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APRIL 29, 2005

**FOSTER PARENTS:** Gays  
may not be out. Page 3



**MARRIAGE:** House also  
bans civil unions. Page 3



**DON'T ASK:** Pentagon  
weighs sodomy law. Page 6



## Microsoft, Proctor & Gamble deny caving to religious leaders

Companies reject claims they  
were bullied by boycotts

By RYAN LEE

A pair of religious conservatives pounded their chests last week, claiming victory in two separate attempts to force Fortune 100 companies to abandon their gay-friendly policies.

But officials from both companies — Microsoft and Proctor & Gamble — deny they caved into pressure from threatened boycotts.

On April 21, the Washington state Senate voted 25-24 to reject a non-discrimination bill that would have outlawed bias in employment, housing, public accommodations, credit and insurance based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Earlier that day, the Stranger, a weekly alternative newspaper in Seattle, reported that Microsoft stopped lobbying in support of the bill and changed its official position from supportive to "neutral" after two meetings in February between Microsoft officials and Rev. Ken Hutcherson.

Hutcherson — leader of a "mega-church" in Redmond, Wash., and a vocal critic of same-sex marriage — could not be reached for comment by press time.

But the day after the vote, he told the New York Times that Microsoft "backed off" from supporting the bill when he threatened a national boycott against the company.

"I told them I was going to give them something to be afraid of Christians about," Hutcherson said.

But Microsoft officials, including Chair Bill Gates and CEO Steve Ballmer, flatly denied Hutcherson played any role in Microsoft switching its position to neutral.

"We met with many people in the community, Rev.



After Microsoft came under intense criticism for dropping its support of a gay-friendly non-discrimination ordinance in Washington state, Bill Gates said the company may back the bill again next year. (Photo by Evan Vucci/AP)

Hutcherson being one, listening to all sides of this issue, but again, our decision was not influenced by external factors," said Tami Begasse, a Microsoft spokesperson.

Please see **MICROSOFT** on Page 7



A letter Pope Benedict XVI wrote when he was a cardinal in 2001 is being used in a lawsuit by three men who claim they were sexually abused by a seminarian in 1996.

## Lawsuit accuses Pope Benedict XVI of hiding church sex scandal

A 2001 letter from then Cardinal  
Ratzinger is being cited in a lawsuit  
alleging child abuse in 1996

By BINNIE FISHER

Three Houston-area men are using a letter written by Pope Benedict XVI while he was a cardinal as the basis for a lawsuit against the Catholic Church.

Please see **LAWSUIT** on Page 4



**local life**  
Jeffrey Coleman says his  
Fresh Start Church is  
affirming and radically inclusive.  
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**dish**  
Will a new Beatle book reveal  
which of the Fab Four had  
sex with manager Brian Epstein?  
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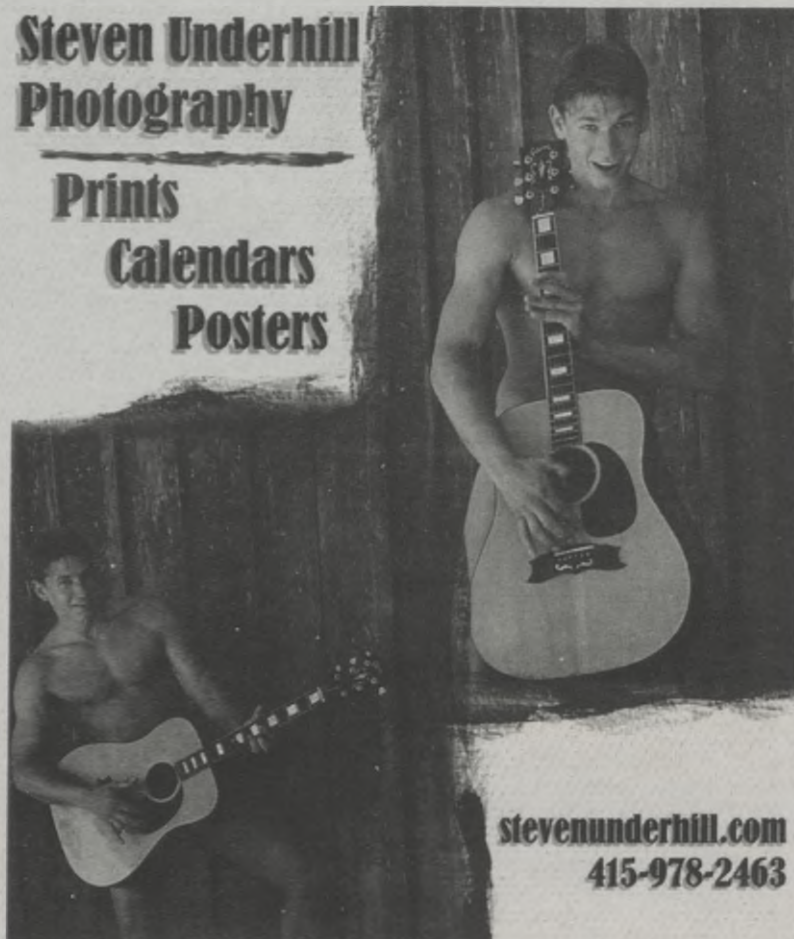
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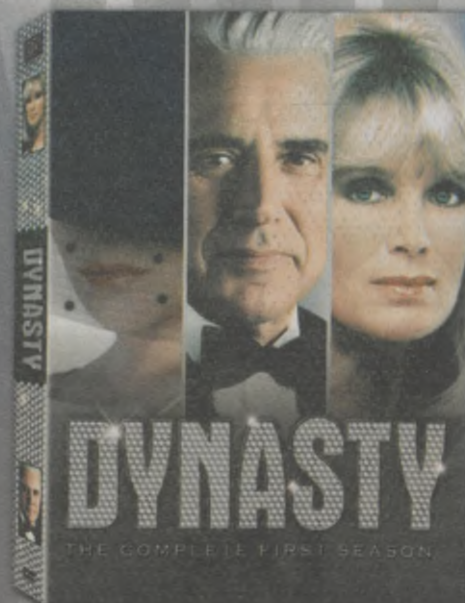
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## local news briefs

### State Senate rejects legislation that bans gay foster parents

A Texas House amendment to a senate foster care bill that would ban gays and lesbians from serving in that capacity hit a snag when the legislation went back to the State Senate for approval. Senators rejected the measure as it was amended by the House and named a conference committee to hammer out a final bill. Senate Bill 6 was introduced as an overhaul to the state's foster care system by Sen. Jane Nelson (R-Lewisville). The bill was approved by the Senate and went to the House where Texas Rep. Robert Talton (R-Pasadena) tacked on an amendment that would ban gay and lesbian foster parents. Nelson is one of five senators who will join five House members on the conference committee. A spokesman in her office said Tuesday she would "argue vehemently" to cull the gay and lesbian foster care amendment from a final bill. "We cannot allow this reform bill to be tied up in the courts for years over an issue that was never part of our review," Nelson said. She pointed out that a similar ban in Arkansas was overturned by a judge there. When the bill emerges from conference committee, it will go back to both houses for a final vote.



Republican State Senator Jane Nelson will argue to have the amendment prohibiting gay and lesbian foster parents removed from Senate Bill 6.

### Houston forum will address reported new HIV strain

The hottest topic currently being discussed by gay men these days – a super strain of HIV recently reported by Dr. David Ho and others at the Aaron Diamond Research Center in New York, will be addressed at a forum in Houston. Ho's disclosure of the case to the New York Department of Health and Mental Hygiene prompted a firestorm of criticism aimed at HIV-positive gay men and has prompted enormous controversy among researchers, medical professionals and public health experts across the nation. At the recent 12th Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections, the international conclave for professionals working in HIV/AIDS, a special session was devoted to whether or not the new strain really exists. During that session, HIV researcher Ho defended his actions. In an effort to get to the facts at hand, The Advances in Treatment and Medications Committee, the arm of the Ryan White Planning Council that addresses how the latest advances in treatment impact those diagnosed with HIV, will conduct a community forum to educate the public and answer questions regarding the medical, behavioral, and epidemiological aspects surrounding the existence of a multi-drug resistant HIV. The forum is scheduled from 6-8 p.m. Thursday at the United Way Community Resource Center at 50 Waugh Drive. The forum will feature a panel of local experts including Dr. William A. O'Brien, Professor of Internal Medicine and nationally recognized expert on research regarding HIV-specific resistant viruses; Dr. Michel Ross, Professor at the

University of Texas School of Public Health and a leading researcher in HIV, sexually transmitted infections and human sexuality; and Dena Gray, Community Liaison, Houston, City Council District D. The forum is sponsored by the Center For AIDS and the Houston-area Ryan White Planning Council. For more information or to RSVP, call 713-527-8219.

### Houston GLBT Political Caucus speaker talks about HJR 6

Elizabeth McLane, a native Texan who has taught political science and criminal justice and worked on a number of political campaigns, will be the featured speaker at the Wednesday meeting of the Houston GLBT Political Caucus (PAC) that will focus on House Joint Resolution 6. McLane will compare the proposed constitutional amendment that would ban same-sex marriage as well as civil unions to legislation that has been introduced or adopted in states around the country. McLane, who has served as a city commissioner and taught at the University of Houston downtown campus and at Houston Community College, has entitled her address, "Compared to Counterparts: A Review of Texas and HJR 6." Her talk will be followed by a discussion of strategies that could be used to combat HJR 6 and other anti-gay legislation. HJR 6 was passed by the Texas House on Monday. If the measure finds a two-thirds majority in the Senate, it will go on the statewide ballot in November. The meeting gets underway at 7 p.m. at the Houston GLBT Community Center, 3400 Montrose Blvd., Suite 207.

From staff and wire reports

## local news

### Texas House approves ban on gay marriage and civil unions

Activists lobbying senate to get civil unions removed from proposed amendment

By BINNIE FISHER

One week after passing legislation that would prohibit gays, lesbians and bisexuals from serving as foster parents, the Texas House of Representatives approved a proposed constitutional amendment that would not only ban same-sex marriage but would also limit civil unions.

The tally was 101-29, with eight members declining to cast votes on the measure.

As originally introduced by Texas Rep. Warren Chisum (R-Pampa), House Joint Resolution 6 would have prevented only gay marriage. Chisum later added language to also prohibit anyone in the state from entering into a civil union.

In debate on the resolution, some legislators questioned whether the ban on civil unions would interfere with the right of individuals to name insurance beneficiaries and heirs to whom they are not legally married. Chisum said his measure allows for private contractual agreements between unmarried partners.

Questioned by Rep. Sylvester Turner (D-Houston) on the House floor regarding whether the measure would also exclude civil unions for heterosexual couples, Chisum said, "I'm excluding any contract that would allow the same status as marriage."

Rep. Elliott Naishtat (D-Austin) asked Chisum whether he thought HJR 6 was discriminatory, and Chisum replied, "I know I'm not discriminating because there is no person in Texas that does not fit under that one man, one woman."

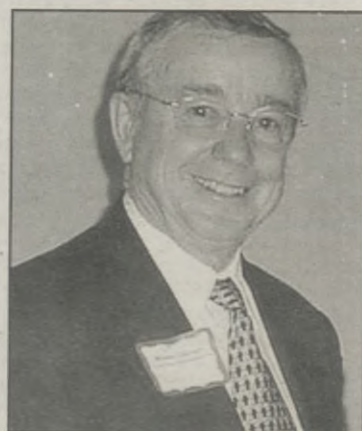
Among the handful of House members who argued passionately against the measure, were Reps. Jessica Farrar, Garnet Coleman and Senfronia Thompson, all Houston Democrats, and Rep. Paul Moreno, a Democrat from El Paso.

