



Gays and Mardi Gras

Gays eye Galveston for parades, elaborate garb and beads, beads, beads.

Page 13

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JANUARY 28, 2005

1-800-HIT-HOME: Gays question national youth crisis hotline. **Page 3**



LESBIAN ADOPTION: State high court has ruled. **Page 3**



STUDENT SUED: Baylor sues gay former student. **Page 4**



2 gays 'purged' in federal office

Watchdog groups assail latest action in D.C. office

By LOU CHIBBARO JR.

WASHINGTON — Scott J. Bloch, the controversial head of the U.S. government office charged with protecting federal employees from discrimination, has threatened to fire 12 high-level employees — two of them gay — unless they agree to be reassigned to positions in other cities.

Three government watchdog groups called Bloch's action another in a series of moves aimed at packing the Office of Special Counsel with religious, right wing cronies and threatening its long-standing mission of protecting federal employees from harassment or intimidation for exposing corruption or incompetence.

"Unfortunately, Mr. Bloch's current pattern of leadership threatens to transform the OSC from an independent agency whose mission is to protect the merit system into a role model for destroying it," said the leaders of the Government Accountability Project, the Project on Government Oversight, and Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility.

The three groups made the statement in a Jan. 10 letter to Senators Susan Collins (R-Maine) and Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), who serve as chair and



Scott Bloch, the director of the Office of Special Counsel once worked at a think tank that proclaims its opposition to gay rights. Bloch is reportedly trying to transfer two gay employees at OSC out of the D.C. office or face termination. (File photo)

ranking minority member of the Senate Committee on Government Affairs, which has jurisdiction over the OSC.

The groups called on the committee to conduct an oversight hearing on Bloch's "illegal personnel practices and the culture of fear he has created at OSC."

An OSC spokesperson told the Washington Post that Bloch's decision to reassign the 12 employees was part of an OSC reorganization plan aimed at

reducing the office's longstanding problem of retaining a large backlog of cases. The spokesperson, Cathy Deeds, called allegations by the watchdog groups that Bloch was conducting a purge "outrageous and inaccurate," according to the Washington Post.

Deeds and Bloch did not return Blade calls by press time.

Congress created the OSC in the 1980s as an independent federal

Please see **BLOCH** on Page 7

I Questioned Homosexuality.



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February 19

WWW.EXODUS.TO

Billboards scattered throughout Harris and Galveston counties promote Focus on the Family's "Love Won Out" conference Feb. 19. (Photo by Dalton Dehart)

Gays and lesbians react to message on new billboards

The message plastered throughout Harris and Galveston counties is, if you're homosexual, you can change.

By BINNIE FISHER

News that Focus on the Family would bring its "Love Won Out" conference to Grace Community Church on Feb. 19 has now been accompanied by 15 billboards in Harris and Galveston counties that advertise the event.

The billboards show a smiling man or woman and include the text, "I questioned homosexuality. Change is Possible. Discover how."

Reaction among gays, lesbians, their families and friends and those who work with them has been vocal.

"I see this as an assault on the GLBT community," said Chris Kerr, a counselor with Montrose Counseling Center. "It's meant to be provocative."

When the billboards went up late last week, they became the

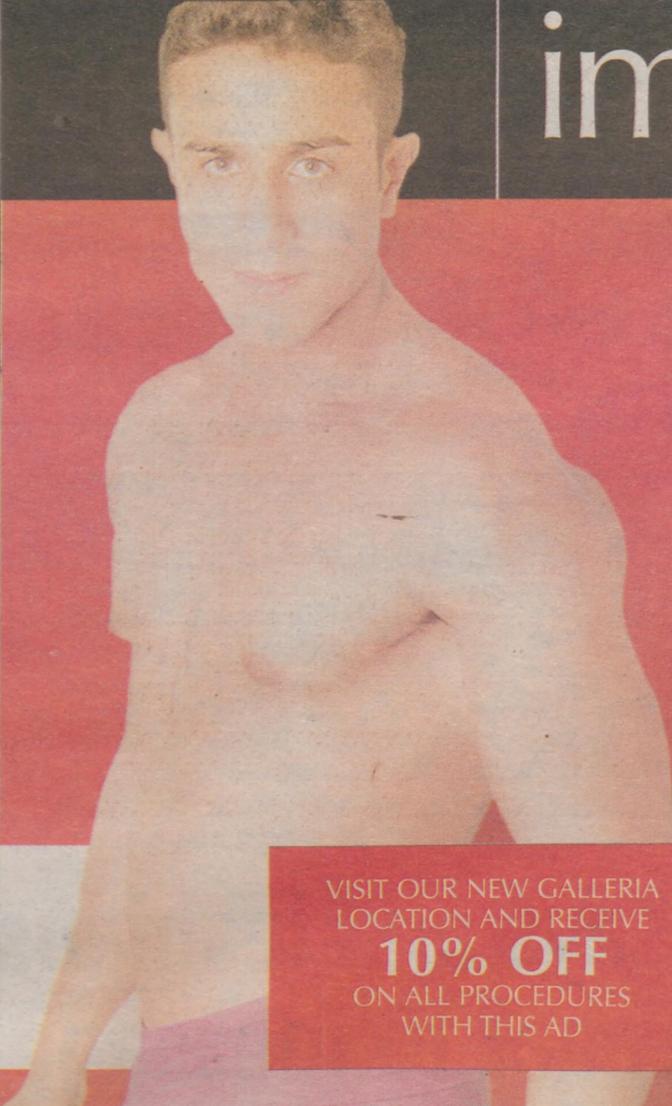
Please see **BILLBOARDS** on Page 5



local life
Cynthia Chappell says sexual orientation is in place long before birth.
PAGE 8

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PAGE 19





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houston news

Crisis line refers gay youth to Exodus

Phone book listings make it sound like a legitimate crisis line, but callers are told that homosexuality is a sin

By ELLA TYLER

When teenager Jeffrey Faircloth wanted a safe place to talk about his growing awareness that he might be gay, he called the National Youth Crisis Hotline – popularized as 1-800-HIT-HOME.

What he heard didn't surprise him. "I'd grown up in a very fundamentalist Christian family, so I wasn't surprised that the woman I talked to said she didn't know any gay people, but she knew they were sinners. She said she would give me the number of a group called Exodus that would help me change. I already knew the religious view, so I wasn't interested."

Luckily, a friend told him about HATCH, an organization in Houston that provides positive reinforcement for gay and lesbian youth.

Faircloth forgot about 1-800-HIT-HOME until recently.

"I called the number last month because friends of mine heard rumors that Exodus was coming to Houston, and it seemed like the easiest way to get a phone number for Exodus so we could ask," he explained.

Faircloth referred to the "Love Won Out" conference to be staged in Houston Feb. 19 by Focus on the Family. Graduates of Exodus, a program that claims it can turn people away from homosexuality, or ex-gays

are among the speakers at the conference.

This time, Faircloth, now 20, was shocked and angry after the call. "I told the man who answered what I wanted and that I was gay, but it wasn't a problem. He insisted on quoting Bible verses to me, so I quoted some right back," He said.

At the end of the conversation, after an hour of dueling with Bible verses, Faircloth asked the hotline volunteer, "How would you feel if some lonely kid in the middle of Nebraska, who had never heard anything except that he is a sinner killed himself after talking to you?"

He was shocked at the man's answer: "Sometimes the devil makes things happen."

Faircloth said, "I didn't know if my experience was unique, so different friends of mine from HATCH called the hotline at different times. We found that they always said the same sort of things. They quoted Bible verses about homosexuality and suggested Exodus."

Faircloth said he is concerned about the hotline because it masquerades as a legitimate service, "One of the reasons I was so shocked about this is that they are listed in the phone book under alternate emergency numbers. Because of that and because of the name, I thought they were a government service."

Research by the Houston Voice shows that many Southwestern Bell phone books, including the ones for Houston, list the National Youth Crisis Hotline on the second page of the book, under the Alternate Emergency Number listings.

"I wouldn't mind if they were up front about being a Christian group, but they lure people in so they can preach at them," Faircloth said.

When the Voice called the hotline and asked for the name of a media representa-

tive, the person who answered the phone did not seem to know whether the hotline had a media relations department.

The representative indicated that calls are answered out of a church in

San Diego. Asked what sort of training volunteers get, he said those who answer phones are trained at the church and given a reference book

Regarding homosexuality, he said, volunteers are told to inform callers what the Bible says on the subject and to refer callers to Exodus.

Further research revealed that the National Youth Crisis Line is a project of Youth Development Institute in San Diego. Representatives of the organization could not be reached for comment.

1-800-HIT-HOME could be deadly for gay teens

Chris Kerr, program coordinator for Montrose Counseling Center's Life and Anti-Violence Program, noted, "This Youth Crisis Hotline could be deadly for teens with questions about their sexuality. We run HATCH and the Gay & Lesbian Switchboard and have intimate knowledge of what goes on when someone calls."

Kerr said he fears that, "When a youth calls a hotline like this it's because he or she is already full of shame and has no one he or she feels safe with. The message these people give reinforces those feelings."

He compared the 800-Hit-Home group to the anti-choice groups that seem to be like Planned Parenthood.

"From a therapist's point of view, these people are really unethical," he said. "They are taking advantage of people at vulnerable moments. People have a right to quality care and referrals that respect

who they are,"

Kerr pointed out that, "The American Psychological Association says that being gay is not a pathology. The group also says that reparative therapy is unethical, wrong, not needed and usually doesn't work."

Kerr, who also has a Masters degree in theology, said he believes that the National Youth Crisis Hotline engages in religious abuse. "I define religious abuse as anytime someone uses spirituality or religion to destroy a person's self esteem or coerces you to go against who you are for membership or salvation."

Faircloth just wants to let people know the group's true colors. He and friends talked about 1-800-HIT-HOME on KPFT's "After Hours" show last month, and he vowed they would keep talking.

The National Youth Crisis Hotline or 1-800-HIT-HOME appears on a wide variety of teen help referral lists, including about.com's popular Web site for teens and the social services listings in the Manhattan phone book. It even appears on the resource list for the National Youth Advocacy Coalition, a group that says it is focused on improving the lives of gay and lesbian youth.

