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THE HARDY WAY
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JUST THE FOXX, MA’AM
Find out about the recent event at the Siskel Film Center that brought Jamie Foxx and Robert Downey, Jr., to town.

THAT’S ENTERTAINMENT
This week’s entertainment round-up includes items on Adele, Patti LaBelle and Bradley Cooper.

plus
DAILY BREAKING NEWS
Your Windy City Gay Idol finals voting guide.
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Look Back With Pride

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Study: LGB youth more at risk

BY DANA RUDOLPH
KEEN NEWS SERVICE

Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) youth are more likely than their heterosexual peers to be at increased risk for unhealthy behaviors such as tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use—sexual behaviors that could lead to infection with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, attempting suicide and violence, according to a groundbreaking new federal study.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, released the results of the study, “Sexual Identity, Sex of Sexual Contacts, and Health Risk Behaviors Among Students in Grades 9–12 in Selected Sites—Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, United States, 2001–2009.” On June 6, it represents the first time the federal government has conducted such a far-reaching analysis of LGB youth.

Researchers analyzed data from “Youth Risk Behavior Surveys” of seven states—Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Wisconsin—and six large urban school districts—Boston, Chicago, Milwaukee, New York City, San Diego, and San Francisco. The CDC funds these surveys of high school students every two years at the national, state, and local levels.

States and school districts may choose to collect data on the students’ sexual identity (heterosexual, gay or lesbian, bisexual, or unsure), the gender of their sexual contacts (both genders, opposite gender only, or same gender only), or both. The states and districts studied by the CDC had collected data on sexual identity and gender of sexual contacts for at least two survey cycles.

The CDC found that gay and lesbian students (and those who have sex only with a person of the same gender, regardless of how they identify themselves) had higher risks than heterosexual students in seven of the 10 major health risk categories: behaviors related to violence (which could include not going to school because of safety concerns), attempted suicide, tobacco use, alcohol use, other drug use, sexual behaviors, and weight management.

Bisexual students (and those who have sex with both genders, regardless of how they identify themselves) had higher risks than heterosexual students in eight of the 10 categories: behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries (such as not wearing a seatbelt), violence, attempted suicide, tobacco use, alcohol use, other drug use, sexual behaviors, and weight management.

LGB students showed no significant differences from their heterosexual peers in dietary behaviors (e.g., eating vegetables three or more times per day) or amount of physical activity.

Dr. Laura Kann, chief of the Surveillance and Evaluation Research Branch within the CDC’s Division of Adolescent and School Health, said that she attributes the “disproportionate” risks of LGB youth to the social difficulties they face, such as stigma, discrimination, and rejection by their families. This creates an environment that contributes to their “disproportionate” health risk behaviors.

“If these kids had physically, emotion-ally acceptable environments—home, school, community, it’s unlikely that they would be practicing health risk behaviors at these rates,” she said. She noted that their increased risk of being involved in violent behaviors is “not because of who they are, but because of what they’re pushed into.” She explained, “It’s a response to the social disapproval, rejection, and bullying they may face.”

The CDC findings confirm previous studies conducted by other researchers, including the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network’s 2009 National School Climate Survey, which found that nearly 9 out of 10 LGBT students experienced harassment at school in the previous year and nearly two-thirds felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation.

Also, a study in the May 2011 issue of the Journal of School Health, by Dr. Stephen T. Russell, distinguished professor at the University of Arizona, and Dr. Caitlin Ryan, director of the Family Acceptance Project at San Francisco State University, found that anti-LGBT bullying at school “is strongly linked” to negative mental health for its victims. Among those risks are an increased frequency of suicide attempts and increased risk for engaging in behaviors that can lead to infection with STIs and HIV. The increased risks exist not only while the victim is in adolescence, but also in young adulthood.

Based on its report, the CDC recommends:

—Improving public health and school health policies and practices to create “safe and supportive environments for sexual minority students.” These policies might include ones to address stigma, discrimination, family disapproval, social rejection, and violence.

—Providing professional development programs for school staff and others who work with sexual minority youth.