Thompson, a black woman elected to the Texas House in 1973, said, "I've been a member of this body for three decades, and I believe we're going in the wrong direction here, the direction of hate and fear and discrimination."

Thompson said she remembers that when she was a child, there was talk of protecting marriage then. "What they meant was if people of my color tried to marry people of Mr. Chisum's color, you'd often find people of my color hanging from a tree."

### 'Compassion over discrimination'

After the vote, Coleman said, "Today, the House passed a constitutional amend-



Texas Rep. Warren Chisum (R-Pampa) is the author of House Joint Resolution 6 that bans not only same-sex marriage but also civil unions.

ment that would deny basic contractual rights to thousands of families across the state. It's time to stop piling on and to start putting compassion over discrimination."

In addition to Farrar, Coleman, Thompson, Moreno and Naishtat, other House members voting against the resolution included, from Houston, Reps. Alma Allen, Harold Dutton, Scott Hochberg, Joe Moreno, Rick Noriega, and Hubert Vo.

The resolution goes to the Texas Senate next, and activists in the state are urging action on the issue. The Lesbian/Gay Rights Lobby of Texas (LGRl) issued an action alert asking anyone who does not agree with the vote to contact his or her senator.

"For the first time in our history, the Texas Legislature is choosing to write discrimination into the very document that should protect all Texans," said Randall Ellis, LGRl's executive director. "The Texas Legislature continues to push policies that hurt real Texas families. Enough is enough. These lawmakers need to focus on the work of making Texas a better place for all Texans."

If they're not able to turn the Senate around on the marriage resolution, activists hope they can at least get the civil union provision stricken. Some lawmakers who agree with the marriage amendment have said they approve of civil unions.

Reps. Martha Wong (R-Houston) and Sylvester Turner (D-Houston) were among eight House members who abstained from voting on HJR 6.

Wong said, "I believe the institution of marriage should be maintained only between one man and one woman. But I cannot allow us to write blatant misunderstanding and discrimination into the Texas Constitution by banning civil unions as well."

### MORE INFO

Lesbian/Gay Rights Lobby of Texas  
www.lgrl.org



## local news

# Lawsuit claims conspiracy by Pope when he was a cardinal

LAWSUIT, continued from Page 1

In a report by KPRC-TV, Channel 2 on Tuesday, the attorney for the plaintiffs told a federal judge during a hearing that the pope in 2001 sought to cover up cases involving the sexual abuse of children by pedophile priests.

The plaintiffs, who claim they are victims of the church's sex scandal, say that a letter written by then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as instructions to bishops from the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, is proof that he conspired to keep claims of sex abuse secret.

The men are suing the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston and Archbishop Joseph Fiorenza.

Their attorney, Daniel Shea, argued Tuesday before U.S. District Judge Lee Rosenthal that Pope Benedict XVI was among those who sought to cover up the child sex abuse scandal in the church.

"We believe, actually, that the current pope, when he was head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, was actively involved in that conspiracy," Shea argued.

The letter in question, written in 2001, was sent to bishops of the Catholic Church and says, "cases of this kind are subject to the pontifical secret."

The attorney for the plaintiffs is arguing that "pontifical secret" means that the bishops were being told not to tell anyone



Archbishop Joseph Fiorenza of Houston said the plaintiffs in a court case do not understand the meaning of a letter written by Pope Benedict XVI when he was a cardinal.

about cases of child sex abuse that were brought to their attention.

Officials of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston have argued that "pontifical secret" refers to matters within the church and not to whether or not a pedophile priest would be reported to authorities.

In a statement, Archbishop Joseph

Fiorenza explains "pontifical secret" this way. "These matters are confidential only to the procedures within the Church, but do not preclude in any way for these matters to be brought to civil authorities for proper legal adjudication. The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People of June, 2002, approved by the Vatican, requires that credible allegations of sexual abuse of children be reported to legal authorities."

Fiorenza went on to say, "On May 18, 2001, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith sent a letter to the Catholic Bishops of the World concerning certain grave violations of Canon Law in the celebrations of the sacraments and against morals. When these violations occur they are to be referred to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith."

The archbishop said there is no insinuation that breeches of law should be kept secret from law enforcement officials.

"To insinuate that this letter from the Congregation for the Faith is part of a Vatican conspiracy is a total and complete misunderstanding of the purpose of the letter," Fiorenza said. "It is beyond belief that someone would try to interpret this Church document as a conspiracy."

The lawsuit accuses Juan Carlos Patino-Arango, who in 1996 was studying for the priesthood at St. Mary's Seminary in Houston and serving in a local parish,

of molesting the three plaintiffs when they were aged 11, 12 and 13.

Annette Gonzales Taylor, spokesperson for the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, said when the (then) Diocese of Houston-Galveston was informed of the alleged molestation, proper steps were taken.

"As soon as the diocese learned of the allegations, (the seminarian) was removed from the parish," she said.

She said a call was made to Children's Protective Services, and an investigation was begun.

"We held this young man at the seminary," she said.

When police informed diocese officials that no charges were being filed, Taylor said, Patino-Arango was expelled from the seminary and released.

"It was our understanding he was going back home to Colombia," she said. "We have had no contact with him."

She added that Bishop Fiorenza notified the bishop in the area of Colombia where the seminarian lived that he had been accused of child sex abuse but that no charges had been filed.

Last year, the case was officially reopened, and on May 21, 2004, Patino-Arango was indicted by a Harris County grand jury on a felony charge of indecency with a child. In court documents, his home was listed as Tampa, Fla.

The suit against the church was filed in June of 2004.

### Resurrection MCC Board of Directors' Statement Regarding Talton Amendment to SB6

The Board of Directors of Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church of Houston, TX strongly opposes the Talton amendment to SB6, the Texas Legislature's bill designed to overhaul the child protective services system in the state.

The amendment, included in the bill passed by the House of Representatives on April 19, 2005, bans same-sex couples from serving as foster parents.

The Board opposes the amendment because it jeopardizes children in the currently overloaded foster care system, puts at risk children who are most vulnerable in the system (i.e. those who are older, minority or have special needs), consumes state financial resources that could be more productively used elsewhere and is discriminatory.

Rather than strengthening families and communities this amendment destroys the fabric of family and community life. We encourage all fair-minded citizens to let their voices be heard by contacting their state representatives and senators with their opposition to the Talton amendment to SB6.

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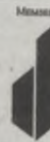
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## national news briefs

### Navajo Council outlaws same-sex marriage

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. (AP) — The Navajo Nation has outlawed same-sex marriages on its sprawling Indian reservation. The Tribal Council voted unanimously last week in favor of the Dine Marriage Act of 2005. Dine is the Navajos' name for themselves. The act restricts a recognized union to a relationship between a man and a woman and prohibits plural marriages as well as any marriage between parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, brothers and sisters and other close relatives. Supporters say the goal is to promote Navajo family values. "Men and women have been created in a sacred manner. We need to honor this," said Delegate Harriet Becenti. "Times have changed, and we are no longer really teaching our children. We want our people to realize that support is in existence for a man and woman." Critics of the legislation have said its sponsor, Delegate Larry Anderson of Fort Defiance, is attempting to rewrite cultural history to parallel conservative Christian backlash against gay rights across the United States.



Harriet Becenti of the Navajo Nation said that marriage should be reserved as a right between a man and a woman. The Navajos approved a ban on gay marriages last week.

### Mass. high court to hear bid to halt same-sex marriages

BOSTON (AP) — The state's highest court will consider a bid by an official from a Catholic advocacy group who wants to halt same-sex marriages until residents vote on a proposed constitutional amendment that would ban the marriages. The Supreme Judicial Court is scheduled to hear the case brought by C. Joseph Doyle, executive director of the Catholic Action League, on May 2, the Republican of Springfield reported. In court papers, Doyle said gay marriages are stifling the full debate required by the amendment process. "His ability to vote is being inhibited and interfered with," said Doyle's lawyer, Chester Darling of Andover. "The court declared an outcome before a vote was taken on the amendment." The SJC legalized gay marriage in Massachusetts by a 4-3 vote in November 2003. The first marriages began last May. About 5,000 have taken place. In March 2004, legislators approved a constitutional amendment that would define marriage as between a man and woman and establish civil unions for gays. The amendment needs approval again this year or next to go on the statewide ballot in November 2006.

### Critics say Minnesota play promotes homosexuality

MORRIS, Minn. — A show billed as child-friendly has sparked controversy among school board members at the University of Minnesota at Morris who alleged the production promotes homosexuality, the Minneapolis Star Tribune reported. The play, called "Cootie Shots," has a theme of tolerance, but four school districts recently withdrew their ticket requests for 1,200 elementary school students for last week's opening, the Star Tribune reported. The play includes gay themes, according to opponents, and parents became concerned when a script from the production became public, news reports indicate. The show's director, Ray Schultz, told the Star Tribune that the play "does not mention, refer to or portray sexuality of any kind in any way."

### Wis. lesbian workers sue state over partner benefits

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Six lesbian state employees backed by the American Civil Liberties Union went to court, saying Wisconsin's refusal to provide health insurance for their partners violates the state constitution. If successful, their lawsuit would force all state government agencies to offer gay state employees the same health insurance and family leave benefits to their partners that are currently provided to married workers. The lawsuit filed last week claims a state law excluding gay partners of state employees from health benefits violates the Wisconsin Constitution's equal-rights protection clause, which guarantees equal treatment for people in similar situations. "It is unfair that these people who work as hard as their neighbor in the next cubicle, the teacher in the next classroom, are not able to share in the kind of benefits that their co-workers share in," said Larry Dupuis, legal director of ACLU of Wisconsin. The lawsuit comes one month after Republican lawmakers expressed their opposition to a call from the governor to provide domestic partner benefits to employees of the University of Wisconsin System.

### Gay man wins discrimination suit against Ore. restaurant chain

GRESHAM, Ore. (AP) — A jury ruled that a gay man who worked at a local Shari's restaurant faced a hostile work environment because he failed to display traditional male behavior. The jury awarded Kevin Turner, 33, of Gresham \$122,225 in the gender discrimination suit filed against Shari's Corp. in U.S. District Court. A Shari's spokesperson told the Oregonian newspaper that the company disagreed with the jury's conclusion and was considering an appeal. The franchise "strives to provide a safe and respectful environment for all our employees" said spokesperson Dick Olsen.

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## national news

# Pentagon weighs changing sodomy law

Activists see a first step to reversing 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'

By LOU CHIBBARO JR.

WASHINGTON — President Bush must give final approval through an executive order to enable the Pentagon to preserve its policy of criminalizing consensual sodomy among military service members, according to attorneys familiar with military law.

The Department of Defense has been deliberating over whether its military sodomy law could be retained since 2003, when the U.S. Supreme Court struck down state sodomy laws on grounds that they infringe on the constitutional right of adult citizens to engage in private, consensual sex. The military has claimed the law banning sodomy is its main justification for not allowing gay men and lesbians to serve openly.

Most legal experts have said the Supreme Court ruling, which was hailed by gay rights attorneys, applies equally to the military and the civilian population.

The DOD disclosed its strategy for retaining its sodomy prohibition in the wake of the Lawrence vs. Texas decision on April 7, when it sent Congress a proposed amendment to the Uniform Code of Military Justice, the statute that contains the military's sodomy law. The DOD also sent Congress a proposed change to its Manual for Courts-Martial, which has served as a set of regulations the DOD has used to implement various provisions in the Uniform Code of Military Justice, known as the UCMJ.