Faircloth will have a lot of talking to do.

MORE INFO

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HATCH

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Gay & Lesbian Switchboard Houston

713-529-3211

State Supreme Court won't hear lesbian adoption

Kathleen Van Stavern remains the adoptive parent of her former partner's six-year-old biological daughter

By BINNIE FISHER

The Texas Supreme Court on Friday declined to consider a case in which the biological mother of a 6-year-old girl had sought to void the adoption of the child by her former partner.

Julie Anne Hobbs of Galveston last year asked the family courts to reverse the 2001 adoption on the basis that at the time, only step-parents were permitted to adopt the children of their spouses.

Hobbs and Kathleen Van Stavern were partners in 1998 when the child was born

through artificial insemination. The couple ended their 8-year relationship early in 2004.

It was after Van Stavern sought joint custody that Hobbs asked for termination of the adoption.

Attorneys for Hobbs argued at the time, "The granting of this adoption was directly contrary to and in violation of Texas law and, therefore, void as a matter of law. The court had no authority to grant the adoption as Janet Kathleen Van Stavern could not be the 'spouse' of Julie Anne Hobbs nor the 'stepparent' to the child."

On Sept. 9, Galveston Associate Family Court Judge Stephen Baker ruled that the adoption could not be challenged because under Texas law, adoptions become final if they are not challenged within six months.

Hobbs' attorneys appealed Baker's decision, and in early October, 306th Family Court Presiding Judge Janis Yarborough upheld the previous ruling.

The case was taken to the 1st State Court of Appeals, where attorneys for



The Texas Supreme Court has declined to hear a case that would have voided the adoption by Kathleen Van Stavern of her former partner's biological daughter.

Hobbs argued that Yarborough lacked jurisdiction in the case, but the appeals court upheld the lower court ruling.

Shannon Warren, attorney for Van

Stavern, noted, "From the trial court level, the biological mother has been saying this case should be dismissed because lesbians can't adopt the children of their partners."

She said she is pleased that the Texas Supreme court turned the case away. She has contended all along that Hobbs' argument is not relevant.

"You must attack an adoption within six months," she said.

Unless the case is again appealed, Van Stavern and Hobbs will go back to court in April for a hearing on joint custody and visitation.

Anthony Griffin, attorney for Hobbs, said he is uncertain whether his client will continue to challenge Van Stavern's request for joint custody.

"I haven't talked to my client," he said.

Griffin, best known for his work on civil rights cases, said he interprets the high court's ruling as, "It just simply says the trial court has to decide. It just simply means we have to start again."

texas news

Baylor sues gay former seminary student

By RYAN LEE

The former Baylor University seminary student who lost his scholarship after school officials discovered he was gay allegedly sent a barrage of pornographic and racist e-mails to individuals affiliated with the private Baptist university, according to a lawsuit filed Jan. 19.

James Matthew Bass lost his scholarship to the Texas school in November 2003 and now attends Emory University in Atlanta. He was scheduled to attend a hearing in Waco, Texas, on Jan. 21 to face charges that he sent more than 1,000 "highly offensive" e-mails to more than 50 Baylor employees and their family members last fall.

But McLennan County District Court Judge Alan Mayfield granted Bass a delay until Feb. 4, after Bass wrote the judge saying he needed more time to find an attorney, according to Dan MacLemore, a spokesperson for Fulbright Winniford, the law firm representing Baylor.

At the Feb. 4 hearing, Mayfield will determine whether to impose a temporary injunction preventing Bass from sending messages to e-mail addresses affiliated with the university, MacLemore said.

Bass did not respond to an interview request by press time, but issued a statement to Southern Voice saying he first learned about the lawsuit against him by reading an article in the Waco newspaper.



Baylor University sued former student **James Matthew Bass** for allegedly sending offensive e-mails to school employees and their families. Bass lost his seminary scholarship to Baylor after administrators found out he was gay.

"I have not seen the lawsuit. Since I am apparently involved in litigation, it wouldn't be appropriate for me to comment at this time," Bass said in the statement.

According to the Baylor lawsuit, school employees, including President Robert Sloan, received a series of sexually explic-

it and racially offensive e-mails allegedly sent from someone with a Baylor-affiliated e-mail address.

"Daddy, didn't Jesus tell you to stop licking me 'down there?'" read a Nov. 12 e-mail to a male Baylor employee, and an unspecified number of other employees. The e-mail appeared as though it was sent by the child of the male employee, according to the lawsuit.

Another message sent Nov. 12 to "various Baylor faculty members and high-level administrators," includes that "Jesus rapes [an employee's wife] while [the employee] looks on masturbating!"

Several of the e-mails Bass is accused of sending included racial epithets, including a Nov. 16 message to a Baylor employee that said, "Nigger, Jesus is dead — Happy Holidays, you bloody [expletive]."

Also emailed was an obituary for a Baylor administrator who is still alive, along with a false report that a faculty member died after suffering a stroke.

Baylor officials used Comcast Cable records to allegedly trace the "broadband modem involved in the harassment campaign" to the same Atlanta address at which Bass is currently residing, according to the lawsuit.

The Comcast service is registered to Bass's roommate in Atlanta, according to the lawsuit, but Baylor claims Bass repeatedly accessed various services on the

school Web site using the traced computer.

"In order to access these services [on the Baylor site], Bass was required to 'log in' using a secure password known only to him, thereby indicating that he had personal access to, and used, a computer associated with the broadband modem in question," according to the lawsuit.

The lawsuit asks that the courts inspect Bass' computer hard drive to verify the origin of the harassing e-mails, seeks a permanent injunction prohibiting Bass from e-mailing Baylor employees and their family members, and requests reimbursement for attorney fees and the cost of tracing the anonymous e-mails.

Emory University officials are aware of the lawsuit against Bass and are tracking its development, said Elaine Justice, associate director of media relations at Emory. School officials have no comment on whether Bass could face disciplinary action if the lawsuit is successful, Justice said.

Bass made headlines when he lost his scholarship to attend Baylor's George W. Truett Theological Seminary, after administrators discovered Bass was gay and said his lifestyle was incompatible with the school's Christian teachings on homosexuality.

With the scholarships accounting for about 85 percent of the costs of his education, Bass left Baylor after the 2003 fall semester. He enrolled in Emory's Candler School of Theology last year.

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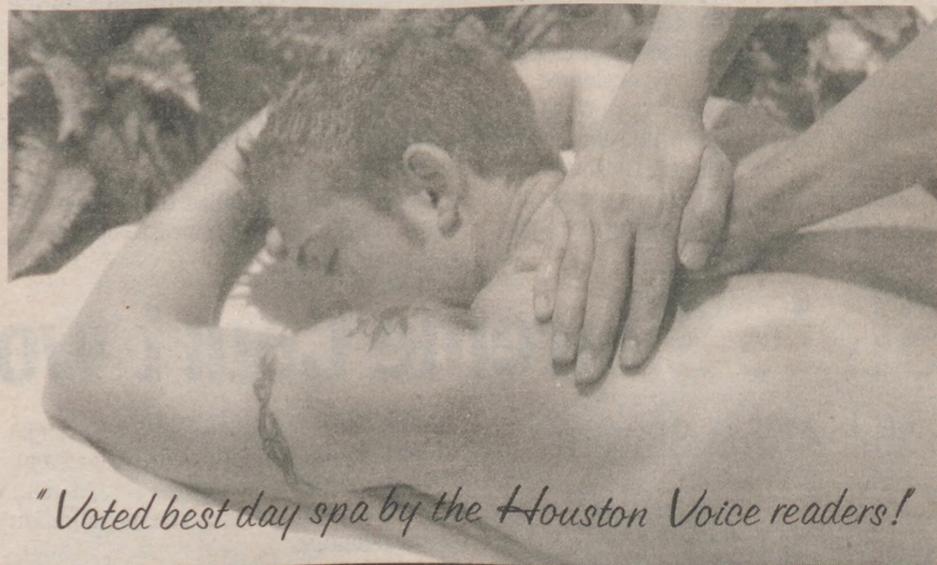


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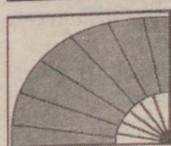
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houston news

Billboards are decried as an 'assault' on gays

BILLBOARDS, continued from Page 1

topic of numerous television and newspaper stories as well as fodder for local radio talk shows.

Gay activist Ray Hill said evangelical ministers with whom he has talked but who are not directly associated with the conference have indicated the billboards were erected because advance registrations had not been brisk.

"This is an expensive conference for a church to host," he said. "These people from out of town come in, put on a show and leave the local church to deal with the bad relations."

A Web site promoting the event calls it a "dynamic one-day conference addressing, understanding and preventing homosexuality," but some say the message can be destructive and dangerous.

"They are parading out a lot of so-called experts who are not reputable," Kerr said. "Gay youth deal with pressure to conform on all fronts. To be battered by these things might confuse them and might be enough to push them over the edge."

Galveston resident B. Joe Cline, who runs the Lighthouse Freedom

Ministry, organized the effort to put up the billboards.

Cline said his son was gay and is now heterosexual and that his organization works to "prevent homosexuality."

Billboards paid for by Christian groups

He raised the money for the billboards from various Christian groups and the billboards include the Web site address of Exodus International, an ex-gay group.

Melissa Fryrear, who said she is a former homosexual who is now heterosexual, will be a keynote speaker at the conference.

She said gays and lesbians can turn straight if they really want to and that the conference does not push its agenda on people.

Fryrear added that Focus on the Family and Exodus are involved in a study to determine how many gays have successfully changed their orientation.

Focus on the Family, based in Colorado Springs, Colo., and founded by James C. Dobson, is a Christian organization that works to "preserve traditional values and the institution of the family."

Conference supporters say they aren't against gays and lesbians, but don't believe homosexuality is sanctioned in the Bible.

Kerr, who in addition to having a Master's degree in education and counseling also has a degree in theology, strongly disagrees.

"From a spiritual point of view, we are exactly as our creator made us," he said. "There is nothing in scripture that justifies prejudice or discrimination against gays and lesbians."