—Adding questions about sexual identity and the sex of sexual contacts to youth risk behavior surveys in other states and districts. The CDC itself encourages states and districts to include such questions in their surveys, but does not require them to do so. In 2009, 10 states and seven large urban school districts added questions to their YRBS questionnaire about sexual identity, sex of sexual contacts, or both.

In addition to funding the surveys, the CDC provides funding and technical assistance to 49 states, the District of Columbia, 16 large urban school districts, six territories and one tribal government to help schools and school districts develop programs to reduce sexual risk behaviors among all youth.

Twenty-four state education agencies and 15 local education agencies used these funds in 2010 on specific activities to address LGBT youth, according to the CDC, including training staff on LGBT-inclusive health curricula, establishing gay-straight alliances and conferences, and developing guides to community resources for LGBT youth.

“If youth are going to thrive in their communities and in their schools,” Kann said, “they need to feel safe socially, emotionally, and physically. The schools and communities need to take concrete steps to establish these safe and supportive environments.”

She added, “I think this is a multifaceted problem that can be addressed at multiple levels.”

Congress is now considering eight bills that would help protect LGBT youth and reduce bullying and harassment of students because they are or are perceived to be LGBT. They include the Student Nondiscrimination Act, Safe Schools Improvement Act, and Tyler Clementi Higher Education Anti-Harassment Act in both chambers, and the Successful, Safe and Healthy Students Act and Reconnecting Youth to Prevent Homelessness Act in the Senate. The bill’s support stems from Republican-controlled House remains unlikely.

The CDC released its report in conjunction with the federal government’s first-ever summit convened to address LGBT Youth in Washington, D.C.

The event was hosted by the Department of Education, in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services.

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Chicagoans part of historic event with Obama

President Obama will be the keynote speaker at the LGBT Leadership Council Dinner on June 23 launching New York’s pride celebration. The event—with actor Neil Patrick hosting—will take place at the New York Sheraton & Towers.

Similar to one of his heroes (Abraham Lincoln), Obama will be remembered for “his courage in further realizing the maxim ‘all men are created equal,’” according to CommunityMatters.Biz. The gala will also support Obama’s re-election bid.

Chicagoans are playing a role in the event, as Wally Browser, Bat Satalavage and Chicago Cubs co-owner Laura Ricketts are among the co-chairs.

Laura Ricketts.

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North Stage  
Clark & Catalpa

Saturday
12:00 PM  Trowbridge Guitar Studio
1:00 PM  Lucy Smith
3:00 PM  The Right Now
5:00 PM  Chicago Afrobeat Project
7:00 PM  16 Candles

Sunday
11:00 AM  Quiet Science
1:00 PM  Curbside
2:30 PM  Chicago Spirit Brigade
3:00 PM  Chicago Samba
5:00 PM  Bumpus
7:00 PM  16 Candles

Center Stage  
Clark & Berwyn

Saturday
11:00 AM  Dayna Malow & Friends
1:00 PM  Devin & the Straights
2:30 PM  Chicago Spirit Brigade
3:00 PM  The Joans
5:00 PM  Lubriphonic
7:00 PM  Funkadesi

Sunday
11:00 AM  Deliverance Singers
2:00 PM  Gospel Brunch
3:30 PM  Windy City Cowboys
4:00 PM  Maggie Speaks
7:00 PM  Mike & Joe

Center Stage  
Clark & Berwyn

Saturday
11:00 AM  Opening Ceremony
11:45 AM  Traditional Maypole Dance
12:15 PM  SWEA Choir
12:40 PM  Swedish Male Chorus
1:05 PM  Nordic Folkdancers
1:25 PM  Chicago Spelmanslag

Sunday
12:00 PM  Nordland Band

Swedish Stage  
Clark & Foster

Sponsored by The Swedish American Museum

Saturday
11:30 AM  Opening Ceremony
11:45 AM  Traditional Maypole Dance
12:15 PM  SWEA Choir
12:40 PM  Swedish Male Chorus
1:05 PM  Nordic Folkdancers
1:25 PM  Chicago Spelmanslag