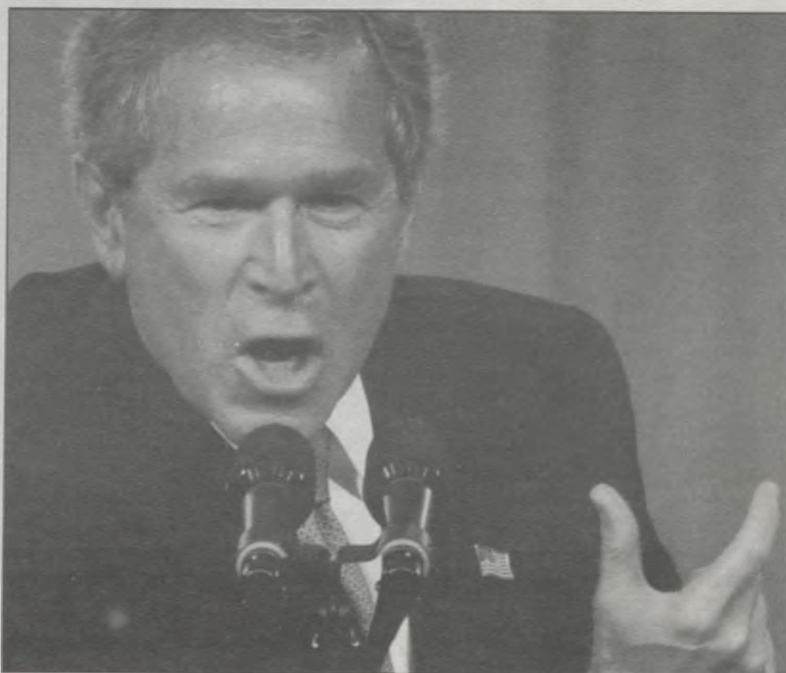
Gay activists initially praised the proposed changes after the New York Times reported last week that they called for removing the prohibition of consensual sodomy from the UCMJ. But a DOD spokesperson quickly contradicted the Times report, saying the DOD plans to retain consensual sodomy as a crime by moving it from one section of the UCMJ to another, and making it a regulatory offense in the court martial manual.

## Changes called a 'shell game'

The Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, a gay litigation group, called the proposed changes a "shell game" that would not stand up to a legal challenge under the Lawrence decision. SLDN noted that at least two military appeals court rulings have cited the Lawrence decision, with one overturning a military sodomy conviction last December and another curtailing the military's enforcement of its sodomy law in August 2004.

"Pentagon leaders cannot run and hide from the Constitution," said Sharra Greer, SLDN's director of policy and law.

In its proposed changes, the DOD calls for moving the sodomy prohibition from Article 125 of the UCMJ, which is considered a section of the military's criminal law, to the UCMJ's Article 134, among other things, addresses matters pertaining to con-



President Bush must issue an executive order for the military to move its laws against sodomy in an effort to avoid having the ban overturned by courts.

duct considered "prejudicial to good order and discipline" among service members.

Provisions under Article 134 are enforced through the DOD's Manual for Courts-Martial. Changes to the manual are considered to be regulatory in nature and are not specifically part of the UCMJ. However, they must be put in place by the president, with the approval of Congress, the DOD told United Press International on Monday.

President Clinton issued two separate executive orders changing the DOD Manual for Courts-Martial in ways that supported gay rights. One of his changes created a provision to prosecute hate crimes. The other change prevented the military from investigating service members for being gay if information about their sexual orientation surfaced in a routine background check for a security clearance.

Tara Andringa, a spokesperson for Senator Carl Levin (D-Mich.), the ranking minority member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said it is widely believed among Capitol Hill observers that Bush will agree to issue an executive order retaining the military's sodomy prohibition.

Andringa noted that the DOD most likely sent its recommendations to Congress calling for the changes needed to preserve the military sodomy prohibition with the approval of the White House.

She said Levin, who has been a critic of some of the Bush administration's military policies, has not yet commented on the proposal to retain the military's sodomy prohibition.

A spokesperson for Senator John Warner (R-Va.), chairperson of the Armed Services panel, did not respond to a Blade inquiry by press time. Warner is considered one of the most influential members of Congress on military matters.

Gay rights attorneys believe the outcome of the military's sodomy law is important because it has been cited by military leaders as a key reason for prohibiting gays from serving openly in the military under the Pentagon's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. That policy, which President Clinton proposed in 1993 and Congress enacted into law, holds that gays are unsuitable for military service, in part, because they engage in conduct deemed illegal under the UCMJ's sodomy clause.

Attorneys for SLDN and the national gay group Log Cabin Republicans have filed separate lawsuits challenging the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy on a variety of grounds, including that the Lawrence decision makes the military's laws against sodomy obsolete.

In December 2004, the U.S. Army Court of Criminal Appeals ruled in a case known as United States vs. Bullock that a guilty plea by a soldier who admitted to engaging in consensual sodomy with an adult female in his private barracks quarters should be overturned. The Army appeals court cited the Lawrence decision and an August 2004 decision by the Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces known as the U.S. vs. Marcum.

The Marcum decision held that the Supreme Court's Lawrence ruling restricted the military's ability to prosecute for consensual sodomy except for the set of exceptions listed in Lawrence. The exceptions allow states to continue to prosecute for sodomy if the sexual relations in question do not involve consent, take place in public, include sexual activity with minors, involve prostitution, and involve "relationships in which consent may not be easily refused."

## Different standards for military

But the Marcum decision went one step beyond the Lawrence exceptions by holding

that military prosecution for consensual sodomy would be allowed if it could be shown that the conduct in question should be prohibited "based on a particular military necessity." The decision did not specify what such a military necessity would be.

Pentagon officials have argued in the past that earlier Supreme Court rulings have recognized that the military in some instances has the authority to restrict certain rights of service members, even though such restrictions could not be applied to civilians.

A DOD spokesperson did not return calls by press time seeking comment on the DOD's legal rationale for retaining its prohibition against consensual sodomy.

UPI quoted two unnamed Pentagon officials as saying the DOD believes it can get around the Lawrence decision by moving the sodomy prohibition to the DOD's Manual on Courts Martial.

"That is why the move in location was made, and thereby (we) avoid continued constitutional attacks against 'sodomy' charges brought under Article 125, UCMJ," the UPI quoted an unidentified Pentagon official as saying. "A general statute (in the Manual) would continue to criminalize private, adult, consensual, non-commercial sodomy," UPI quoted another unnamed official as saying.

According to UPI, one of the Pentagon officials believes the Armed Forces Court of Appeals would most likely uphold future convictions for consensual sodomy if such convictions are backed by "facts and circumstances establishing the military's interest concerning conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline or service-discrediting" conduct.

Steve Ralls of the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network said military appeals courts would likely uphold a sodomy conviction under certain circumstances pertaining to the military, such as a case where an officer engaged in consensual sodomy with an enlisted person — a practice that is prohibited among heterosexuals in the military. However, Ralls said SLDN believes courts in the future will cite the Lawrence decision to strike down military convictions for consensual sodomy that don't involve circumstances that apply to all types of sexual relations, such as an officer having sex with an enlisted person.

"The military is playing a shell game to try to avoid having to comply with Lawrence," Ralls said. "Putting it in Article 134 doesn't change things."

Ralls said SLDN would prefer that Congress and the White House reject the DOD proposals and direct the Pentagon to comply with Lawrence decision. But he acknowledged that most Capitol Hill observers believe the Republican controlled Congress will back the DOD request, just as they expect Congress to bottle up in committee a pending bill seeking to repeal the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" law.

Rep. Wayne Gilchrist (R-Md.) signed on as a co-sponsor to the repeal bill this week, becoming the fourth House Republican to do so. As of earlier this month, 70 House Democrats had signed on as co-sponsors to the bill.



# national cover story

## Religious conservatives declare victory in boycott battles

MICROSOFT, continued from Page 1

The company decided to downsize its legislative priorities list prior to the legislative session starting earlier this year, Begasse said.

Exactly when Microsoft switched from being supportive of the Washington non-discrimination bill remains in dispute.

Begasse said the company decided before the 2005 legislative session that it would focus only on issues directly related to its business, such as computer privacy, education and competitiveness.

But on Feb. 1, two gay Microsoft employees testified before a state House committee in favor of the non-discrimination bill. Asked if they represented Microsoft's official position, the employees responded by informing lawmakers that the company issued a letter of support for a similar bill in 2004, and was preparing to send another letter this year, said George Cheung, executive director of Equal Rights Washington.

"But the letter never came," Cheung said. "It seems clear in terms of the timing that [Hutcherson] had some impact on Microsoft's decision to withdraw its support."

Upon watching the testimony of the two Microsoft employees, Hutcherson requested a meeting with company officials to clarify whether the workers represented Microsoft's official position, Begasse said.

Over the course of two meetings between the conservative pastor and Microsoft officials, Hutcherson asked that the two employees who testified be fired, but Microsoft refused his demands, Begasse said.

"Rev. Hutcherson also urged Microsoft to change its position [on the non-discrimination bill] from neutral to negative, and we declined," Begasse added. "We are disappointed people are misrepresenting those meetings."

But Hutcherson isn't alone in giving himself credit for coercing Microsoft to change its stance.

Reports in both the *Stranger* and *New York Times* cited anonymous gay Microsoft employees who were present during a March 29 meeting between Microsoft Senior Vice President Brad Smith and GLEAM, the company's gay employee group. During that session, Smith allegedly cited pressure from Hutcherson as the reason behind the company's switch.

Asked if there were any gay employees who attended the meeting who could refute the allegations from the anonymous sources, Begasse said there were and that those employees were allowed to talk with the media if they pleased.

Multiple attempts to contact GLEAM members for interviews were unsuccessful by press time.

Cheung, from Equal Rights Washington, said his group had also been unable to talk with gay Microsoft employees, and added it is possible that Hutcherson is inadvertently benefiting from Microsoft's switch even though he may have had nothing to do with

it.

But that doesn't lessen the negative impact Microsoft's decision had on the non-discrimination bill, Cheung said.

"What's important to know is that Sen. Bill Finbeiner, the [Republican] minority leader who locked up all 23 members of his caucus to vote against the bill, represents Redmond, which is Microsoft's district," Cheung said. "So Microsoft's decision certainly gave him extra political coverage not to support the bill."

Cheung also criticized Microsoft's employment of Ralph Reed, a conservative political consultant who rose to fame as former president of the Christian Coalition.

Reed, currently a Republican candidate for lieutenant governor in Georgia, has been paid by Microsoft for several years, but his company, Century Strategies, is limited to advising Microsoft on issues like trade and competition, Begasse said.

"Century Strategies has never advised Microsoft in any way on any social policy issues, including anti-discrimination legislation," Begasse said.

In an interview with the *Seattle Times* published Tuesday, Gates said the company did not expect the media firestorm over its decision to drop its support of the non-discrimination bill. He added that Microsoft may consider endorsing the bill when it is introduced in 2006.

### Procter & Gamble changing?

Employing the same bravado Hutcherson used in describing his alleged takedown of Microsoft, the American Family Association recently sent an e-mail alert to its members, listing a litany of gay-friendly positions Procter & Gamble supposedly abandoned as a result of AFA's boycott of the company.

"Our boycott of P&G has been successful," AFA Chair Donald Wildmon wrote in the April 16 e-mail. "We cannot say they are 100 percent clean ... but judging by all that we found in our research, it appears that our concerns have been addressed."