From where he sits as a professional who counsels others, Kerr said, Focus on the Family should have their hands full dealing with the problems of the family without seeking to convert homosexuals.

As for the billboards, he said, "Treat them just as you would the bogus ads for weight loss programs that are not based on science."

Sue Null, advocacy chair for Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) said a four-tiered response to the conference is being crafted.

In addition to looking for persons to infiltrate the conference, she said, others are being sought to stage a peaceful and polite protest across the freeway from the conference venue near exit 30 on Interstate 45 South.

She said she asks that signs be large enough for those who take the exit to read and that they be along the lines of "God loves his gay children."

Hill said he is encouraging signs that read, "No U-Turn," since those attending the conference from Houston must make a U-turn under the freeway to get there. That message could have a different meaning for gays, he suggested.

On Feb. 12, the Foundation for Family and Marriage Equality, Inc. will sponsor a same-gender wedding celebration at 1:30 p.m. at Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church.

The Foundation also plans an alternative conference on Feb. 19 entitled, "Love Won! We're Out: Mind, Body and Soul." Speakers will include a psychologist, a biologist and a minister.

Null said those who infiltrate the Focus on the Family conference will be charged \$50 if they register in advance and \$60 at the door.

Conference organizers have said they hope to attract pastors, community leaders and parents to teach them to minister to people dealing with homosexuality and encourage them not to "embrace this destructive way of life."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.



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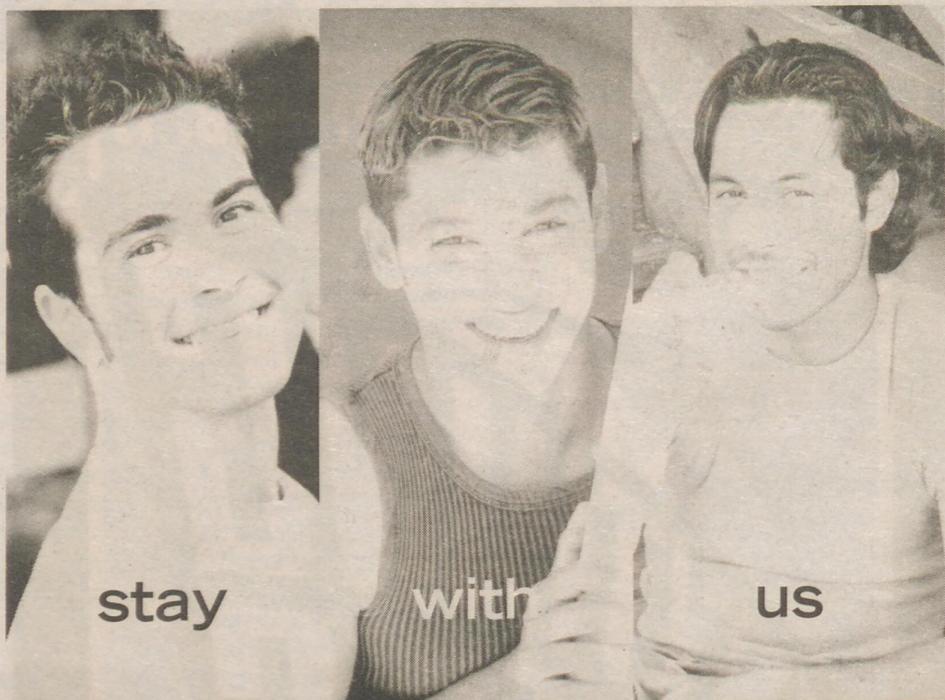
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national news

2 gay employees targeted

BLOCH, continued from Page 1

investigative and prosecutorial agency to safeguard the civil service system, which bases its hiring practices for most of the federal workforce on merit rather than political connections. Among other things, OSC is charged with protecting federal employees from harassment and intimidation under the Whistleblower Protection Act in cases where they expose corruption or incompetence.

During the Clinton administration, the OSC took on an added role of adjudicating sexual orientation discrimination cases filed by gay federal employees. The Clinton White House assigned that task to the OSC after Clinton issued an executive order banning sexual orientation discrimination in the federal workplace.

Bloch took steps to diminish OSC's role in addressing sexual orientation cases in January 2004, shortly after President Bush appointed him to the OSC post. Bush administration officials, responding to complaints by members of Congress, directed Bloch to resume the office's enforcement role on gay cases, but he has resisted doing so.

Prior to joining the Bush administration, Bloch practiced law in Lawrence, Kan. He also served as a research fellow for the Claremont Institute, an ultra-conservative think tank in California which boasts of "fighting the gay rights movement" as one of its mottos, before starting his first Bush administration post at the Justice Department. He served there as deputy director of the department's Task Force for Faith-Based & Community Initiatives.

He began his post at OSC in January 2004, replacing lesbian attorney Elaine Kaplan, who had been appointed by President Clinton. The law creating the OSC established a fixed, five-year term for the director's job, which prevents a president from removing the director unless it can be shown that he or she has engaged in misconduct or violated the law.

Anthony Vergnetti, an attorney representing some of the 12 OSC employees ordered to be reassigned, said Bloch gave them all 10 days notice to decide whether to accept the reassignments or resign or be fired. Seven were to be reassigned to a newly created OSC regional office in Detroit; four were to be sent to an existing OSC office in Dallas, and one was to be sent to an office in Oakland, Calif., Vergnetti said. Should they choose to accept the transfers, Vergnetti said, the 12 employees must report for work at the new locations in 60 days, a development that would create hardships for the employees, some of whom have families with school children in the D.C. area.

Deadline extension

Vergnetti said Bloch has since extended the deadline for the employees' decision on the reassignments by another 10 calendar days.

Under federal employment law, the employees have virtually no recourse other than to appeal to Congress to review Bloch's action, Vergnetti said. Ironically, federal employees in most other agencies could turn to OSC for help in cases like this, where an employee believes he or she is being targeted

for retaliation or dismissal through a threat of a transfer. But OSC employees are ineligible to go to their own agency for redress in such a situation, said Vergnetti, who specialized in federal employment law.

A source familiar with the OSC said the only two openly gay staffers at OSC are among the 12 employees chosen by Bloch for the involuntary reassignment. The source said a third person picked for the reassignment is an OSC attorney who adjudicated and reached a settlement favorable to a gay federal employee who filed a discrimination complaint against his supervisor in 2003.

Shortly after becoming OSC head, Bloch removed a write-up about that case from the OSC Web site along with other Web site references to OSC's role in adjudicating sexual orientation cases.

Jeff Bruch, executive director of Public Employee for Environmental Responsibility, known as PEER, said OSC insiders have speculated over why Bloch chose to open an OSC office in Detroit, a city that has fewer U.S. government offices than a number of other major cities.

Insiders believe one possible reason for opening the Detroit office, said Bruch, is that it is close to the Ann Arbor, Mich., based Ave Maria Law School, a conservative Catholic institution with ties to Bloch.

Deeds, the OSC spokesperson, told the Post that the employee transfers were part of a "restructuring" plan intended to boost the office's ability to adjudicate cases. Deeds told the Post that OSC has grappled for years with a large backlog of cases and that Bloch's efforts to reorganize the office had already resulted in reducing the backlog.

Bruch disputed Deeds' explanation for the transfers, saying the shifting of employees to cities outside Washington had no logical relation to reducing a case backlog.

Complaints by gay activists and members of Congress over his interpretation of the law pertaining to gay workers prompted the Bush White House to issue a statement reiterating the Clinton policy of banning discrimination against gay federal employees. Bloch responded by promising to reinstate information about that policy on the OSC Web site and in other OSC literature.

But the gay federal employees group GLOBE has charged that Bloch has "hidden" all references to sexual orientation discrimination in an obscure section of the Web site, creating a state of confusion for most employees on this subject.

The three watchdog groups stated in their letter to Collins and Lieberman that Bloch has refused to allow other OSC employees to volunteer for the 12 newly assigned posts. The groups also point out that there are at least 11 current vacancies at OSC headquarters in Washington. Bloch has chosen not to move the vacant positions to the field office posts and to fill them with residents in the three cities, officials with the groups said.

"In fact, the way that the 'reorganization' is being implemented leads to the inescapable conclusion that existing career staff are being purged," the heads of the three groups stated in their letter.

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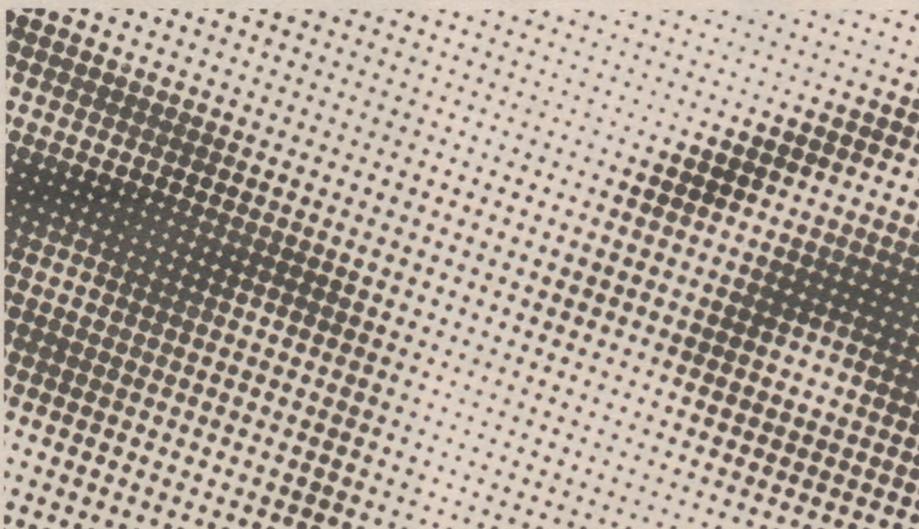
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A biological basis for homosexuality

Cynthia Chappell, a researcher and mother of a gay son, has translated research on the biology of homosexuality into terms for everyone.

By BINNIE FISHER

When her 30-year-old son came out to her and her husband six years ago, Cynthia Chappell said she reacted the way most any mother would react.

"It's emotional when you find out," she said. "I had all those feelings everyone else has. I asked him, was it something I did. He assured me he'd had a fine childhood."

