festival in July.

Woody's and Shampoo are two of the larger dance clubs with Shampoo going gay on Fridays. Sisters is a lesbian hang-out that's a bar, restaurant and dance club rolled into one.

Canary Islands: Located off the coast of Morocco, this seven-island chain is the big destination for European gays.

Gran Canaria, the main island, is blessed with sunshine, rolling beaches — including gay nude spots — and numerous seaside caves. The gay nightlife scene is hopping with countless bars packed into the Yumbo Centre district.

Las Vegas, Nev.: Sin City isn't just for gamblers. Entertainment of all varieties is Vegas' other commodity that gay travelers adore. Whatever you do, stop by to see Cirque du Soleil's sexy show, "Zumanity," featuring drag queen legend Joey Arias as the production's emcee. Sir Elton John will be performing at Caesar's Palace through 2008, and there are always male strippers in town.

There are numerous fantasy hotels on the strip, but the Blue Moon Resort is an all-male, clothing optional spot that features a pool with waterfalls and large Jacuzzi and steam room facilities.

Cruise ships: Gay and lesbian cruises are expanding with RSVP Vacations and Olivia Cruises leading the charge.

The mostly male RSVP features varying packages exploring the world. Large 2,000 person ships coast along the Mediterranean and Alaska, but for a more intimate setting, cruise from Prague to Budapest on a luxury riverboat. Now part of PlanetOut Inc., RSVP also operates land tours in Peru and Ireland for the water wary.

Olivia is the all-female favorite, chartering an entire ship for each vacation, and the entertainment lineup is impressive: Melissa Etheridge, the Indigo Girls, k.d. lang and Whoopi Goldberg. Cruising destinations include the Galapagos Islands, a trip from Barcelona to Rome, the Caribbean and Antarctica.

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Dykes To Watch Out For by Alison Bechdel



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AS THE TURBID, OIL-SLICKED TIDE OF AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION BEGINS TO TURN AGAINST THE WAR, OUR FRIENDS ARE CAUGHT IN THE UNDERTOW OF THEIR OWN PERSONAL AFFAIRS.

SYDNEY, YOU TOOK MY "PLEASURE AND DANGER" TWO SEMESTERS AGO AND I NEED IT BACK.

UH... I'LL TAKE A LOOK, BUT I DON'T THINK I HAVE IT. HEY, D'YOU WANT TO ROOM TOGETHER AT THE MLA CONVENTION AGAIN THIS YEAR?

IF I GO, I'M GETTING MY OWN ROOM, THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

WHY?

YOU KNOW WHY YOUR LITTLE TRYST. I WAS OKAY KEEPING YOUR SECRET FROM MO WHILE IT WAS JUST A ONE NIGHT STAND, BUT YOU'VE BEEN IN CONSTANT COMMUNICATION WITH MADELINE! YOU'RE PROBABLY EMAILING HER RIGHT NOW!

I HAVE TO GO. JUST RETURN MY BOOK, OKAY?

TRAITOR!

YOU'RE THE TRAITOR, TROGLODYKE.

AND NEAR A MOTLEY CLOT OF BIG-BOX SHOPS...

MO! UH... YOU'RE THE LAST PERSON I'D EXPECT TO SEE IN THIS PLACE.

HI, TONI! I HAVE A JOB INTERVIEW AT THE LIBRARY BRANCH OUT HERE. PLUS I'M ADDICTED TO THESE FRICKIN' CHAI LATTES.

UM... REALLY?

WHAT DO THEY PUT IN THEM? SOYLENT GREEN?

OOPS.

TONI, THANK GOD YOU CAME. LISTEN, WE HAVE TO THINK FAST. ANA KNOWS.

HEY, GLORIA. MO?!

UH... YOU MEAN ANA KNOWS ABOUT THE SURPRISE PARTY WE'RE PLANNING?!

YES! EXACTLY!

A PARTY! HOW COME YOU DIDN'T INVITE ME?

OH.

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bitch session

I HATE THAT MY BEST FRIEND STOPS by on Sundays to show off his trick because that just takes them off the market for me. When was the last time he asked who I slept with?

I LEFT MY GIRL OF THREE YEARS TO be with you, but you said you weren't comfortable being "second choice." I was screwing three other girls, so really you were my fifth choice. So how 'bout it? Call me. I love you.

TO THOSE LESBIANS WHO IMPLICITLY side with the religious right on so many issues: Have you ever read "The Handmaid's Tale"? Thank you so much for leading us down that road.

Bitch Boy responds: A lesbian handmaiden? The mind reels with the image...

I'M SURE WHEN YOU WERE IN fifth grade, no one told you that an amoeba was also an STD. It wasn't until you

found your diseased ass in the free clinic needing urgent medical care that you got that bit of education.

TO THE ASSHOLE WHO SAYS people who proclaim themselves gay have a psychological dysfunction that includes a blind spot that makes them feel born that way: By that "logic" can I conclude that the psychological dysfunction that makes people proclaim themselves "born again" includes a brain tumor that makes them feel born that way?

Bitch Boy responds: Or just born again that way.

TO THE CANDY "STRIPPER" WHO works in a hospital and doesn't date dumb guys: Learn how to spell, dumb! You meant candy "striper."

Bitch Boy responds: Learn to read, SAT flunk boy! I pointed that out in response to his post.

Sugar may make the medicine go down, but bitching helps you swallow the bitterness!

ACCEPTING A FREE DRINK FROM someone you don't know doesn't obligate you to speak to them. But aside from being rude, not even a thank you, it sure makes you a leeching jerk for accepting it when you have no other use for the person.