When the AFA launched its boycott against Procter & Gamble products — most notably Tide detergent and Crest toothpaste — it cited the Cincinnati-based company's support for the campaign to repeal Article 12, a section of Cincinnati's charter that prohibited laws based on sexual orientation, including non-discrimination and domestic partner benefit policies.

Procter & Gamble's efforts included donating \$10,000 to Citizens to Restore Fairness, an ad-hoc group created to remove the measure.

In an August 2004 letter to employees, Procter & Gamble executives said "Article 12 'prevents Cincinnati from developing a reputation as an open and welcoming community' and 'negatively impacts the city and region's image and therefore limits P&G's ability to attract and retain the best talent to help build our business.'"

AFA responded to the letter by launching a boycott in conjunction with Focus on the Family, and claiming that Procter & Gamble's position equated to an endorsement of gay marriage.



Ralph Reed has been paid by Microsoft for several years, but his company, Century Strategies, is limited to advising Microsoft on issues like trade and competition. (Photo by AP)

"To keep homosexuals from being legally married is discrimination for a good reason, which P&G says they will not tolerate," the AFA's boycott literature read.

Procter & Gamble did not withdraw its support for repealing Article 12, and Cincinnati voters approved the repeal in November.

But the AFA claimed this month that Procter & Gamble has changed its policies, including no longer advertising its products on "TV programs promoting the homosexual lifestyle, such as Alice and Grace [sic]." The AFA also notes that a Procter & Gamble executive who strongly supported repealing Article 12 "is no longer with the company."

But that former executive said Tuesday that AFA officials are being disingenuous in declaring victory, just as they were when they initially announced the boycott last fall. "Accuracy and integrity, of course, isn't AFA's strong suit," said Gary Wright, who used to work as Procter & Gamble's corporate demographer and associate director for global trends.

Wright took a two-month leave of absence from Procter & Gamble last year to lead Citizens to Restore Fairness. Following the November election, Wright resigned from the company to immerse himself in gay rights activism on a full-time basis, he said.

"As far as I can see, there has been no change in Procter & Gamble's approach to gay and lesbian issues, so I'm a little puzzled by the timing in the AFA announcement to call their boycott off," said Wright, who continues to chair Citizens to Restore Fairness as it transitions into a permanent organization.

Doug Shelton, a Procter & Gamble spokesperson, declined comment on the specific allegations made in the AFA e-mail, but said the company is pleased the boycott has been suspended.

A representative from the AFA sched-

uled an interview with the *Blade* this week, but canceled it the next day.

### Boycotts ineffective?

While Microsoft in particular received blistering criticism from gay rights groups for its policy reversal, some workplace watchdogs said boycotts have become increasingly ineffective, causing them to doubt the claims of the conservative leaders.

"We have to be really careful and definitely get all the facts straight in these situations before believing the words of these ministers, and improperly crediting them with bringing about change," said Shelly Alpern, assistant vice president and director of social research at Trillium Asset Management, a firm dedicated to "socially responsible investing."

"On the face of it, it doesn't make sense that companies that have really been leaders on gay and lesbian issues are going to backtrack," Alpern said.

Trillium owns Microsoft stock and is considering writing a letter to company executives, but first wants an in-depth briefing by gay and lesbian Microsoft employees, she said.

The recent developments between corporations and religious groups are surprising considering the limited success conservatives have had when trying to derail gay-friendly practices at the corporate level, said Melissa Sklarz, co-chair of the Equality Project, which advocates for workplace equality for gays.

"I've always been so proud of corporate America in this area, to see them take the lead on issues of diversity, that now to think that they are buckling under a campaign based on hate and fear would be unfortunate," Sklarz said.

"But I don't think corporate America will respond to this angry, small, bitter minority and change the American dream of being able to work hard and achieve success," she said.



# Local Life

HOUSTON VOICE

APRIL 29, 2005

PAGE 8

## He built a church where his flock could find a 'Fresh Start'

Pastor Jeffrey Campbell said he wanted his congregation to be affirming and 'radically inclusive'

By DAWN RORIE

Every Sunday afternoon, the Houston GLBT Community Center is filled with the sound of rejoicing, singing and music. Wandering through the corridors, following the joyful sound, visitors find a room crowded with a congregation—predominantly gay men—who have come there to worship.

Leading the gathering is Pastor Jeffrey Campbell, a man whose goal has been to provide a place where gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals can find reconciliation between their sexuality and their spirituality.

Born and raised in Cuero, Campbell says he was brought up in a missionary Baptist family that was always active in the church. When he entered into Texas State University to study accounting, he worked as a musician in the campus choir.

Campbell's involvement with ministry work almost seemed inevitable. He already knew that he had the ability to connect with people. While running for student body vice president in high school, he had discovered that he had an amazing gift for public speaking.

When asked to describe what drew him into ministry work, Campbell smiles and says that it's difficult to explain in a way that can be put down on paper.

"It's a call," he explains. "It was something within me as I grew in my relationship with God. There was an urging or a moving in my spirit that said to me that there was more that God wanted from me; there was more that God had given me to do for him."

After starting work on a Masters of Divinity at the Houston Graduate School of Theology, Campbell started holding weekly Bible studies in his home. In January of 2003, the small congregation began sharing space with a church in southwest Houston, where they had a worship service every Saturday night. With that, Fresh Start Church was born.

Although its services were open to everyone, Fresh Start was not initially an open and gay-affirming church, Campbell admits.

In March of 2004, a member of the congregation who was involved with organizing Houston Splash, the annual black gay pride celebration in Galveston, approached Campbell about signing on as the "Splash Pastor" and holding a worship service at the event.

"I was somewhat apprehensive, because at that time, there were still members of the church who were not aware of my sexual orientation. I always preached about unconditional love, but I hadn't completely come out of the closet," whispers Campbell, grinning sheepishly.

Although Campbell's Sunday "Worship Experience" at Houston Splash was met with some resistance from within the gay community, its reception was overwhelmingly positive. The minority that spoke out against the event did not feel that religion belonged at the Splash celebration.

Campbell said that some people told him that they did not put the religious aspect of their lives and their sexuality together, and that Splash was not the place to be holding a church service.

For others, the experience was an encouraging one. Campbell looked around the room to see "individuals who were just excited to be in a place where if they were with their partner, they could hold their partner's hand and worship God, all at the same time." Others felt relieved to be able to come to Campbell with personal issues such as conflict in their relationships or living with HIV or AIDS.



As pastor of Fresh Start Church, Jeffrey Coleman knew he wanted his congregation to be a radically inclusive fellowship.



Fresh Start Church is among the sponsors of a showing of the film comedy, 'Punks.'

### JEFFREY COLEMAN

Age: 39  
Birthplace: Cuero  
Home: Houston  
Education: BBA in accounting from Texas State University  
Occupation: Pastor/HIV activist  
Marital status: Single  
Pets: None  
Hobbies: Traveling and spending time with good friends/good people

### Radically inclusive fellowship

After that experience, Campbell knew that he had found his calling, and Fresh Start Church underwent a transformation. From then on, his church was known as "an affirming and radically inclusive Christian fellowship." That is to say, affirming to people of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender orientation and radically inclusive of all people.

In August of 2004, Fresh Start held its first weekly Bible study on "Scripture and Sexuality" at the Houston GLBT community center. Later that year, Campbell began holding Sunday worship services at the community center, as well.

Since then, the church has continued to grow. At this time, the congregation is up to about thirty-two members.

Personally, Campbell has continued to grow, as well. He is an advocate for HIV/AIDS education and prevention, and is currently working with the African American Gay and Lesbian Alliance to expand awareness about this serious issue.

Campbell has also been planning another Fresh Start program for Houston Splash 2005.

Fresh Start, Lambda Legal and Human Rights Campaign Houston will host a screening of Patrik-Ian Polk's comedy, "Punks," on Wednesday. The event will begin at 7 p.m. at Bartini on Westheimer.

On Sunday, May 8th, Campbell will hold his second Houston Splash "Worship Experience" at the Brookhollow Sheraton. The event will feature Fresh Start's choir, the Revolution singers, led by music coordinator Leo Radford. Bishop Dr. Yvette Flunder, pastor of the City of Refuge Church in San Francisco, will be the guest preacher.

Campbell hopes all those who have felt unwelcome at other churches will open their hearts and attend. He said he believes that it is only through willingness to participate, study, and pray that the reconciliation between spirituality and sexuality can begin.

### MORE INFO

#### Fresh Start Church

Sunday, May 1  
11 a.m. service with New Covenant Church  
1 p.m. on other Sundays  
Houston GLBT Community Center  
3400 Montrose Blvd., Suite 227

#### 'Punks' screening

7 p.m. Wednesday  
Bartini  
1318 Westheimer

#### Houston Splash Worship Experience

11 a.m. Sunday, May 8  
Brookhollow Sheraton  
3000 North Loop 610 West



# out in houston

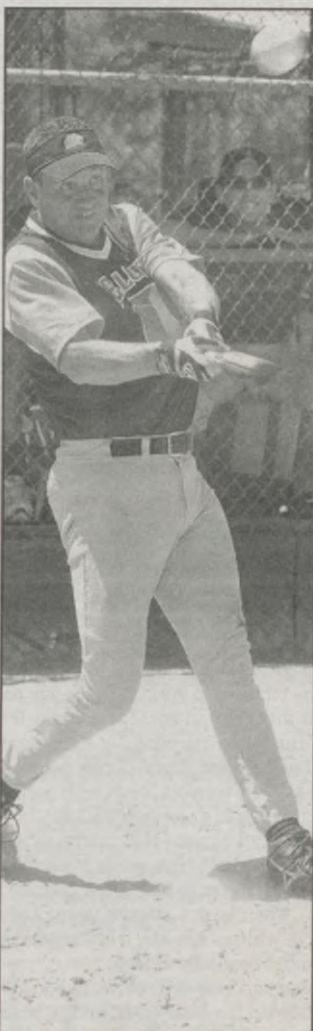
(Photos by Dalton DeHart)



The Houston Pride Band recently performed in a concert entitled, 'Out West: Themes of the Old West.'



Tony Carroll (second from left) and Bruce Smith (right) threw a party to commemorate the beginning of their second decade together, and among those in attendance were Houston City Council Member Gordon Quan and his wife, Sylvia Quan.



Michael Beard took careful aim recently as he slammed the ball in Montrose Softball League play.



Brooks Ballard threw an open house at his GMAC Home Services that was attended by (from left) Luis Freay, Ballard, Matt Sibley, James Schwartz and Marty Yaklin.



At a recent volunteer appreciation event at Montrose Diner, (from left) Melisa Frisby, Scottie Scott, Pat Alford, Delma Cummings, Pat Gandy, Sally Huffer, Lucy Watson and Cathy McMillan represented the Lesbian Health Initiative.



Rodeo cowboy Gene Mikulenka (right) hugged it up with Andre Vega at the Pride Band concert.



Dr. Patrick McNamara celebrated the opening of a new location for his Skin Renewal Center with Vada Askew and Tony Yarbrough.



At an opening at Bering-James Gallery, (from left) Blakely Bering and Austin James chatted with Fiona Downing of Bering Omega Community Services, Reesa Hedrick and Jan Quizoz.



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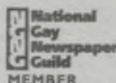
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# Forum

## editorial

# Denial River runs deep

A circuit party incident shows just how rampant drugs are among gay men — and just how indifferent we seem to have become when people fall out from them.

By MUBARAK DAHIR

IT'S A PICTURE-PERFECT Saturday afternoon on South Beach the first weekend in March. There isn't a single cloud in the azure blue sky.