But, Cynthia Chappell is hardly your typical PTA mom. As a professor and associate dean for academic affairs at the University of Texas School of Public Health in Houston, she saw an avenue to pursue for answers that not everyone could easily tread.

Chappell holds a Ph.D. in microbiology and immunology from Baylor College of Medicine.

"When our son came out, in order to help him understand what had happened, I knew I could go to the primary scientific literature that was available," she said.

It was something only a research scientist like herself could do effectively.

"I realized there was no translation of that material for the lay public," she said. "There was a real need to have someone read that primary literature and put together the data in a way the public can understand."

Chappell, a member of Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) will present a lay-person's guide to that research during the group's

i MORE INFO

Scientific Research on Genetic and Biological Causes of Homosexuality
PFLAG Monthly Meeting
2 p.m., Sunday, Feb. 6
St. Paul's Methodist Church
Second Floor
Main and Binz
Parking on Binz between Fannin and San Jacinto
Public is invited.



When her son came out to his family, Cynthia Chappell went directly to the scientific research regarding the basis for homosexuality.

monthly meeting at 2 p.m. Feb. 6 at St. Paul's Methodist Church.

"I really looked at the current scientific and medical evidence regarding a biological basis for sexual orientation," she said.

Her conclusion: sexual orientation is determined long before birth. Sexual orientation, she concluded, is determined sometime between the eighth and the 16th month of gestation.

"It has to do with the various hormones that the fetus produces and their effect on the various tissues, including the brain," she said.

She added, "It's a complex process. There are many steps and many factors."

That explains, she said, what happens with identical twins. Often, when one is gay or lesbian, so is the other.

"Those individuals come from one egg and one sperm," she said. "They're genetically identical. They've occupied the same environment. The outcome is that those two individuals will be very closely aligned."

Although religious conservatives assert that homosexuality is not genetic, Chappell said, "The genes that are expressed during development really are the important fac-

i CYNTHIA CHAPPELL

Residence: Houston

Occupation: Dean for Academic Affairs
Professor, Division of Environmental and Occupational Health

Professor, Biological Sciences Discipline
University of Texas School of Public Health in Houston

Education: Ph.D. in microbiology and immunology from Baylor College of Medicine.

Married to: Tom Chappell

tors in determining sexual orientation. So, it's genetic in that sense."

Chappell, who has authored more than 60 scientific articles and several chapters in textbooks, said those who quote scripture when confronted with homosexuality are reacting out of fear.

"They think they're going to get blamed," she said. "It's just a very frightening idea. When we get frightened, we get rigid and very protective."

Data, not opinion

The work that she has done takes emotion out of the picture.

"This is data," she said. "It's not opinion."

Chappell has given her talk on homosexuality often, and although it's designed for parents, she said, gays and lesbians often approach her and thank her for the information she has presented.

"I did not expect it to have a great deal of impact on gays and lesbians," she said. "I thought they already knew it wasn't a choice. But they need that validation."

Her own son had attempted to come out much earlier, but found that the information available to him at the time wasn't helpful.

"He knew that something was different when he entered puberty," she said.

The images he saw in the media didn't help.

"There wasn't anybody with whom he could identify," she said.

He decided to suppress his feelings and begin dating girls.

"He brought so many girls home," Chappell said. "At some point he had to come to the conclusion that he was lying to himself."

Finally, she said, "He came home and talked to everyone who meant anything to him. None of us thought any less of him. None of us stopped loving him."

Six years later, Chappell said, she and her husband, Tom, have seen a pleasant change in their son.

"He was always a guarded person. He didn't let people in easily," she said. "Now, he's much more open."

out in houston

(Photos by Dalton DeHart)



The Krewe of Olympus got Mardi Gras off to a start at the recent Undrewriter's Party.



Miss Kofi (left), and Aike, an 'American Idol' contender, encouraged the crowd to give at the South Beach 'Paradise Lost' party to raise money for tsunami survivors.



Charles Solomon, Mimi and Amber were in fine form at the Spoiled Boyz party at Dean's Credit Clothing.



DJ Kimberly S. was spin doctor at JR's recently.



Queen Olympus Becky Brewer and her escorts took the best costume prize at the Mystery & Fantasy Mardi Gras Party at Rich's.



Outgoing Miss Keys West Aurora Briar (left) offers her best wishes to the reigning Miss Keys, An'Marie Gill.



Kate Shindle (from left), Jennifer Garza, and Dennis Draper participated in Act Out at the Alley Theatre.



Julie Eberly accepted a check for \$23,000 made out to AIDS Foundation Houston from the Bayou City Boys Club.

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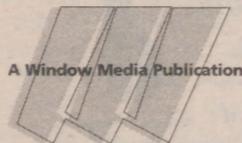
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Forum

HOUSTON VOICE

JANUARY 28, 2005

PAGE 10

editorial

Gay Iraqi will not vote in elections

Even after the election, 'the electricity will still go out, the water will still get shut off, and people will still get shot in the streets.'

By MUBARAK DAHIR

W

WHEN IRAQ HOLDS ITS national election on Sunday, January 30, Walid — a gay Iraqi who asked that he be given a pseudonym for this article — will not cast his ballot.

"The election is a joke," he writes from his cramped apartment located in what he describes as "downtown Baghdad."

I first met Walid about two months ago on a gay Internet site.

Since we first began chatting in intermittent conversations — broken over time by power failures — he has painted a dire picture of fear and desperation in a city and country besieged both by foreign forces and by armed rebels who often end up killing average Iraqi citizens in their raids on the American military and their sympathizers.

Walid doesn't trust either side.

And he doesn't have any faith that the elections will produce much of anything other than more fighting.

"The Americans will impose the results they want," he believes. And adds: "It doesn't really matter who wins the election. The Americans will still be the rulers. Whoever wins the election will have to do what the Americans say."

Little else will change with the election, too, Walid fears.

"The electricity will still go out, the water will still get shut off, and people will still get shot in the streets," he writes.

THE NOTION THAT AN ELECTION, under the auspices of the United States or any other country, will change the harsh attitudes and conditions in Iraq for gays is unrealistic.

"It is very difficult to be gay here," he says. "It can be very dangerous."

But Walid doubts that social attitudes against homosexuality are going to change with any newly elected government.

"Those things are not something the government here will get involved in," he says. "It is about the way people think. It will not

change for a long time. Maybe never."

If anything, Walid fears, a new government here might make the atmosphere worse for gays.

There will be 111 political parties on the ballot. But most people know very little about any of the parties or candidates. Campaigning is minimal, with some parties even refusing to name their candidates out of fear they will become assassination targets.

For security reasons, most voters do not even yet know where their polling stations will be, and when they find out, they might not be able to get to them to cast their ballots, if the insurgents have their way.

The result, Walid says, is that no one really knows anything about the parties or the candidates or what they stand for.

Those who do vote, he says, will likely cast their ballots based on religious affiliation or some sort of family or tribal loyalty.

One of the most favored parties is the United Iraqi Alliance, which is the merger of the two biggest Shiite Muslim political parties in the country.

"If religious parties win, things will get worse for gays," because there will be a stricter interpretation of religious laws, Walid worries.

But even the political parties that claim to be secular, he fears, will be heavily influenced by religious leaders.

"This would not be good for gays."

WHAT THERE ONCE WAS OF GAY LIFE in Baghdad disappeared with the war, Walid says.

No, there were never gay bars like in Europe or America, he says, but there used to be coffee houses where men could covertly meet each other if they were extremely careful about it, he says.

And sometimes, he says, you could just catch a man's eye in the markets, and you would know.

But today, you try to avoid catching the eyes of strangers, Walid says. Today, a stare is more likely to mean you are being watched by a spy for the Americans

or are considered suspicious by the rebels, he says.

"The best thing is to walk and not look at anybody," he writes.

WALID, WHO IS IN HIS MID-30's, remains unmarried, despite strong pressure from his family to find a wife. Social custom dictates that most gay Iraqis will get married and have kids and live their lives in the closet, even as they continue to have sex with men on the side.

"But I never will marry," he says. "I cannot."

Despite the hardships of today's Baghdad, Walid, an unemployed engineer, admits he is lucky, as far as gay Iraqis there go.

Coming from an educated, at one time affluent family, he has a little more personal freedom than many other gay men do.

Furthermore, unlike many single, gay Iraqi men who follow the traditional customs, Walid does not live with his family, though they live nearby and are heavily involved in his life.

"There is not privacy the way you Americans think of it," he says. "Here, your family is in all your business."

If his family found out he was gay, "I couldn't say what might happen," he says.

When asked if he would be in physical danger, he said he hopes his family would not actually hurt him. But they might totally ostracize him, literally leaving him no way to survive in war-torn Baghdad.

Since the war began, Walid says he has not had any personal encounters with gay men of a romantic or sexual nature.

"How do you do it now?" he asks. "It is too risky."

He says he has never had a long-term boyfriend, and while he would prefer to fall in love with another Iraqi man, he is skeptical that can ever happen.

He dreams of meeting a Western gay man, and moving away from the dangers and fears of Baghdad. But he admits that, too, seems unlikely.

Still, he has e-mailed several American gay and lesbian groups, inquiring about how he might get political asylum as a gay Iraqi.

The Internet is his only outlet for gay life for now, he says. And at the moment, that's enough.

"I do not think so much every day about being gay," he says.

"I just think about staying alive."

@ Mubarak Dahir is editor of the Express Gay News in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., a paper affiliated with this publication. He can be reached at mdahir@expressg2news.com.



viewpoint JENNIFER VANASCO

Maybe the real problem with this cartoon sponge was that he was entirely *too individual*.

Our new hero, SpongeBob

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I HAVE an important announcement.

A new hero has joined our side. An American icon has stepped forward and declared that, from now on, he, too, recognizes the need for freedom and equality for all gay Americans.

(Cue triumphant music here.)

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, the time of our liberation has arrived. I introduce to you — cue drumroll — SpongeBob SquarePants.

Yes, indeed. Like his esteemed forefather Tinky Winky before him, dear SpongeBob has been declared an enemy of the religious right.