Sunday
12:00 PM  Andersonville Suzuki
1:00 PM  Charlie & The Chocolate Factory
2:00 PM  Dream Big Performing Arts
2:30 PM  The Revelettes
3:00 PM  Scribble Monster
4:00 PM  Little Nashville
6:00 PM  Al Rose
8:00 PM  Robbie Fulks w/Nora O’Connor

Summerdale Stage  
Clark & Summerdale

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Saturday
2:00 PM  Bakelite Army
4:00 PM  Shy Violet
6:00 PM  Rock Candy
8:00 PM  Hairbangers Ball

Sunday
2:00 PM  7th Heaven
4:00 PM  Hat Guys
6:00 PM  Afrodisiacs/Spazmatics
8:00 PM  Wedding Banned

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White House unveils AIDS plan

BY LISA KLEIN

After 30 years of the HIV/AIDS pandemic sweeping across the country, the White House held a conference call June 6 to discuss how they plan to move forward.

“The story of HIV is one of countless human lives,” said Kathleen Sebelius, secretary of health and human services.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that more than 1 million people are currently living with HIV in the United States with an estimated 56,300 new infections each year. AIDS has killed almost 600,000 people since its first appearance.

Last summer the Obama administration put together a comprehensive plan to combat the disease (the National HIV/AIDS Strategy, or NHAS), a first for the United States. Various goals have been set, all with the purpose of making new HIV infections a rarity and to ensure all infected people receive the proper care.

Jeffrey Crowley, director of the Office of National AIDS Policy, said President Obama is “deeply committed to ending the pandemic.”

Dr. Thomas Frieden, director of the CDC, reflected on the early days of the disease, when he said the CDC would be watching hundreds of people die with very little [he] could do for them.

Frieden said that the CDC will be working to expand testing and links to patient care. Frieden said condoms and annual testing offer the best protection, but “if you’re positive you can protect yourself and your community by getting treatment. We want everyone who’s HIV positive to have access.”

Jeffrey Crowley. Photo courtesy of Shin Inouye

White House comments on AIDS at 30

Washington, D.C.—Thirty years ago on June 5, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention first reported on the condition that would eventually become known as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection. Over the past three decades, HIV has emerged as a potent global pandemic, and today more than 33 million people around the world are living with HIV and more than two million deaths from Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) annually. Even today, more than 50,000 people in the United States are infected with HIV in the United States.

“The story of HIV is one of countless human lives,” said Kathleen Sebelius, secretary of health and human services.

Sebelius added that the administration hopes the new healthcare bill can be implemented quickly to get proper care to those living with HIV/AIDS.

Frieden said condoms and annual testing offer the best protection, but “if you’re positive you can protect yourself and your community by getting treatment. We want everyone who’s HIV positive to have access.”

Jeffrey Crowley. Photo courtesy of Shin Inouye

since the 1990s.

Frieden said that once people know they are infected, the chance of them spreading the disease decreases sharply. He also said that proper treatment decreases the risk of spread by 95 percent.

Mary Wakefield of the Health Resources and Services Administration spoke about the group’s Ryan White Program, which helps to get treatment and care for low-income people living with AIDS. $50 million in funding has been added to the program in 2011 to provide additional services like medication and mental health counseling at almost 1300 sites across the country.

Wakefield said this program “plays a crucial role in the president’s HIV/AIDS strategy.”

Medicaid Director Cindy Mann said that they just issued state guidelines for two new Medicaid programs that will also give HIV/AIDS patients more access to care, along with extra funding for the programs.

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BY ROSS FORMAN

TEL AVIV, ISRAEL—Perceptions can be hard to overcome.

Many Americans still view this Israeli city as it was years ago—not the safe, vibrant, fun, energetic city it is today.

It's also one that also is gay-friendly and accepting. In fact, it is very much so.

Tel Aviv boasts itself as the New York City of the Middle East—a lively, happening, non-stop city. I agree.

Tel Aviv is history and tradition meeting trendy and cutting-edge. It's museums, shopping, art and the beach. Yep, the beach—which runs along the shore line from north to south and is, arguably, the most beautiful aspect of this city.