This particular weekend, hordes of gay men have come to South Beach for Winter Party. At the Surfcomber Hotel, the site of this year's pool party, hundreds of handsome men in seductive swimwear are hanging out by the pool, bumping and grinding on the makeshift dance floor, parading their rippled abs and bulging biceps.

I'm standing with a friend soaking up the sea of flesh when our attention turns to a particularly muscular man with a hairy chest who's wearing a red ball cap. He's absolutely stunning, but it's not his body that grabs our attention. It's his inability to walk without stumbling.

"He's really screwed up," my friend comments. "From the look on his face, it's probably tina," he says, though the man might just as easily be high on any number of "designer" drugs, such as G or K.

A Winter Party volunteer, wearing the signature pink T-shirt that helps them stand out in the crowd, approaches the unsteady man and asks if he needs help.

I overhear his friends dismiss the inquiry.

"It's OK," they say. "We're his friends." Minutes later, there is a commotion in the packed crowd.

The muscular man in the red ball cap has collapsed. His apparently unconscious body is slumped, limp in a white plastic pool chair.

Four pink-shirted volunteers have surrounded him now. One of them has two fingers on an artery in the muscleman's neck, as if she is checking whether or not he has a pulse.

A band of volunteers heaves the chair up, and together they carry the unconscious man away. As they push through the crowd, the woman keeps her two fingers on the man's neck, and his pulse.

The crowd hardly pauses, barely seeming to notice that someone has been carried past them. The dance beat cranks,

and the bodies continue to gyrate.

IT'S NO SECRET THAT DRUG USE, particularly crystal meth, is rampant at circuit parties all around the country.

When I mention the pool party episode to my gay friends, and comment I may want to write about it, the response is almost universal: Big surprise, stop the presses. And the drug and crystal problem is hardly limited to circuit parties. It's all around us, on a daily basis, and it is wrecking gay men's lives every day — financially, physically and emotionally.

But what strikes me most, perhaps, is the nonchalance surrounding the issue. It's become so routine, many gay men don't even seem to notice it, or perhaps they just don't pay attention to it anymore. Obviously, the drug use and crystal problem involves a serious issue of personal responsibility.

But I can't help but think that there must also be a collective consciousness to this problem, if we as gay men — as a group of people who have staked the claim that we are connected to one another in some sort of bond that forms a community — hope to beat it.

In the early years of AIDS, gay activists combed the streets and the bars and the bathhouses, armed with condoms and safer sex fliers, gently reminding other gay men that all our lives were at stake. In our newspapers and our magazines, at our offices and in private homes, people were talking to each other about the risks and perils of unsafe sex, and the need we all had to help each other stay as safe as we could.

It didn't save everyone from HIV, or replace the personal decision-making at the moment of truth. But there was, at least, a recognition that we were all in this together, and that we needed to hold each other's hands, literally and figuratively, because even with the best intentions, we are all human, and we all slip up sometimes.

To some degree, aren't we all supposed to watch out for each other? Particularly in places like Miami and Fort Lauderdale, or the Castro or Chelsea or Provincetown, or any of the other gay ghettos where we've

congregated by the droves to create our own little gay Meccas, our insular, protected, safe spaces where we can fashion the kind of world we think is better than the places we came from.

Aren't these places, at least — the places where we've worked so hard to make being gay so easy — supposed to come with something more than crowded bars and naked pool parties?

Or have we created places where we are so callous to each other that we no longer notice, or care, if our community is partying itself to death?

After the pool party, much later that evening, I get a poignant reminder about why, as gay men, we need to care about and care for our own.

THE NEXT DAY, SUNDAY, MARCH 6, I am at Winter Party's beach party, right on the gay beach at 12th street.

The enormous swarm of muscled men dwarfs even the crowd at the previous day's pool party. It's another bright, hot Florida afternoon, and everyone seems to be hanging out shirtless and in sunglasses.

I have my camera in my hand, and I'm taking pictures to publish in the gay newspaper that I edit in Fort Lauderdale. It's something I do frequently at such events, and I understand that different people have various comfort levels with their face being shown in a gay publication.

Initially, I assume that is why so many people decline to remove their sunglasses when they agree to have their picture taken. Then I ask a smooth young Latin man in white pants and a sailor's hat to pose, and he gladly agrees.

Lean and well-defined, he looks adorable in his little outfit on the beach. But he would look so much cuter without the dark sunglasses that hide too much of his face. I ask him to remove them, and he emphatically shakes his head no.

"I can't show my eyes," he tells me. "They're a mess."

Soon after, I come across the muscled man in the red ball cap from the pool party the day before, the one who had been carried away in the chair.

He, too, is wearing sunglasses.

@ Mubarak Dahir is editor of the Express Gay News and can be reached at mdahir@express-gaynews.com



READER FEEDBACK: Send letters, comments and suggestions to [forum@houstonvoice.com](mailto:forum@houstonvoice.com).



## viewpoint MICKEY WEEMS

## Why we should refuse to serve

LOOKS LIKE WE GAY FOLKS MIGHT be allowed the privilege of fighting for our country.

Actually, the government has no choice. The Pentagon is running out of options. Recruitment is catastrophically down. A fifth of our soldiers aren't even American citizens. We've been reduced to importing them.

Suddenly, sex panic in the barracks showers doesn't seem like that big of a deal when faced with the prospect of an American military that's increasingly non-American.

But don't expect the announcement of our recruitment to be contrite, apologetic, or in any way equalizing. I would not be surprised if it were put in terms of our irresponsibility.

Be ready for the politics of blame: Why should homosexuals be allowed to shirk their patriotic duty just because they are perverts?

As usual, it will be our fault.

This will not, of course, lead to a big jump in lesbian enlistment. As with team sports, Americans expect that most women in the military are lesbians.

"Don't ask, don't tell" (DADT) was aimed at men; women have been affected by it, but not to the same degree. It has not been enforced with the same rigor as with men.

THERE ARE ORGANIZATIONS IN THE LGBT community of veterans who oppose DADT with dogged persistence. American Veterans for Equal Rights (AVER) and its local subsidiaries have done an admirable job representing soldiers who cannot speak for themselves.

I applaud these groups.

I am a Marine brat (Parris Island '83; once a Marine, always a Marine). I have good friends currently serving in the military. I support BRAVER (the BR is for "Buckeye Region"), our local gay vet organization in Ohio, where I live.

But I disagree with my BRAVER brothers and sisters on one fundamental issue. I do not want gay folks to be in the military.

First of all, our soldiers, straight or otherwise, have been treated like chattel since the Invasion of Iraq. Ask them when you see them, especially those who are not officers.

They are second-class citizens, unable to speak openly about some very serious problems concerning their safety, their families, their pay, and the government's refusal to honor their contracts when they expire.

We already know what it is like to be second-class citizens. Why would we want to have our social inferiority compounded by joining the military?

Second, it is counterintuitive to serve a country that refuses to acknowledge our intrinsic worth as human beings, that consistently undervalues us because of our sexuality.

As long as there is talk of a constitutional amendment banning the recognition of our conjugal love, then the only time I see it fitting for us to "defend the Constitution" would be if our country were actually under attack.

The war in Iraq, like the Vietnam War before it, does not even come close to being a national wartime emergency. Like disaster relief, national emergencies should be real, not imagined or hypothetical.

I WOULD REQUIRE THAT ONE condition be fulfilled before accepting any mandate allowing us to serve openly: a full apology from the president and the secretary of defense for kicking us out. I would insist that, when the draft is reinstituted, gay boys and girls be automatically exempt based upon sexual orientation.

While we're at it, I want every boy and girl, regardless of sexuality, the option of exemption based on temperament. The tender-hearted and sensitive (which accounts for a plethora of nelly gay boys and finely-tuned grrrrls) have no business on the battlefield. Leave the fighting for the butch of either sex.

Any study of the dynamics of war leads us to the conclusion that it is

shaped by heterosexual macho posturing. This is the reason we were kept out to begin with.

Warfare, riots, and terrorism are straight masculine pastimes, not ours, so let straight men die while playing those games. Keep us out.

A little-known fact about the so-called

"Stonewall Rebellion": nobody died. And those involved in beating people up were straight, not gay.

@ Mickey Weems is a doctoral candidate at Ohio State University and can be reached at [mickeyweems@yahoo.com](mailto:mickeyweems@yahoo.com).

## letters

## Rep. Al Edwards should know bigotry is wrong

To the Editor:

As reported in Tuesday's Fort Worth Star Telegram, Rep. Al Edwards called homosexuality a "social ill" on the floor of the House. He stated, "I take offense when people associate me and my race and my culture with a social ill. I don't see how the two relate."

Representative Edwards ought to be ashamed of himself. His comments are bigoted, hateful and just plain wrong. No one is comparing race with sexual orientation — they are not the same thing, but discrimination is discrimination. As an African American, Edwards should know what it feels like to hear such hurtful words. The only way to stop prejudice is to practice what you preach. Bigotry says a lot more about a bigot's own insecurities than it says about those they target.

TEXAS REP. GARNET COLEMAN  
Houston

## Lesbian adoption case may not be completely over yet

To the Editor:

After 14 months and going through every court in Texas, including the Supreme Court of Texas, the adoption of my daughter's six-year-old has been upheld.

Five days of a jury trial in Galveston last week awarded her full joint custody. Kathleen Van Stavern is my

daughter, and Julie Hobbs was her partner for nine years. Together they owned their home and decided to have a child together, but in February 2004 Hobbs decided it was over.

Kathleen began \$400 monthly child support, but in June had to file for visitation — not custody — and that was when Hobbs started the legal case to overturn the adoption.

Needless to say, Kathleen and our family were overjoyed with the upholding of the adoption and getting joint custody as were many gay and adoption organizations.

However, Hobbs has said, and the Houston Voice has printed, that she is considering going back to court to overturn the adoption again.

She has a doctorate and a professional position, and Kathleen is a police officer. Current legal fees are still due and if it starts again, Kathleen won't be able to do it. I want the Gay community to know this and why.

Theirs' was an open relationship, and everyone knew the child was the daughter of both parents and we were grandparents. How can Kathleen suddenly turn off her paternal feelings? How does one suddenly NOT be a grandparent anymore? The mind cannot grasp that. How does the child comprehend that?

What will the effect be on other adoptions if Kathleen can't fight this anymore? Your comments and prayers will be most appreciated and comforting to me and relayed to my daughter bearing this burden. Thank you for listening to me.

JANET WEINBERG  
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[janetweinberg@yahoo.com](mailto:janetweinberg@yahoo.com)

# THE Q

What is the most pressing issue for transgendered persons in the year 2005?



Without any doubt, it would have to be jobs and benefits.

JOSEPHINE TITTSWORTH, 54  
Baytown  
Retired from IBM/Student at University of Houston Clear Lake



Jobs and finding jobs.

BRANDI WILLIAMS  
Willis  
Aircraft mechanic



Passing the Right to Dignity Bill currently being considered. We need to have schools, businesses and people on the same page for human rights. We need to end the fear transgendered people have of being themselves.

BILL HUDSON, 47  
Austin  
Administrative clerk, Texas Department of Public Safety



The most pressing issue for transgendered people in 2005, I feel, is trying to get people to understand exactly what "transgender" is and to show people exactly who we are.

MYKAL PONTELLO, 23  
Pearland  
Student



Employment.

JENNIFER POOL, 56  
Houston  
Consultant — business and construction designer

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Interviews and photos by Dalton DeHart



# 1<sup>ST</sup> WORLD OUTGAMES YOUR BEST TRIP IN 2006



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## Raise for Will & Grace

Rumor is that all four stars will get a whopping \$600,000 per episode next season.