Dr. James C. Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, has announced that SpongeBob stars in a “pro-homosexual video” being sent to thousands of school-children.

Alas, this — like many pronouncements of the religious right — is not quite true.

Indeed, SpongeBob does star in a new video promoting diversity and tolerance that will be sent out to elementary schools in March. Other stars include Clifford the Big Red Dog, the Rugrats, Dora the Explorer and Big Bird, but somehow they don't have quite the, uh, homosexual cache that SpongeBob has, at

least in Dobson's opinion.

It's a music video, and the music does happen to be the gay anthem “We Are Family.” And the We Are Family Foundation has, on its Web site, a pledge borrowed from the Southern Poverty Law Center that encourages “respect for people whose abilities, beliefs, culture, race, sexual identity or other characteristics are different from my own.”

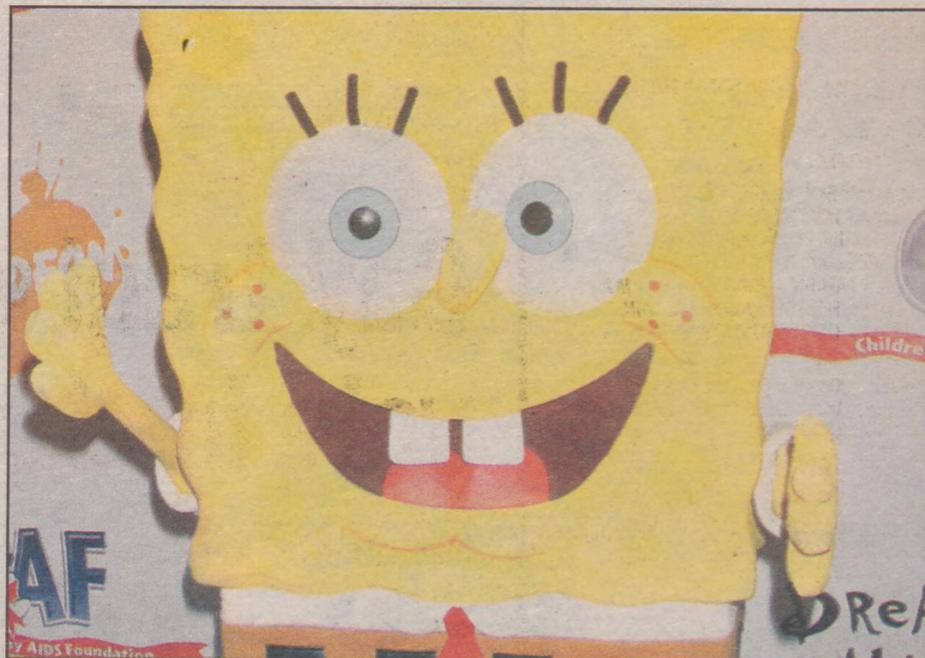
MY, THIS IS SUBVERSIVE! WE CAN'T have children having respect for people different from themselves, can we? How will they ever get along in the world? Tsk, tsk.

It is far, far better to teach children that anyone who is different is frightening, so they had better get a gun just in case they meet someone not quite like themselves.

Oh, by the way, there is no gay content in the video and only passing reference to same-sex parents in the materials sent with the video.

In fact, you might say that the We Are Family Foundation is promoting a very, um, Christian message: loving all people, no matter where they come from.

SpongeBob, I am told, is a bit of a camp icon to gay men. I don't pretend to understand this. I, myself, am not quite sure why



SpongeBob SquarePants is shown at the 3rd Annual Dream Halloween Fundraiser hosted by the Children Affected by AIDS Foundation, held at the Hammerstein Ballroom last October in New York. (AP Photo/Amy Sussman/Graylock.com)

a sponge would garner this sort of glory.

But if Dr. Dobson and his ilk declare war on everything gay men like, well, then, we can say goodbye to theater, club music, interior design and good grooming.

PERHAPS DR. DOBSON AND HIS handlers have made a mistake. Dobson himself admits he hasn't seen the video; he's only heard about it.

Another Web site called We Are Family supports gay youth. It's unrelated to the We Are Family Foundation. But perhaps some researcher, in her haste to promote a worldwide gay conspiracy to recruit children, happened to conflate the two.

It's too bad when facts are inconvenient, isn't it?

Maybe the trouble is that SpongeBob is so — individual.

He is very much himself. He is the mythic hero, the lone man bucking the expectations of all those around him. Or maybe not.

First of all, it's not really clear whether a sponge can rightfully be called “a man.”

What is clear, though, is that Dobson and other religious right figures are so out of touch with mainstream American culture that they have decided, once again, to get all riled up about absolutely nothing.

The religious right actually does this all the time. Mix together a call for tolerance — not even “acceptance,” mind you, but “tolerance” — a quirky individual and children and what do you get? Gayness.

If SpongeBob wants to come out — he does hold hands with his friend Patrick, after all — then well, I'm sure we'd welcome him. There must be a place in our rainbow for sponges. In fact, just knowing that the guy is on our side makes me feel all warm and squishy.

@ Jennifer Vanasco is a Chicago-based syndicated columnist and can be reached at vanasco@chicagofreepress.com.

THE

Q A conference is being called in June to chart the future of gay and lesbian Houston. What should be addressed at the meeting?



Civil rights and marriage. Same rights and equal rights for gays and lesbians.

LUIS ARAGON, 26
Houston
Visual Director



Helping gay and lesbian people deal with the issue of religion and being gay. A group should be formed that is a local “think tank” that helps the gay community understand their being gay and their relationship with God.

ROD CASELE, 37
The Woodlands
Mortgage Broker



Gay marriage.

REESA FREDRICK, 27
Houston
Attorney



A classy lesbian bar.

FIONA DAWSON, 46
Houston
Nonprofit



Obviously, one issue is finding new ways to make advancements for governmentally protected equal rights. Another issue is HIV/AIDS awareness. We must find new ways to encourage people to behave safely. We must find a means to reduce and eliminate the stigma associated with being infected.

MERLIN CAVALLIN, 28
Houston
Accountant

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the assassin tour



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Not a switch hitter
New York Mets' Mike Piazza
squashes hopes that he's
gay with wedding plans.
Page 19

made for one another

GAYS AND MARDI GRAS WERE A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN

By BINNIE FISHER

m

ASQUERADE BALLS, NIGHTTIME parades, lavish costumes and strings of beads, beads, beads. There is no need to surmise why gays and Mardi Gras were a match made in heaven.

The annual two-week celebration starts at 6:15 p.m. today in Galveston and wraps up with the Fat Tuesday celebration and parade on February 8. Between now and then, there will be two weekends of lavish parties and masquerade balls as well as street celebrations and parades.

In Houston, the Krewe of Olympus celebrates Mardi Gras with an invitation-only, black-tie ball Saturday night at the George R. Brown Convention Center.

Krewe member Sonna Alton said the event is billed as a "tableau" ball where elaborate costumes are presented and King and Queen Olympus are officially crowned.

"This is our 35th anniversary, and we're presenting 35 major, elaborate costumes," Alton said.

Krewe lieutenant Weldon Hickey describes the Krewe of Olympus as, "a traditional Mardi Gras krewe that was originally in New Orleans. It was one of the first gay krewes in New Orleans."

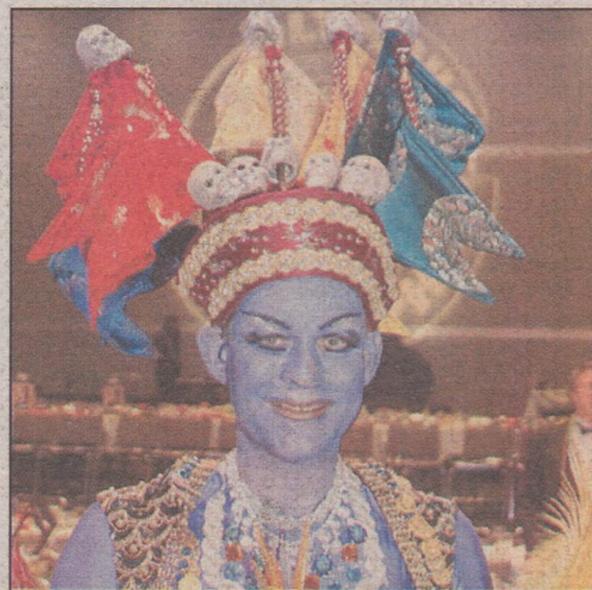
When AIDS took its toll on the gay population in that city, Hickey said, the Krewe of Olympus was moved to Houston. The first Krewe of Olympus ball in Houston was the organization's 22nd ball.

He noted that the group hosts a number of fundraisers each year to pay for the ball. Proceeds from the annual ball then go to a handful of designated charities.

Alton said this year the beneficiaries are the Assistance Fund, Montrose Clinic, Lesbian Health Initiative, the PFLAG-HATCH Youth Scholarship Fund and Legacy Dallas.

The Galveston celebration is an hour away from Houston on Interstate 45, and several gay and lesbian groups organize yearly trips to Mardi Gras.

A.J. Simpson and Michael Mixon are among a growing number of gays from Houston who have bought and



renovated houses in Galveston.

"I know of 10 gay couples who have bought in Galveston in the last four years," Simpson said.

In recent years, he and Mixon have begun a tradition of throwing a party at their home on 21st Street the afternoon of the last Saturday in Mardi Gras. Both are active with the Diana Foundation, and many of those who attend the party are also active with that group.

"This will be our third year of having the party," Simpson said. "Our party is from 2-5 p.m. At 5, we walk three blocks to 25th Street to watch the Momus Parade. It's a lot of fun, watching the parade and catching beads."

The couple is renovating a loft at the corner of 25th and the Strand, and the facility will be their Mardi Gras party central next year, Simpson said. Next year, he said, he and his friends will be among those throwing beads from upper-floor windows.

THE TRADITION OF CELEBRATING MARDI GRAS in Galveston began in 1867 with a masked ball and a

theatrical performance from Shakespeare's "King Henry IV."

In 1871, rival Mardi Gras societies, the Knights of Momus and the Knights of Myth staged their own night parades with elaborate costumes. Each parade ended with glitzy galas at separate venues.