Tel Aviv is amazing, but slim to none in other places in the country where they are very traditional, said Zohar Avigdori, 29, a Tel Aviv-based tour guide and educator. "Tel Aviv has a very big, vibrant gay community. I think Tel Aviv is leading by example for the rest of Israel to follow [its gay community]."

"Tel Aviv is a very accepting, very gay-friendly city—and that's the reason that a lot of gays come to Tel Aviv. It's the city's character and weather, the history, the culture, everything. Everything transmits openness and acceptance."

Everything gay in Tel Aviv anchors around the city's new, multi-story Municipal G.L.B.T. Community Center, known locally as the Proud Center, or HaMerkaz HaGe'e. "The Proud Center has an issue with immigration workers [and] so many Americans still view this Israeli city as it was years ago—not the safe, vibrant, fun, energetic city it is today.

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Everything gay in Tel Aviv anchors around the city's new, multi-story Municipal G.L.B.T. Community Center, known locally as the Proud Center, or HaMerkaz HaGe'e. "The Proud Center is the local version of Center On Halsted, where its monthly calendar of activities is as loaded, diverse and wide-ranging as the one we see at COH."

The Proud Center is, “one of the pinnacles of the city, somewhere that others can learn from—how a municipality gives [to a community],” Avigdori said.

The center has been 20 years in the making, the expansion of what was once a basement apartment gathering-spot for local LGBTs. It is also the site of the tragic, still-unsolved 2009 shooting that left two dead.

The Proud Center, "is an integral part of what Tel Aviv is," Avigdori said.

Tel Aviv is a booming, bustling major city. It is trendy and topical, and actually also tropical—sun, sun, sun. The beaches of the Mediterranean Sea are charming, inviting and loaded with hot bodies all year long.

Tel Aviv is the economic, cultural, and financial center in Israel—and also a 24/7 party town.

"There are still a lot of questions about what is [the LGBT] community's role in the city," Avigdori said. "Is it able to contribute as it did in the past in terms of openness of thought, of politics, in terms of art and more? Can it fight for its right and also acknowledge the injustice that is done to other sectors of society? Maybe it can lead the struggle on these issues as well."

"Tel Aviv has an issue with foreign workers; it has an issue with immigration workers [and] so..."
Local activists praise fed trans guidelines

BY KATE SOسين

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has produced a set of employment guidelines for federal transgender workers for the first time. “Guidance Regarding the Employment of Transgender Individuals in the Federal Workplace,” which was released late last month, covers everything from appropriate pronoun usage to insurance policy.

“This really now is the golden standard,” said Illinois-based psychologist and gender identity expert Dr. Randi Etter. “This is a landmark document.”

The policy, while not a legal document, mandates that transgender employees be able to transition on the job; use appropriate bathrooms; update their office records and insurance information; and be called by their preferred names and pronouns. According to the OPM website, the policy is based on the World Professional Association of Transgender Health standards of care.

“Over the last several years a number of agencies have requested that OPM provide them with information and advice concerning issues that may arise in connection with the employment of transgender individuals in the workplace,” the OPM website reads.

While the policy focuses heavily on transgender people who identify as only male or female (many transgender people do not identify as either), it is progressive in scope, mandating that transgender people be allowed to use bathrooms consistent with their identity without providing proof of medical procedure.

The guidelines also tackle one of the most commonly-reported fears among transgender professionals: the possibility of being outed at work. The policy states that “employing agencies, managers, and supervisors should be sensitive to these special concerns and advise employees not to spread information concerning the employee who is in transition: gossip and rumor-spreading in the workplace about gender identity are inappropriate.”

Etter works with many transgender clients and said that in many cases, transgender people complete transition medically and socially, but remain closeted at work for fear of being fired.

She also said that many trans people are not allowed to use preferred bathrooms at work.

According to the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce (NGLTF), unemployment among transgender people is double the national average, and half of all transgender workers responding to a recent NGLTF survey reported being harassed at work.