Page 18

APRIL 29, 2005

# power to the people

HOLLYWOOD CO-OP FINANCES LESBIAN FILM

By SARAH KELLOGG



**W**HAT WOULD YOU CALL A WOMEN'S Hollywood film cooperative that finances short movies about lesbians and gay men? A joke? A pipe dream? Dead on arrival?

These days, you call it successful. Despite the odds, POWER UP

(Professional Organization of Women in Entertainment Reaching Up) will celebrate its fifth birthday in October, and with considerable pride. After all, the non-profit production company—that could have produced and distributed 11 short films and is working on its first feature.

That POWER UP has succeeded where others have failed—or not even dared to go—is due in no small part to its powerhouse founder, Stacy Codikow, a former television and film producer, who apparently won't take no for an answer.

"I completely believe in what we're doing here," says Codikow, whose previous credits include a stint on "Cagney & Lacey." "There are so many lesbian and gay filmmakers who have so much to say out there, and up until recently, not that many places to say it. We're a club with members around the country, and we are trying to help as many of them tell their stories as possible."

Telling those stories wouldn't have been possible, Codikow says, if there hadn't been exceptional people to support POWER UP's mission. Even she marvels at the vein of talent that POWER UP has tapped into in recent years. Talent that many in Hollywood had ignored or didn't even know was there.

Look at the credits for any of POWER UP's short films, and you'll find the names of successful directors (Jamie Babbit, Lee Friedlander), producers (Andrea Sperling, Lisa Thrasher) and writers (Cherien Dabis, Michele Greene).

"These people are making it right now," Codikow says. "Imagine what they're going to be doing in five years."

TO DATE, POWER UP'S MOST ACCOMPLISHED alum has been Angela Robinson, the director of the recently released feature film, "D.E.B.S.," the lesbian spy caper. POWER UP financed a short version of the film in 2002, and its success proved to be a ticket to directorial stardom for Robinson.



Stacy Codikow, a former television and film producer in Hollywood, says there are many lesbian and gay filmmakers who have so much to say and, up until recently, not many places to say it. For the past five years, POWER UP, the company she founded, has been working to fix that problem.

"Stacy and Lisa really came in and took a risk with me," says Robinson, whose latest film, Disney's "Herbie: Fully Loaded," is coming out in June. "Here was this lesbian talking about directing a story with girls in short skirts carrying big guns. I'm not sure everyone would have bought it, but they did and my life changed after that."

POWER UP HAS HAD AT LEAST ONE OF ITS SHORT films accepted into the Sundance Film Festival (the gold standard of festivals) every year since the production company first opened its doors. And almost every one of its short films has won festival kudos and awards.

Originally, the grant program selected three short film scripts each year, helping fledgling directors and writers turn their dreams into reality through \$20,000 grants and in-kind contributions that ranged from production help to distributing the film. The group has given away \$1 million in cash and in-kind assistance since 2000.

By shelving the shorts program to focus on feature films, the company will surely increase its visibility and influence. Feature films, not short films, are the currency of real power in Hollywood, and Codikow and her board of directors are determined to elbow their way into the film world's old boys' club. The feature film application deadline is May 1.

First at bat for POWER UP in the features league is "The Itty Bitty Titty Committee," a comedy about a high school girl who joins a radical feminist group. The film was written and will be directed by Jamie Babbit ("But I Was a Cheerleader").

What has made POWER UP so successful up to now has been its old-school, major-studio approach to bringing films through the pipeline. At every step along the way, whether it's production, marketing or distribution, POWER UP's Codikow and her No. 2 partner, Lisa Thrasher, have called on a cadre of friends at Los Angeles studios and production companies to assist their first-time directors.

"POWER UP really came to the rescue when I was making 'Memoirs of an Evil Stepmother,'" recalls writer/director Cherien Dabis, whose screenplay "Little Black Boot" was produced by POWER UP with a different director. "They offered me production insurance, crew recommendations, free locations and completion funds. It doesn't really get much better than that. This is a group of women who want to tell good stories and are willing to help anyone who asks."

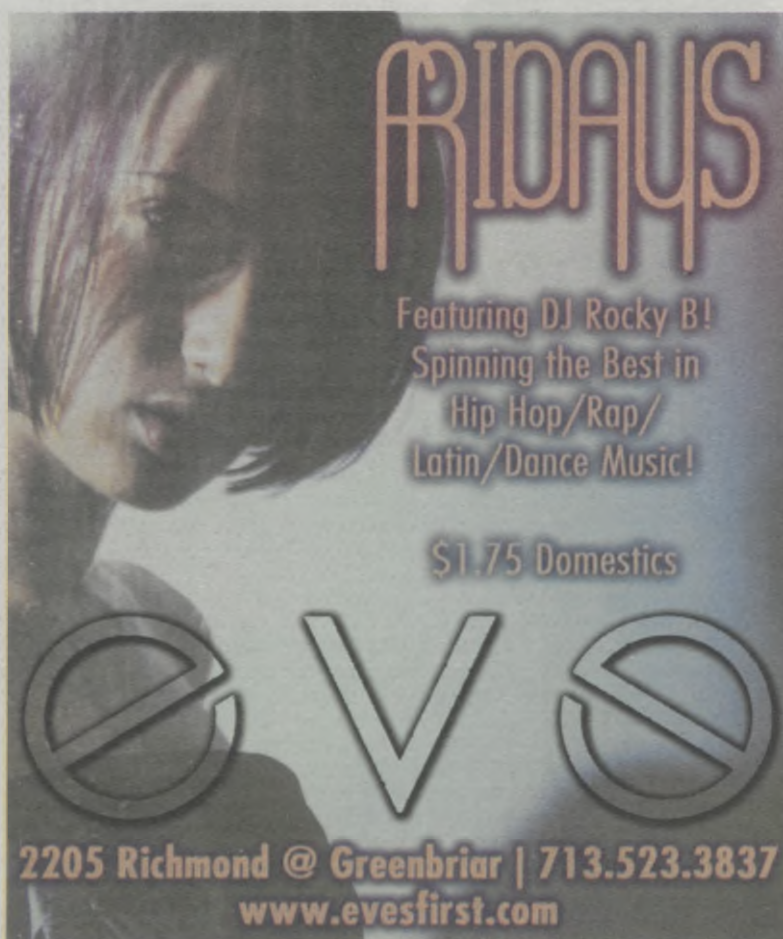
The result has been compelling films with high production values and, more importantly for some, famous names. The actors in POWER UP-financed films have included Sharon Lawrence ("NYPD Blue"), Michele Greene ("LA Law"), Tammy Lynn Michaels ("Popular") and Amanda Bearse ("Married with Children").

Please see **POWER UP** on Page 19

**LYRIC DELIGHT:** HGO's 'Romeo and Juliet' offers up rousing stage action with moments of great passion. **Page 14**

**RIDING WITH ROSIE:** Rosie just isn't believable as a developmentally disabled woman in TV movie. **Page 15**





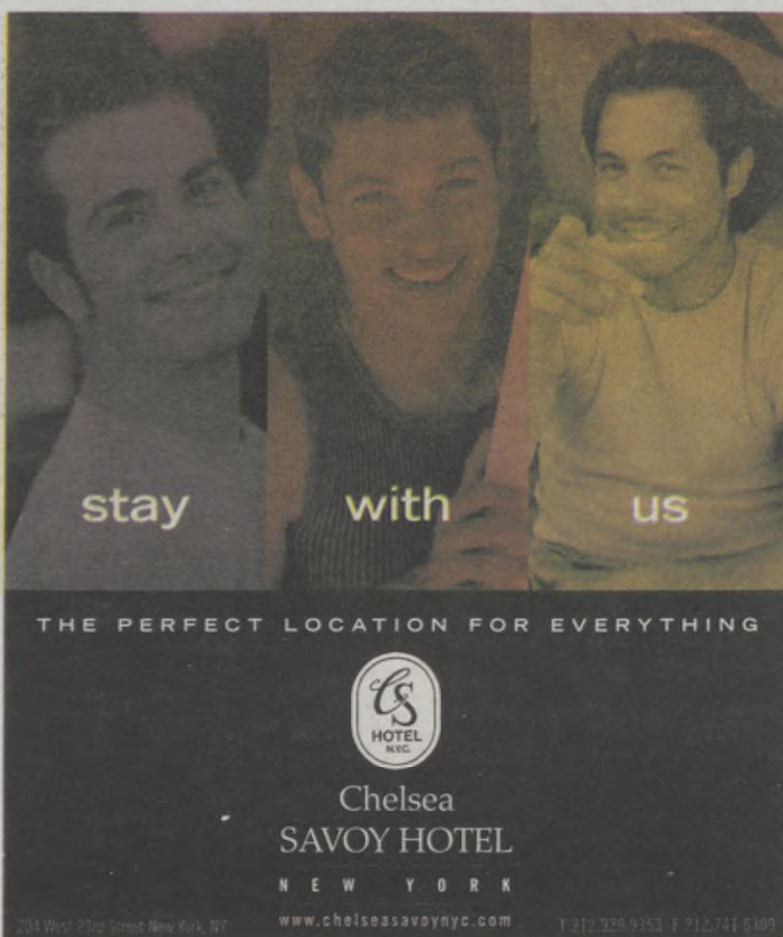
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## opera RICH ARENSCHIELDT

# A lyric delight

OPENING HOUSTON GRAND OPERA'S much-touted 50th anniversary season's spring repertory is Gounod's rendition of Shakespeare's much adapted "Romeo and Juliet." This offering is a reinvigorated remount of a previous, somewhat sluggish production presented eight years ago. This time HGO gets it right on all counts.

Gounod's classic, second only in popularity to his "Faust," is one of the two compositions that cemented his music firmly into the worldwide operatic repertoire. The work has its shortcomings in that sometimes the action doesn't come fast enough, but it also contains some splendid opportunities, each of which this cast, designer and director take complete advantage.

Making their role debuts as the doomed lovers are HGO Studio alumna Ana Maria Martinez and the reigning king of the lyric tenor repertoire, Ramón Vargas. With four significant duets throughout the opera, audiences hear a lot of music from these two.

This continuous musical dialogue sustains the production. French conductor Emmanuel Joel, a maestro with every single major French opera under his belt, leads the ensemble in an interpretation guided by subtlety and understatement.

Neither Martinez nor Vargas possesses a particularly huge voice, and this offering benefits from a continuous "trio-like" performance, equally balanced between tenor, soprano, and orchestra. No contests among singers or orchestra are evident here. Each vocal line is gently respected and perfectly shaped to fit within a completely lyric framework.

As one would expect, there are moments of great passion, but the finesse with which these characters communicate is never obscured by overblown emotionalism.

Other singers in this work play minimal roles but among these, American baritone Daniel Belcher shines dramatically and vocally as Romeo's ill-fated friend Mercutio who, before bleeding like a stuck pig, offers a delightful version of the vocally challenging "Queen Mab" aria.

Directorially, the same evenhandedness is evident on stage. One of the dangers of the genre is that sometimes, the pace of mid 19th century theatrics tend to somnificate 21st century audiences.

LIKE AN ART FILM, GOUNOD OFFERS us plot and action at a relaxed pace. This production gets "jacked" as the result of a redo from German director Christian Räth, whose work was last seen here in



Romeo and Juliet (Ramón Vargas and Ana Maria Martinez) are married by Friar Lawrence (Nikolay Didenko). (Photo by Brett Coomer)

the visceral staging of Benjamin Britten's nearly homo-erotic "Billy Budd."