The celebrations grew more ornate as years went by, and by 1873, Mardi Gras Galveston was drawing attendees from out of state.

The tradition went through several decades of decline and revival, curtailed by two world wars.

In 1985, Galveston natives George and Cynthia Mitchell launched a citywide revival of Mardi Gras to coincide with the opening of their new Tremont Hotel in the heart of the Strand.

That year, 75,000 spectators greeted the night procession led by jazz clarinetist Pete Fountain.

Houston gays and lesbians who participate in the Galveston tradition this year will be among a half-million revelers.

i MORE INFO

Mardi Gras Galveston
888-425-4753
www.mardigrasgalveston.com

Krewe of Olympus
www.mardigrastexas.com

MAN OF THE CLOTH: Homer Simpson becomes a minister to perform a same-sex wedding. Page 14

FOOD'S BLACK HOLE: Terlingua Texas is the most recent cafe to open in Houston's restaurant Bermuda Triangle. Page 16

television BRIAN MOYLAN



A gambling Web site has fun with speculation about which Simpsons character will come out in February.

Pastor Homer Simpson will marry a same-sex couple

AFTER 16 SEASONS AND NEARLY 350 episodes, it's amazing that Fox's "The Simpsons" can still cause a ruckus. Last summer, one of the show's producers, Al Jean, announced that the series would feature an episode where Homer becomes a minister to make money performing same-sex weddings. Homer also is to perform a wedding for someone close to him, who will come out on the show.

Ever since, there has been an unusual amount of buzz about just who the character will be. In October, London's Sun news-

paper reported that it would be Patty Bouvier, Marge Simpson's man-hating sister. At the time, Fox wouldn't comment.

The network still isn't talking, but it did confirm that the episode, dubbed "There's Something about Marrying," will air on Sunday, Feb. 20, at 8 p.m.

THE GOOD FOLKS AT WWW.BETUS.COM have seized on the highly anticipated coming out episode. On Jan. 18 the Canadian-based gambling Web site posted odds on which character would come out on "The Simpsons" and began taking bets.

"I believe this is the first time we've offered odds relating to anyone's sexuality, fictional or non," says Mike Foreman, a spokesperson for the company.

The odds-on favorite is Patty, with 4-to-5 odds, which means, for every \$5 you bet, if she comes out, you only get \$4 back. Guess all those rumors that she's going to



Now's your chance to get rich quick like Homer, by betting on which Simpson's character will come out of the closet in a special episode next month.

come out carry some weight after all.

Next in line is Waylon Smithers, Mr. Burns' dithering, effeminate assistant, who viewers have assumed for years is gay. His odds are 4-to-1, so you'll get \$4 for each dollar you bet that he comes out first.

Foreman says that, after more than 1,000 bets, he was surprised that Homer's evangelical neighbor, Ned Flanders, at 15-to-1, was getting the most big money bets — many of them at the \$500 limit.

"Imagine the kind of press they would get if Ned came out," Foreman says. "I think that's definitely something

to consider."

Other characters who visitors can bet on include Patty's twin sister, Selma, at 9-to-1 odds; Homer's homoerotic coworkers Lenny and Carl, at 9-to-1 and 13-to-1 odds, respectively; bartender Moe at 15-to-1 odds; Bart's best friend Milhouse, at 8-to-1; convenience store owner Apu, at 10-to-1; Homer's boss, Mr. Burns, at 16-to-1; and Homer Simpson himself, a long shot at 20-to-1.

BetUS.com often encourages betting on pop culture issues, like the winners of reality television programs and the outcomes of award shows, but rarely on scripted series such as "The Simpsons." Foreman says that the company almost always loses money running entertainment pools.

"It's fun for our customers and it creates a bit of a buzz," he says, adding that "The Simpsons" pool has brought them to an entirely different market.

NO STRANGER TO CREATING A BUZZ, Oprah Winfrey got a ratings surprise last Monday, Jan. 17, with an episode featuring gay interior designer Nate Berkus. Though he is a regular on the show for his designing talent, Berkus was featured that day to talk about his experiences and the loss of his partner, Fernando Bengoechea, during the tsunami in South Asia last month.

Nielsen Media Research, the company that charts audience size, estimates the show had more than 15 million viewers, a high for Winfrey's 19th season, even higher than the season premiere, when the talk-show guru gave each of her 276 audience members a free car.

MORE INFO

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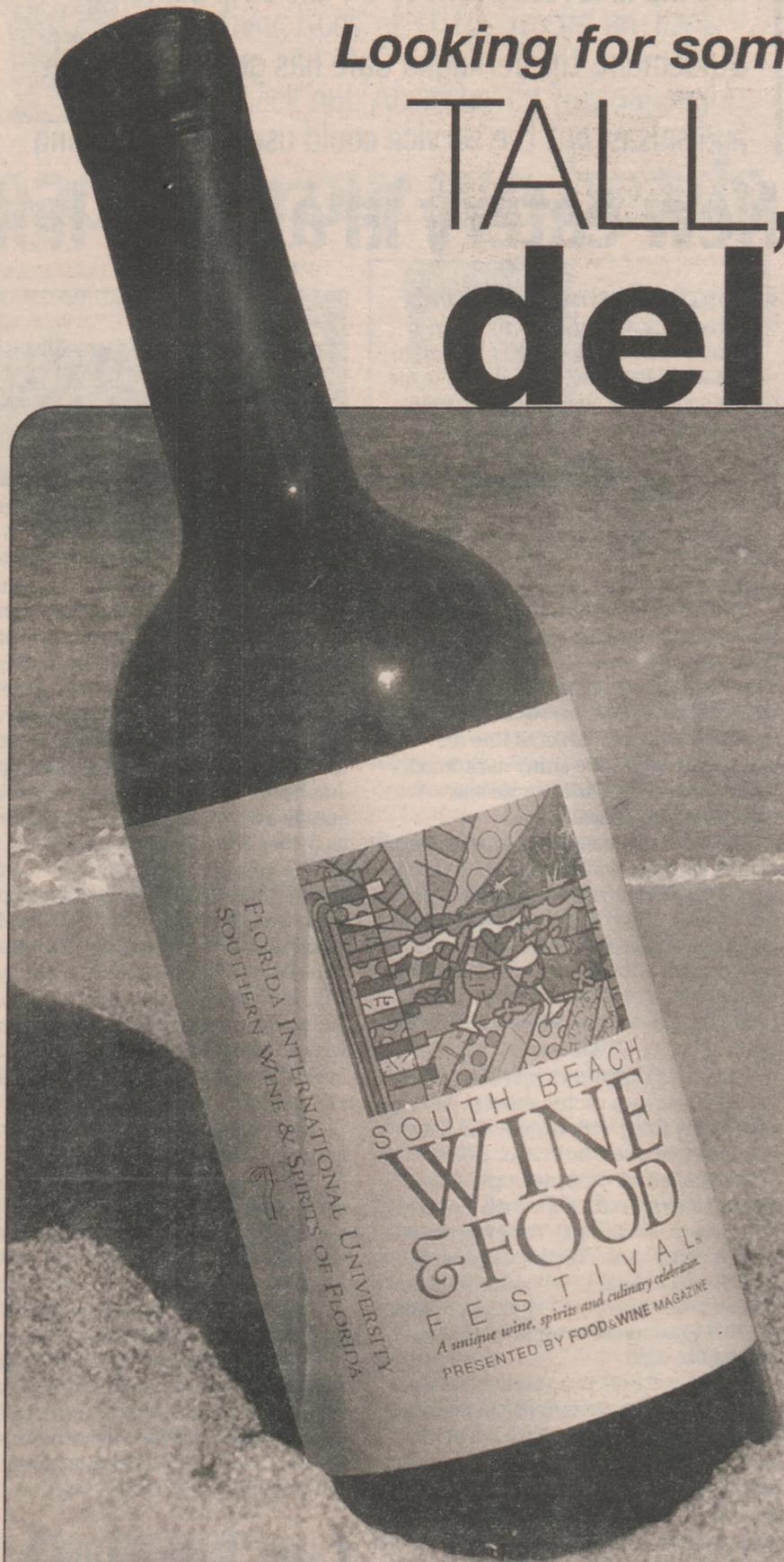
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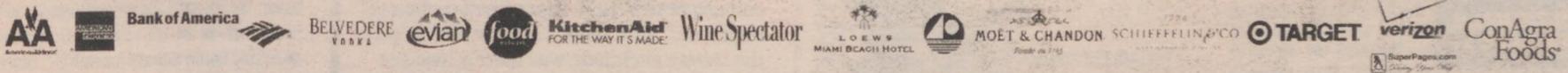


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dining J.A. CHAPMAN

Not the first restaurant to try the strip center on Studemont, the Terlingua Café has great guacamole and salsas, but the service could use some tweaking

New eatery in a black hole

WHY IS IT THAT SOME LOCATIONS can't keep a restaurant for anything?

Some locations just seem to be restaurant black holes. One such location is the corner spot of the strip shopping center on Studemont near Washington where Terlingua Texas Border Café, the third restaurant in two years, has just opened for business.

I gamely visited its two predecessors, Ragazza and The Rivendell, and found them good enough, if not outstanding.

At first glance, Terlingua is the best of the bunch. The décor has been redone in an upscale authentic-Mexico-meets-Texas-ranch style. Attractive mirrors with ornate frames, ironwork, and century-old pictures of vaqueros line the walls. The tables are shiny dark wood, while some chairs have Texas star cutouts in their backs.

The extensive menu is primarily Tex-Mex, with some typical Texas fare thrown in. They start you off with a paper bag full of thin, crispy and piping hot chips, and three chilled salsas. I couldn't pick my favorite salsa. The tangy salsa verde would prevail until I tried either the smoky, warm chipotle or the garlicky red again. They're all winners.

Ditto for the margaritas (\$5.50), served in cutesy saguaro cactus glasses. They're generously filled with tequila and have just the right sweet-tart ratio.

We started off by ordering a dish of guacamole (\$3.95-\$5.99), which I consider a litmus test for any Tex-Mex restaurant worth its salt. Terlingua passed with flying colors. Lively with lime and cilantro and filled with chunks of avocado, this guacamole is some of the best I've had in ages.