WHY CAN'T "BITCH SESSION" have its own television show? It's better than all that "howdy-dooody" happy crap on the gay channels.

TO THE QUEEN WHO ACCEPTED the drink: You obligated yourself to talk to the guy when you said yes. If you didn't want to talk to him, you should have declined the drink, you self-centered bitch!

IF YOU ARE "AMUSED" THAT you weren't invited to the birthday party, but you don't know why, would you like me to take a guess based on the pompous tone of your bitch?

TO BITCH BOY: NEXT TIME WHEN you print that "Sarcasm Alert," be sure to also print the rest of the bitch that declared you a pathetic loser! I still stand by it too because you are Blanche, you are. **Bitch Boy responds:** I'll keep that in

mind the next time I print a "Sarcasm Alert," but the next time you feel the urge to purge about me, try blogging. Others need space to bitch, too.

TO THE GUY WHO IS PISSED THAT "queens" didn't like "Brokeback Mountain" because it had a sad ending: The movie was a tragedy, just like almost every other damned gay-themed movie. The point was that if you had to wait until someone is dead to love him, then you didn't love him enough when it was alive.

TO THE GUY WHO THINKS LIKE A woman and thinks it's upsetting when men don't want to hear him bitch: We have been feminized, demonized, ostracized and hated for who we are. It takes more than a penis to make you a man. Revel in your masculinity as women glory in their femininity. Value your male aggression and anger instead of thinking like a woman.

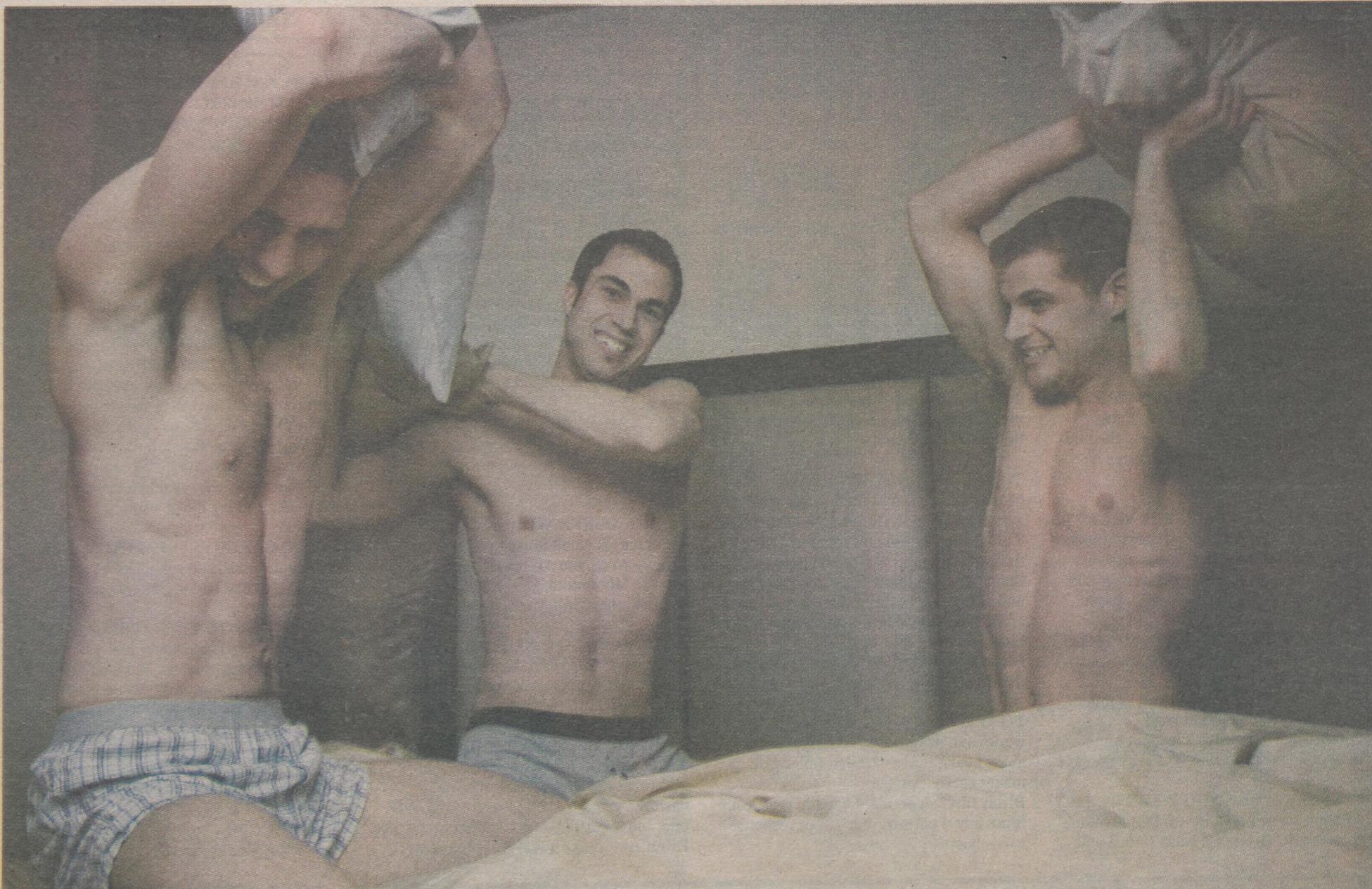
WHY DO GAY GUYS FORM EXCLUSIVE little cliques like high school girls? Honestly, it's just bad manners!

IN RESPONSE TO THE COMPLAINT about how every gay charity has to involve tired drag queens: Maybe if the rest of the gay community would get involved, the charities wouldn't have to call up queens for every event.

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

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