Räth used the spartan but cool mausoleum-inspired set designed by Bruno Schengle to its full advantage. Guys in euro-trash inspired costumes gallop around the stage fighting and carousing just as you'd expect young roguish renaissance nobility to do.

Additionally, there are also some poignant moments — Romeo bestows a tender kiss upon Juliet's shoulder during an aria — a small motion that speaks volumes.

The chorus and principals are always in motion but not in a manner that draws inordinate attention. Fight scenes staged by Brian Byrnes possess realism usually not seen in most productions, especially in those with more "well rounded" casts. This cast is nimble, and the suspense they initiate reinforces the veracity of the feudal family feud.

The dichotomy of love and hatred is omnipresent in this production. The passion and adoration that Romeo and Juliet possess is sharply contrasted by the mistrust and contempt experienced by their respective families, the Capulets and The Montagues.

The stage is often split in two depicting the irreconcilable chasm existing between these two clans. Life and death are represented by two fates who serve as superfluous distractions to an otherwise well-conceived visual presentation.

French composer Camille Saint-Saëns — also known for setting another famous pair to music with his opera "Samson and Delilah" — wrote of his elder, Gounod: "His aim was to achieve the maximum effect with the minimum of apparent effort." In this "Romeo and Juliet," HGO's combined forces have accomplished that precise effect — a great blend of musical lyricism and dramatic action.

### MORE INFO

"Romeo and Juliet"  
Houston Grand Opera  
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Wortham Center  
550 Prairie St.  
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www.houstongrandopera.org



## television BRIAN MOYLAN



She tries hard, but Rosie O'Donnell isn't convincing as a developmentally disabled woman in 'Riding the Bus with My Sister.'



Rosie O'Donnell (left) stars as a developmentally disabled woman entrusted to the care of her sister, played by Andie MacDowell, in CBS' 'Riding the Bus with My Sister,' which airs this Sunday at 9 p.m.

## A busload of problems

LEAVE IT TO A SHOPPING CART TO reveal the biggest problem with "Riding the Bus with My Sister," a new Hallmark Hall of Fame movie that airs on CBS Sunday, May 1, at 9 p.m.

In an early scene, Beth, a developmentally disabled woman played by former talk show host Rosie O'Donnell, refuses to put away her shopping cart after a trip to the supermarket. This is much to the chagrin of her older sister, Rachel (Andie MacDowell), who is entrusted with her sister's care after their father's death.

"I know why dad called you 'the sheriff,'" MacDowell's Rachel tells her sister. "Because you always get what you want."

Rachel then puts the cart away herself, while Beth laughs and claps. And herein lies the problem. As much as Rachel is trying to improve Beth's life by setting boundaries and making her take responsibility, she always ends up caving in to her sister's desires.

Why is this? It appears to be because Rachel can't blame Beth for being born with a developmental disability. Rachel also appears to feel slightly guilty that she was born without a disability.

BUT AS HARD AS O'DONNELL TRIES TO transform herself into Beth, the movie just doesn't work. Under director Anjelica Huston, Beth has the speech, tics and traits often found with developmentally disabled people, but she just doesn't seem believable.

O'Donnell seemed much more believ-

able in 1992 playing Doris Murphy, a third-base player in "A League of Their Own," and in 1993 when she portrayed assistant D.A. Gina Garrett in "Another Stakeout." She seemed to succeed in those films because she was more or less playing Rosie O'Donnell.

Maybe O'Donnell's portrayal of Beth falls short because we all know so much about her real life: her activism, her loving partner and their handful of adopted kids back home. She just doesn't have the seamless believability of, say, Dustin Hoffman in "Rain Man."

MacDowell, who has always been more beautiful than impressive as an actress, does a better job here. And all she has to do is (finally) not look like she's actually acting.

But this movie has other problems. As a Hallmark Hall of Fame film, it doesn't deviate from the basic, sentimental formula of all the 200-plus franchise movies that came before this one. Based on a book of the same name by Rachel Simon, the film's main character Rachel initially doesn't want to be bothered with her sister, who spends her days riding the buses in an unnamed city.

Rachel views Beth as a burden and doesn't want to give up her own life in New York as a photographer to take care of her. Of course, she eventually learns about the beauty of life from Beth and the family her sister has created among the drivers and regular passengers on the bus line. In the end, Rachel can't imagine life without Beth.

Just from hearing this premise, you pretty much already know how the plot is going to unfold, and the predictable script doesn't disappoint. If you like making pasty paper balls by crying into tissues on your couch, go ahead and indulge.

Otherwise, don't bother with this wishy-washy tearjerker.

### MORE INFO

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## dining J.A. CHAPMAN

Azuma goes downtown with sushi and robata served in an upscale but casual environment that is great on the sushi but could use just a bit more rice on the side.

## Downtown to Azuma

FANS OF AZUMA WILL BE PLEASED to learn that a second location has opened downtown.

The sleek, modern Japanese restaurant has brought across its style and menu from the original Kirby location to the Rice Lofts. Azuma Sushi & Robata Bar is a good fit for this neighborhood—upscale and casual.

The décor is done in sharp black and neutral tones. Intriguing touches such as ceiling light fixtures made from asymmetrical beige cloth boxes are visually stylish, yet in keeping with the overall Japanese ambience.

The robata, or open flame charcoal grill, is one of the signature dining experiences at Azuma. We ordered the robata combo one (\$12), which allowed us to sample beef, shrimp and calamari, grilled on skewers. And thus began our adventures in poor service.

We ordered the appetizers even before our drinks, yet the kitchen served up one of our main courses before anything else arrived. The person who delivered the food was not our waitress, so it took some time to sort out of the situation.

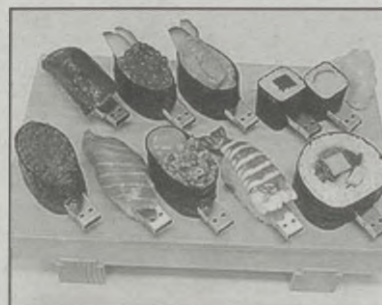
Eventually, our appetizers arrived, but they brought us combo two, which included shiitake mushroom and shrimp as well as the other three items. The robata is tasty, but the various items seemed to be seasoned in the same manner, making them all a bit the same. Two dipping sauces add flavor. We all agreed the mushrooms were the best of the bunch, so in the end we were glad for the service mix up.

Our favorite appetizer was the shiitake age (\$6), shiitake stuffed with shrimp and calamari and tempura fried. A delicate tempura outside contrasted nicely with the tender shiitake and seafood inside. Even the serving was generous. Unusual and creative, it was one of the best dishes of the evening.

Don't miss the Azuma hot rock beef (\$14). A blazing hot rock, butter, and thinly sliced beef are placed in front of you on a stylishly arranged platter. You season the rock with the butter, then cook the beef to your liking. It's fun and decadently delicious. Like many of Azuma's dishes, however, the servings are miserly, there's no rice or other starch, and you're left wanting more.

THE VOLCANO CONCH (\$12) SOUNDED intriguing. Our waitress told us fake crab cake, along with the conch meat, was sautéed with vegetables. We could hardly wait to see what she meant.

Although stunningly served in a large upright conch shell with a piece of fruit set aflame, the result was somewhat disappointing. The conch meat was rather tough and slices of unidentifiable seafood made it seem almost down-market. Quite



The sushi at Azuma's new location is made of top-quality seafood and is stylishly presented.

spicy, it too would have seemed a more complete dish if accompanied by rice.

Fortunately, we had plenty of rice to spare from the una ju (\$15), grilled freshwater eel on rice. The eel was outstanding, served slightly warm with a hint of smokiness. The serving of eel could have been more generous, but there was enough rice for six people. Odd serving combinations seem to be a theme.

Azuma is a better deal at lunch. A special lunch menu, with a wide variety from sushi to udon to bento boxes is offered. The lunch specials are served with a salad, topped with the traditional Japanese spicy dressing.

The roll combo C (\$12.95) includes three hand rolls and a spider roll made with softshell crab. The seafood is top quality and very fresh, and everything is stylishly presented. Even the service seems more attentive and speedier at lunch. The dishes arrived promptly, and the waitress was quick with the check.

Azuma is a stylish, dependable Japanese restaurant, and the new location is a good fit for downtown. With a built-in clientele from lofts, the busy theater district and nearby offices, it's sure to fill a niche.



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## nitelife JOHNNY HOOKS



From 'Valley of the Dolls' to Adoptathon 2005, the last weekend in April also includes an HGO appearance by rock diva Elton John.

## Of dolls and divas

CAN IT REALLY BE THAT THE LAST week of April is already here? Time flies when you're busy HoV-ing on the Go-Go! This week lets visit the Valley of The Doll's, join our Spoiled Boyz and enjoy some Fire and Ice!

### GOT TO GET OFF GOT TO GET OUT.

To Cypress that is! Darling's your eyes are not deceiving you, and HotGG is not making this up. Valley of the Dolls, the play, is here, or rather there! Valley of the Dolls was first published in 1966, and this riveting tale became the best selling novel of all time. A campy, funny, and often moving exposé of the Hollywood lifestyle became a time-honored, cult classic film. The play version is adapted from the explosive book and the over-the-top movie. Jacqueline Susann's sensational story of three wildly different, pill-popping, show-biz friends (modeled, rumor has it after Judy Garland, Grace Kelly and Marilyn Monroe) perfectly crystallizes the decadence of the 60's entertainment industry. Recommended for mature audiences! Friday and Saturday at the Cy-Fair College Center for the Performing Arts, 9191 Barker Cypress Drive in Cypress. Curtain is at 8 p.m. with tickets running \$12 for adults, \$10 for seniors and \$5 for students. There is also a Sunday matinee with curtain at 3 p.m. Call the box office at 281-290-5201 or for special group rates call Joe Watts at 713-522-2204. HotGG would walk a hundred miles to see this show!

ARE YOU LOOKING FOR A NEW four-legged friend? HotGG has three at home already, but if we didn't we'd be at the Adopt A Cat event this weekend. Saturday and Sunday, Adopt A Cat is joining thousands of other animal welfare organizations across the country and around the world for Pet Adoptathon 2005. This annual worldwide event was organized to make lifelong friends by matching adorable homeless and orphaned pets with loving people, people just like you! Visit Adopt A Cat to find your life-long friend, between Noon and 5 p.m. at PetsMart, 610 at Westpark or Shepherd at West Alabama, at PETCO, 1960 at Eldridge or on Highway 6 in Copperfield. Adopt A Cat, 17319 Bamwood, Houston, 281-580-6652 for more in-purr-mation!

A NEW CLUB IS HOSTING THE NEXT Spoiled Boyz event. The always-frenzied event this time happens Saturday at a new spot in mid-town called Escobar. This chic space boasts a great sound system and is a great match for this raging late night/early morning event. The theme this time around is Lavender! Oh how sweet! Charles Solomon of Beyond Entertainment explains, "Spring has sprung, flowers are in bloom! So



DJ Manny Lehman spins for the Fire and Ice Ball Saturday at South Beach.

prepare to enjoy the lighter side of Purple: Lavender." The event honors the fashion color of Spring 2005. Escobar is located at 2905 Travis at Anita. NYC's own DJ Joe D'Espinosa will be providing the beats. Any shade of Purple attire is suggested, however Spoiled Boyz usually have most of their clothes off about an hour in! Doors open 3:30 a.m., and the party goes until 8:30 a.m. Advance tickets at \$15 are available at M2M Fashion. Expect to be treated like royalty at the purple velvet ropes!