Things were off to a roaring start!

And then, somehow, it began to unravel. The ribs on the baby back rib platter (half \$9.59/full \$16.99) were ideally tender and meaty, but the barbecue sauce suffered from a too much sugar and a lack of smoky depth. The potato wedges had a slight paprika coating and a light texture, but left the impression they started out frozen. The sautéed spinach arrived watery, overdone and with mushrooms which added little to the dish.

The Rio Grande platter (\$11.59) is a typical combo platter. More of that addictive guacamole showed up, along with a spicy chile con queso puff. The taco al carbon impressed, with tender, smoky beef, but the cheese enchilada was merely average and hiding under a mass of sauce and extra cheese.

SERVICE IS AN ISSUE AT TERLINGUA. Our waiter forgot the tortillas (be aware, they're an extra \$0.99), and they



were corn, instead of the requested flour when they finally arrived. On a subsequent visit, the waitstaff huddled together near the back chatting loudly, and then raced across the floor should a patron near the door. A woman even cleaned the glass dividers around me while I was eating, adding an unwelcome scent to the dining experience.

The menu may be too large for the kitchen to handle. The boiled shrimp (six Jumbo for \$5.59), billed as ice-cold, took ages to arrive, and were still warm inside, as if they'd just been cooked.

The peppercorn chipotle bleu-cheese burger basket (\$6.99) was a hodge-podge of flavors. The "chipotle" consisted of a minimal swab of some sad orange mayonnaise, the bleu cheese was unexpectedly held in place by a slice of American cheese, and the peppercorns were indiscernible. Stick with the basic burger, which in and of itself, is meaty and tender.

The capirotada (\$4.59), or Mexican bread pudding, was highly recommended by our waiter. But it turned out to be a chewy lump of a cinnamon flavored bread pudding-like substance, with an anemic white sauce on top. We left most of it on the plate.

Terlingua has a lot of potential. The Tex-Mex food is quite good, particularly the salsas, guacamole and tacos al carbon. The prices are reasonable, and the bar serves generous drinks. If they can pare down the menu and get the service under control, it should be a great addition to the neighborhood.



**Terlingua Texas
 Border Café**

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Rumors of Hamburger Mary are floating, 'Anything Goes' at TUTS, 'Trocks' are back, and check out 'Absinthe' on Tuesday nights.

Beads, throw me beads

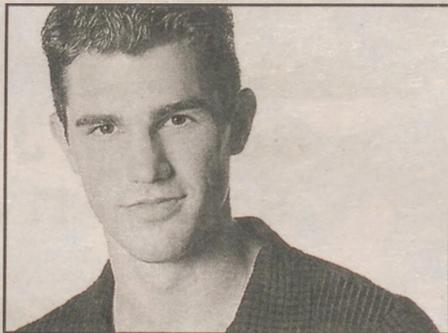
HELLO ALL YOU HIP AND HAPPENING queers! Welcome back to HoVo on the Go-Go! This week we'll be running around downtown in search of an Urban Cowboy and some drag ballet as well as hitting the island for some beads!

FIRST UP THOUGH, LAST WEEK HotGG mentioned the soon to be open **Montrose Diner** in the old Cabo location. Our thoughts were that the diner is looking to take up the slack because Houston doesn't have a **Hamburger Mary's** here. The gay burger joints are all across the US, including Dallas, but no one has opened one here...yet. The rumor this week is that a recently closed establishment is being considered for Hamburger Mary's. Apparently a group of investors is sniffing around to see if all involved parties can come to an agreement on terms. Stay tuned to HotGG for all the latest.

HERE WE GO AGAIN. WE'VE LOST another "family" restaurant. Our old friends at **Café Noche** on Montrose have closed the doors for good. A long-standing patio favorite, Noche has seen its share of margarita soaked brunches, I know because I was often wearing one myself! Sadly, the doors are already shuttered. What no goodbye party? Hmm. A group of investors, Hamburger Mary's, closed space? We'll see.

ABSINTHE IS HOT! OR SHOULD I SAY the men there are. On a recent visit to **Absinthe**, HotGG was floored with the beautiful crowd of gay men, lesbians and some fashion forward metrosexuals. Owners **Jackie & Ralph Ragar** have managed to keep the petite bar and bistro on the hip radar but under it at the same time. Stop by on Tuesday, apparently thats when "our" people are out in full force. Absinthe, 609 Richmond Ave. (there's no sign) or call 713.528.7575.

SING IT COLE, PORTER THAT IS. This week you really should get down to the Hobby Center to see **Cole Porter's** classic musical "Anything Goes." Why? First of all some of Porter's most memorable songs came out of this musical including "I Get A Kick Out of You," "You're the Top," "Blow, Gabriel, Blow" and the title song, "Anything Goes." Secondly, gorgeous actor **Matt Cavanaugh**, formerly of Broadway's short-lived "Urban Cowboy" plays the dashing Billy Crocker and that alone is worth the price of admission. If you're a fan of (the best damn soap on the air!) "One Life to Live," you'll recognize Matt for his recurring role as gay teen



Matt Cavanaugh, that cute hunk who plays a gay teen on HotGG's favorite soap, is in 'Anything Goes' at TUTS.

Mark Soloman. Set on an ocean liner in the 1930's, "Anything Goes" tells the story of Reno Sweeney, an evangelist turned nightclub singer and Reno's pal Billy Crocker who has boarded without a ticket. He is then forced to adopt a number of disguises as he pursues social debutante Hope. Also the "Out at Tuts" night is this Wednesday. After the regular performance you'll find a cabaret evening of live piano music, cast members from the show, and fellow musical theatre lovers, at **Artista** restaurant in the Hobby Center. Matt, I really do get a kick out of you! Tickets are available at www.tuts.com or by calling 713-558-2600.

THE TROCKS ARE BACK. **LES BALLET de Trocadero de Monte Carlo** returns to Houston for **one night only**, Saturday at 8 p.m. at Jones Hall. The Trocks are an all male professional ballet troupe that perform all female roles in a mix of ballet and modern dance. The troupe, now in its 30th year, simply must be seen to fully understand how campy and queer these guys are. Call 713-227-4SPA, or go to www.spahouston.org or www.trockadero.com for tickets and info.

BEADS, I NEED BEADS! SO I'M dropping 'trou' in Galveston this weekend and next for **Mardi Gras Galveston**. This year's celebration marks the 21st consecutive year of Mardi Gras Galveston since its 1985 revival. While on the island, don't forget to stop by HotGG's fave spots including Garza's Kontiki at 315 Tremont & 23rd St (409-763-6264), Robert's Lafitte, home of the infamous drag puppet show, at 2501 Q Ave (409-765-9092) and the multi-leveled Undercurrent at 3102 Seawall Blvd (409-750-8571).

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

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

A swing and a mess

Mike Piazza's final at bat, Amelie Mauresmo's feud and Showtime's shakeup

It now appears that the New York Mets' hunky catcher **MIKE PIAZZA** is not a switch hitter after all.

The New York Daily News reports that he plans to marry his girlfriend of two years, former Playboy playmate Alicia Rickter, next weekend in Florida, where Piazza owns a house and a condo.

It's been a rocky road to love for Piazza, whose pretty boy good looks (and a whole lot of fawning gay fans) made him the subject of persistent rumors that he was out at the ballgame in more than one way. Even though former girlfriend Darlene Bernaola, another Playboy playmate, went on the record talking about their active and fabulous sex life, the rumors continued.

It eventually got so bad that he held a news conference in 2002 to tell everyone he wasn't playing for our team.

Dish could carry on the baseball metaphors and make jokes about how he's definitely a catcher, but she's sick of that trope already.

Piazza isn't the first celeb to deny those gay rumors — **TOM CRUISE**, **TOM SELLECK** and **RICHARD GERE** have all done the same. But he's the first one to actually hold a news conference to announce it. With his marriage, I suppose we can all put this rumor to rest.

And if this works, look for hot Aussie swimmer **IAN THORPE**, who has done everything in his power to stop the gay rumors to little effect, to be doing the breaststroke all the way to the altar.

A killer serve

Speaking of sports stars, lesbian tennis player **AMELIE MAURESMO** seems to be a little upset at the return of her former rival **MARTINA HINGIS**.



Amelie Mauresmo

Hingis, who retired in 2002 after surgery on both ankles, recently entered a tennis tournament in Thailand and seems poised for a comeback.

That's not good news for Mauresmo, who briefly was

ranked the No. 1 female tennis player in the world last year. In 1999, former numero uno Hingis defeated her in the Australian Open and, to add insult to injury, called Mauresmo "half a man."

The Associated Press reports that at a recent press conference, Mauresmo did not react well when asked about Hingis' return.

"I have nothing to say, absolutely nothing at all." When the questioner persisted, she reiterated "Nothing!" while walking out of the pressroom.



New York Mets catcher **Mike Piazza** might finally squelch the rumors about his sexual orientation now that he's getting hitched (to a woman).

Get a room

Dish knows you've heard a lot about her recently, but she can't stop talking about her favorite home wrecker, **PORTIA DE ROSSI**. It seems as if the relationship between the "Arrested Development" star and the lesbian talk show host **ELLEN DEGENERES** (at the expense of their respective long-term girlfriends) is getting even stranger.

A source told US magazine that de Rossi has been at every taping of DeGeneres' syndicated talk show since it started shooting again on Jan. 5. Even more annoying, the two communicate during the opening monologue. The source says, "Portia will mouth, 'That was a good one!' And Ellen mouths, 'Thanks!'"



Portia de Rossi

In and out at Showtime

Showtime recently announced unceremoniously that the fifth season of hit gay drama "**QUEER AS FOLK**" would be the last one for the series. A rep for Showtime offered no explanation, but it returns to the air this spring.

Hit lesbian drama "**THE L WORD**" is poised to return on Feb. 20. Two weeks ago, Showtime renewed it for a third, 12-episode season before even an episode of the second season hit the screen. Now that's girl power.