AS YOU KNOW, HOTGG DOESN'T usually include opera in this column, but when Sir Elton is involved well, that's different. The soon-to-be-wed diva of rock joins opera divas Renee Fleming, Patricia Racette and others Saturday night for Houston Grand Opera's 50th birthday celebration at Wortham Center. With ticket prices starting at \$250, HotGG may have to sit this one out, but we'd love to be a fly on the wall.

FINALLY THIS WEEKEND THE FIRE and Ice Ball is Saturday night at South Beach. Superstar DJ Manny Lehman, touted as "the most sought after DJ on the Circuit," will be tearing up the tootsies from 10:30 p.m. until 5 a.m. with resident DJ Jimmy Skinner opening early. Advance tickets are \$15 and can be had at JR's Bar and Grill, Meteor, South Beach, M2M Fashions and the Hollywood Superstore. Décor and special effects provided by Alienliteforms and Bright Star. www.southbeachthenightclub.com for all the details!

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

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## The "Super" HIV Virus... Fact or Fiction?

**May 5, 2005 - 6:00pm**

### Panelists:

**Michael Ross, DrPH**

Professor, UT School of Public Health at Houston

**Dena Gray**

Community Liaison, Houston City Council District D

**William A. O'Brien, MD**

Professor of Internal Medicine, UTMB Galveston

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### RSVP Required

### LOCATION:

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**To RSVP please call Georgette at 713-572-3724.**

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

# The numbers game

The hottest gossip about TV's gay quartet, the Fab Four and a dynamic duo

Dish has always been a big fan of numerology and thinks a lot can be learned from looking at numbers.

For instance, take 600,000. On its own, it's just a string of six digits.

Put a dollar sign in front of that number, however, and it becomes a big fat paycheck.

What Dish wouldn't do for \$600,000. One thing she would do is star on NBC's "Will & Grace," and that's how much money I'd get for one episode.

Yes, each of the four stars of the show — **SEAN HAYES**, **ERIC MCCORMACK**, **DEBRA MESSING** and **MEGAN MULLALLY** — will take home about that much per episode in the show's eighth season, according to Reuters. That's between \$13 and \$15 million a season.

NBC just inked a deal with the stars for the upcoming season, which will include at least 24 episodes and a show with clips from previous episodes. The actors all received a raise from about \$400,000 per episode this season. It's the first time Hayes and Mullally, the "supporting" players, will be making as much money as Messing and McCormack.

All four actors have each won an Emmy for their work on the show, which earned an Emmy for Best Comedy in 2000.

While this quartet (and countless guest stars) is still good for a few chuckles on Thursday evenings, the loss of "Friends" has caused W&G's ratings to slip this season. But a lucrative syndication deal leaves the show a moneymaker for NBC and NBC Universal TV Studio, the network-owned producer of "W&G."

### Fabest of all

Speaking of groups of four, Dish hears that the **BEATLES** were so open-minded that one of the band's members had an intimate relationship with gay manager **BRIAN EPSTEIN**.



Brian Epstein

Epstein's longtime assistant, Joanne Peterson, is hard at work on a book titled "There's a Beatle in My Closet," about her experiences with Epstein and the band. According to Australian newspaper MX, in the book she says that the manager engaged in sex acts with one of the band's legendary members, **JOHN LENNON**, **PAUL MCCARTNEY**, **RINGO STARR** or **GEORGE HARRISON**.

But, of course, she won't say which one just yet. Only McCartney and Starr



Jack (Sean Hayes) and Karen (Megan Mullally) and all the other stars on "Will & Grace" recently learned they're getting big fat raises.

are still alive. Epstein died of a drug overdose in 1967 at age 32.

Many have speculated over the years that Epstein had an unrequited love for Lennon. In 1992, filmmaker Christopher Munch released "The Hours and the Times," a movie about a fictional romance between the two during an actual trip they took together to Barcelona in 1963.

### Wedding belles

Sir **ELTON JOHN** announced last week that he and his partner **DAVID FURNISH**, who have been an item for 11 years, are getting married. Well, sort of.

John told the Mirror in London that he and Furnish plan to hold a civil partnership ceremony in Windsor in December. The United Kingdom is allowing gay couples to take part in civil unions beginning Dec. 5. The unions grant gay couples the same rights as married couples, including tax breaks and inheritance rights.

John's publicist, Gary Farrow, later told Reuters that the ceremony may not be until early 2006 and he said one of the main reasons for the union was financial.

Last week, John was in the news because his company is losing money. Now, he's marrying to save cash.

See, it call comes back to the numbers, which apparently never lie.



Elton John and David Furnish



Send comments, suggestions to  
 Dish@houstonvoice.com



## eclipse cover story



The recently released feature film, "D.E.B.S.," a lesbian spy caper, propelled POWER UP alum Angela Robinson to directorial stardom.

### POWER UP, continued from Page 13

SOME CRITICS SAY THAT POWER UP IS less a club than a clique — think an A-list lesbian sorority. But Codikow says there's an important reason why the same names keep appearing in the credits of POWER UP films: Those people show up.

"Much of what we do is done for little or no pay," she says. "We keep calling on our friends, and they keep calling on their friends. If you're willing to give us your time and expertise for free, we'd love your help."

The group caused a minor coronary in the lesbian filmmaking community when it financed the film, "Starcrossed," last year, not necessarily because of its subject matter (sexually intimate brothers), but because a man, James Burkhammer, wrote and directed it.

Codikow says POWER UP's mission has never been about separatism; it was and is about finding a voice for lesbian and gay filmmakers. "We aren't afraid to work with men, because their stories are important to all of us," she says.

But the real bread-and-butter for POWER UP these last five years has been the rich, sometimes-painful and often-



(top to bottom) Billy's Dad is a Fudge-packer; Little Black Boot; Starcrossed; Breaking Up Really Sucks.

humorous, stories of women making their way in a world that doesn't always welcome diversity and dissent.

### MORE INFO

Since 2000, POWER UP has produced 11 lesbian and gay films that have traveled the gay film circuit. They are:

- "Billy's Dad is a Fudge-packer," 2004
- "Starcrossed," 2004
- "Prom-Trovsey," 2004
- "Intent," 2003
- "Little Black Boot," 2003
- "Zoe Cadwaulder," 2003
- "D.E.B.S.," 2002
- "Fly Cherry," 2002
- "Give or Take an Inch," 2002
- "Chicken Night," 2001
- "Breaking Up Really Sucks," 2001

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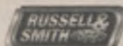


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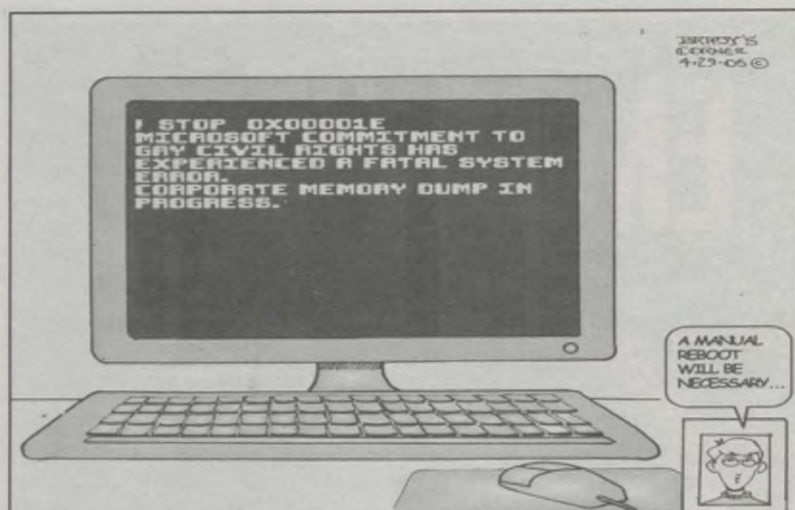


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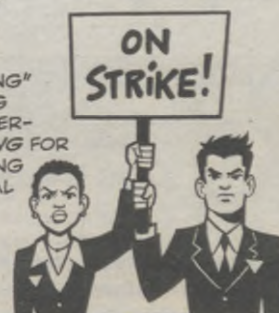
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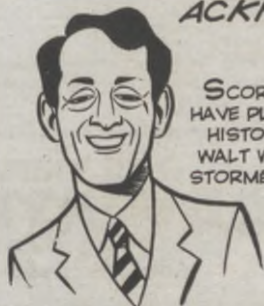


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# bitch session

I THINK IT SAYS VOLUMES ABOUT our value system when a bona-fide rock star like Bob Mould has less attitude and is easier to talk to at the gym than a lot of the everyday gay "hunks" who work out there.

SOME OF THESE GUYS ONLINE WILL say it's their first time but then have a repertoire that would make a gay sailor blush. What's wrong with this picture?

THE BEAR MOVEMENT WAS SUPPOSED to be a celebration of men as men actually are. Turning it into yet another form of drag defeats the purpose.

SINCE YOU DIDN'T GET THE MEMO: Drug addicts are not attractive!

LOCKER ROOM TIP NOS. 43 AND 44: If you have back hair, please don't try to shave it in the sink; it's disgusting to watch.

And, if you choose not to shave it, don't spend forever drying your back hair with a blow dryer. I manage to dry my chest hair using a towel, and not look ridiculous doing it!

FIRST YOU FELL OFF THE BAR AND the bartender caught you. Yeah, it was humorous. Next time you might break my bottle of Jack Daniels. That will be far from funny!

OUT AT 25 AND NEED A SUPPORT group for college-age people? PFLAG — or Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays — is a national organization with chapters in most cities. PFLAG welcomes everyone, not just parents. You may not pick someone up, but you will find support and a place to speak to others on relationships, coming out and more.

BITCH I WASN'T TRYING TO PICK YOU

To the guy who complained that I don't call. What's the point? I have yet to get a word in edgewise.

up when I asked you where the dates were. I was there with my husband. You're too short and balding for my taste anyway.

DAMN IT! BAPTISTS, EVANGELICALS, Muslims, Jews and Mormons disagree on almost everything but they all agree when it comes to hating and excluding gays!

TO THE ILLITERATE QUEEN SPREADING lies about my best friend: What goes around comes around; and as much as you've been around, you should know.

MAYBE I DON'T WANT TO BE LIKE MY father because he chose not to be a father. Why be like someone who doesn't want to be in your life, or you to be in his?

I'VE NOTICED A DISTURBING NEW trend among gay men: bad oral hygiene. Honey, if your ass smells and tastes better than your mouth, it's time to see the dentist!

SOME THINGS JUST NEVER GET EASY to accept: like being smart, educated,

hard-working, in-shape, drug-free, kind and considerate, but watching Joe Blow get all of the attention and dates because nature made him better-looking.

WHY IS IT HETERO-MALES ARE GETTING as rare as a snowflake in July? Whatever you gay guys are doing, cut it out. From a lonely hetero female

LORD KNOWS HOW, BUT WE NEED TO get over our in-fighting at least enough to build a real community that truly cares for its own, because the straight world will never treat us as equals.

WHY IS IT THAT SOME PEOPLE HAVE to lie to you online? It's pretty stupid to say a pic is of you when it's really of the guy you're sending it to. Think before you steal, you could end up with a charge of ID theft.

STRAIGHT PEOPLE DO NOT HATE US because we write to "Bitch Session." They hate because they were taught that it's OK to hate fags just because they are fags. So don't lay the blame where it doesn't lie!

TO THE BOY AT THE BAR WHO TOLD his man, "I'll kill you if you ever leave me": You are a terrorist!

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



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