@ Send comments, suggestions to Dish@houstonvoice.com

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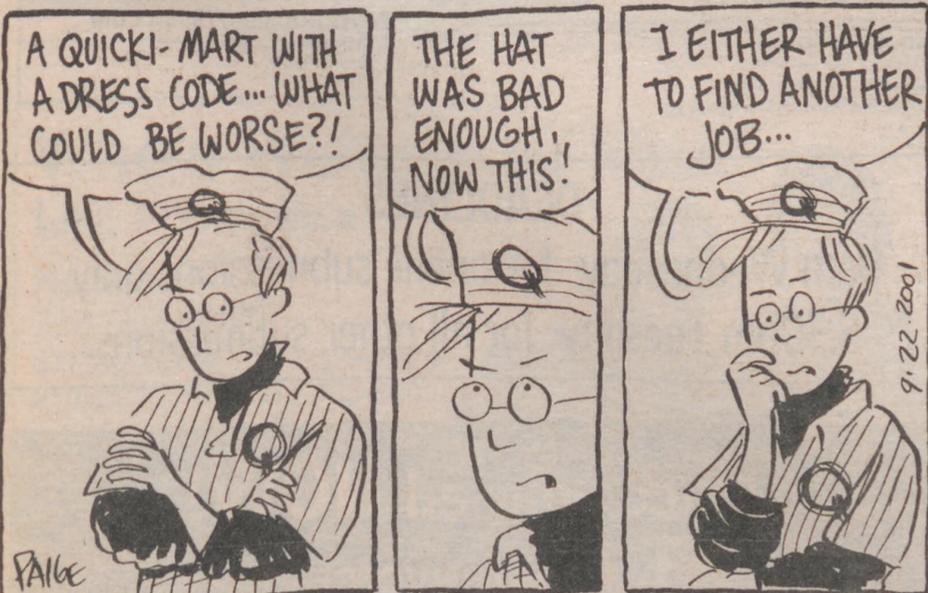
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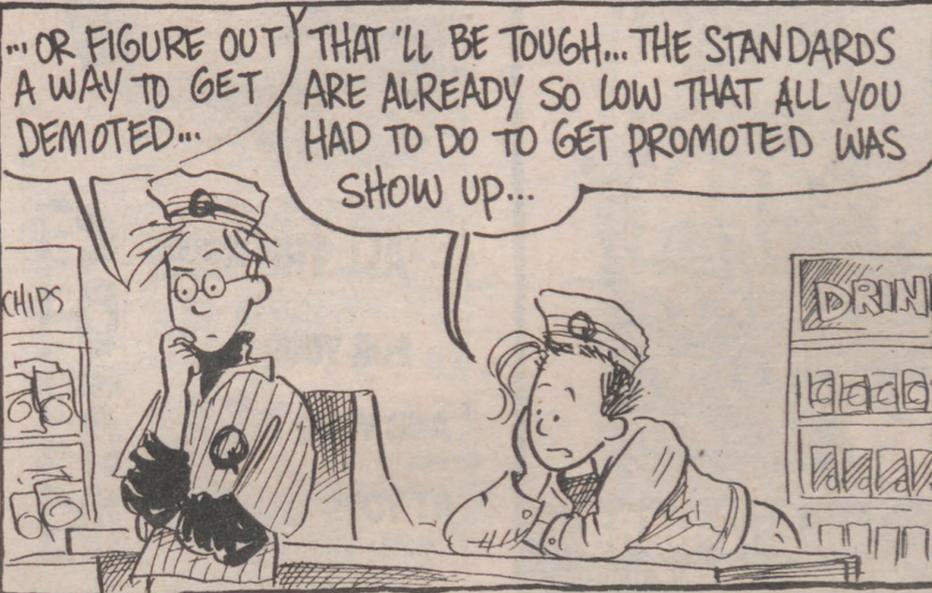
Panel 1: A QUICKI-MART WITH A DRESS CODE... WHAT COULD BE WORSE?!

Panel 2: THE HAT WAS BAD ENOUGH, NOW THIS!

Panel 3: I EITHER HAVE TO FIND ANOTHER JOB...

9.22.2001

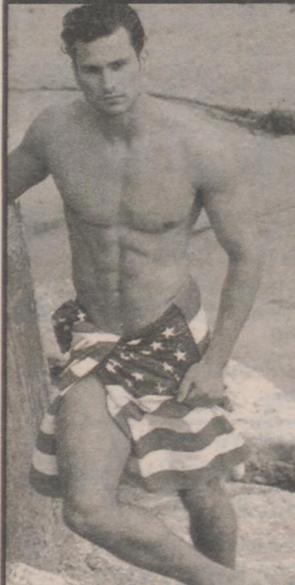
Paige Braddock



Panel 4: "...OR FIGURE OUT A WAY TO GET DEMOTED..."

Panel 5: THAT'LL BE TOUGH... THE STANDARDS ARE ALREADY SO LOW THAT ALL YOU HAD TO DO TO GET PROMOTED WAS SHOW UP...

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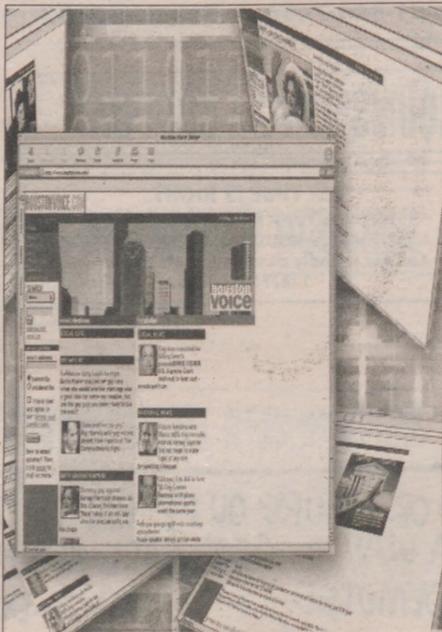
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bitch session

YOU HAVE THE AUDACITY TO complain to me that your boyfriend looks at other guys when you are hitting all the cruise spots. You have a lot of nerve.

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SEX CLUBS IN THE U.S. REALLY NEED to catch up to our European counterparts in cleanliness and good service.

HEY GRANDPA, THE NEXT TIME YOU come into the strip club, remember that you're not sexy and the things that you say are nauseating.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT EGO THAT MAKES you think you're socially superior just

because you're better looking than me? **IT'S FINE IF YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND** and decide it was just a one-night-stand, but is the courtesy of a follow-up phone call to let me know you're canceling on a second date really that much trouble?

THIS BITCH IS FOR ALL THE PEOPLE hating on feminine guys. Just because I have twitch in my step and a slink in my hand doesn't mean I'm not a man. Remember that.

PUT DOWN THE PIPE? NEVER! IF IT weren't for the pipe I wouldn't have this beautifully O-shaped mouth.

IF YOU HAVE A RECENT PICTURE OF me, or if I'm standing right in front of you, why do you still need to know my age so badly?

Homophobia wasn't the reason they fired you for your job. They offer domestic partnerships. It was your "lunches with Tina."

TO THE BROTHER WHO DATES WHITE men: Brothers don't know how to treat other brothers right, so how can they treat other races right? Straight African-American women and gay men have the same problem: There is nothing in our race to pick from.

HEY SHUT UP! I HAVE TALKED TO that guy wearing too much jewelry and colored hair, and he is the sweetest guy I've met in a long time. So look past the appearance and stop the running commentary on everyone who comes through the door!

JUST BECAUSE ONE HAPPENS TO BE frock retarded is no reason to call him straight. Teach and he shall learn. Poor dear thing, stuck in last year's outfits.

IT'S QUITE UNNERVING WHEN you're about to pay for a meal and the waiter tells you a complete stranger picked up the tab. Some may say that is flattering but he was not my type so I could do no more than say thank you and feel bad for him as I walked out.

I WAS FEELING POORLY UNTIL I READ the reply by Bitch Boy that Gas-X was his

cure for internalized oppression. I laughed so hard I began to feel better!

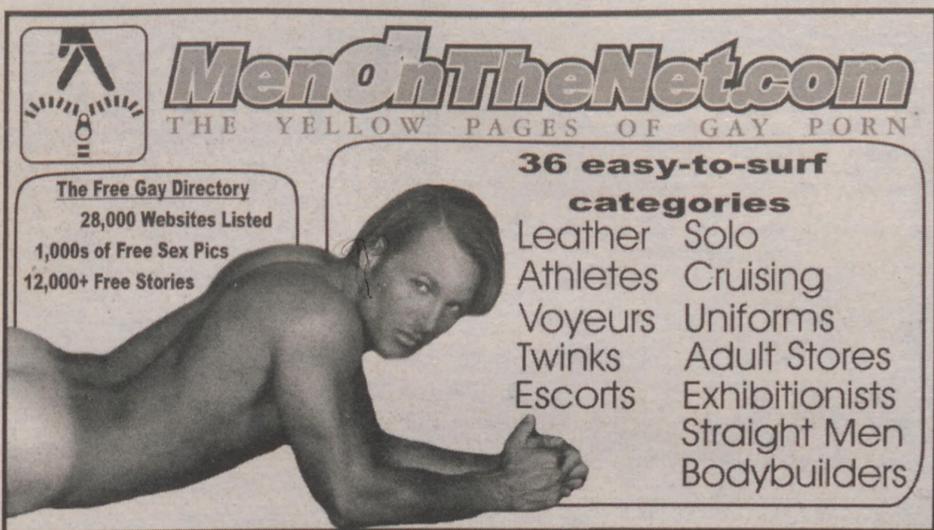
THIS GAY WOMAN CAN'T HELP BUT chuckle in seeing how much gay men oppress and marginalize each other. It makes me snicker.

GIRLFRIEND, IF YOU AUTOMATICALLY think that I want to split my attentions between you and another man because I'm bisexual, you're not as open as you think.

NAMBLA MEMBERS: STATUTORY rape is not loving someone of the same gender. It is sex with minors, which very few gay folks think is OK. Don't bring your degenerate notions here; we have our own problems and don't need you muddling it up with yours.

LISTEN, MATE, WHEN WE FIRST start talking online, I really am not there to listen to you whine about your ex-lover.

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



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