Last month, Windy City Times reported on the story of Meggan Sommerville, an Aurora woman who is suing her employer, Hobby Lobby, for denying her use of the women’s restroom despite the fact that she has completed her transition from male to female. Sommerville’s case represents a growing number of complaints about human resource policies that prevent transgender workers from maintaining employment.

Executive Director of The Civil Rights Agenda (TCRA) Anthony Martinez called the OPM policy “a great first step.” Martinez’s organization has advocated on behalf of at least five gender-variant workers as part of their Workplace Project, which connects clients to pro-bono legal services when they have experienced discrimination.

“What we find is that a lot of transgender people are dealing with a lot of the issues that this policy put out by the OPM brings up,” Martinez said. “These policies that the federal government is adopting are really going to help us in our cases.”

Etter believed the new federal policy will put pressure on private businesses to amend old discriminatory policies.

“It really spells out some of the important details that have been ambiguous in human resource policies,” Etter said. “There are some debilitating consequences for having to live in an insecure, marginalized situation and to be employed as such.”

However, Martinez was also quick to point out a flaw in the policy. While the document acknowledges that there are many ways to be transgender, he said, the guidelines themselves fail to deal with transgender people who do not want to medically transition or who are gender non-conforming. That, he said, will be the next battle.

Susan Stryker takes Ariz. post

BY JOYCE BOLINGER

Susan Stryker, a leading scholar of transgender theory and history, has been named director of the University of Arizona’s (UA) Institute of LGBT Studies in Tucson.

Stryker replaces the current director, Dr. Eithne Luibheid, who returns to the faculty of the university’s department of gender and women’s studies. Luibheid is nationally known for her research about LGBTQ immigration.

Under Luibheid’s leadership, the Institute for LGBT Studies was formally established Oct. 11, 2007. (There was previously a committee on LGBT studies.) It is one of only a handful of such institutes in the country.

Stryker is an author, filmmaker, archivist and activist whose documentary, Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton’s Cafeteria (2005) told the story of the first known instance of collective militant queer resistance to police harassment in U.S. history. Led by transsexuals and drag queens, the San Francisco incident in 1966 preceded the better-known New York Stonewall riots by three years. The film was co-produced and co-directed with Victor Silverman for the Public Broadcasting System.

Her goals include increasing funding for programming such as conferences that produce publications and festivals that build excitement and interest about LGBT history and issues.

Read the entire article online at http://www.WindyCityMediaGroup.com.
Redistricting favors gay state reps

BY ERICA DEMAREST

The Illinois General Assembly signed off this week on Democrat-drawn redistricting maps that will secure the state’s three openly gay representatives’ seats, and could pave the way for progressive political victories in the coming decade.

Though district boundaries throughout the state fluctuated in response to population shifts, Chicago’s Lakefront districts—home to Illinois’ three openly gay legislators—remained remarkably similar. That means, when Deb Mell (40th), Kelly Cassidy (14th) and Greg Harris (13th) run for re-election in 2012, they’ll have the advantage of campaigning on home turf.

“As a whole, we’re representing the same community areas, the same neighborhoods, the same population that we’ve traditionally represented,” Harris said, “so that’s good for continuity. Largely, the districts will remain intact.”

Since Democrats hold majorities in the Illinois Senate and House of Representatives, the 2011 redistricting process was relatively one-sided. Republicans did propose a map that would’ve created more majority-Latino districts and somewhat more Republican districts, passed the Illinois House with a 64-52 vote and the Senate 35-22. Gov. Pat Quinn is expected to approve the Democratic map this month, which consolidates Democratic power and seeks to reverse recent GOP gains by combining Republican districts, passed the Illinois House with a 64-52 vote and the Senate 35-22. Gov. Pat Quinn is expected to approve the Democratic map this month.

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How districts are redrawn this year will shape Illinois’ political landscape for the next 10 years, and queer activists are hoping to capitalize on that. The Civil Rights Agenda (TCRA), for instance, is working to elect more openly gay candidates in key districts and motivate newly formed progressive voting blocs on issues such as marriage equality and women’s reproductive rights.

“We’re trying to look at the lay of the land and put our best foot forward as the LGBT community,” said Anthony Martinez, TCRA’s executive director, “specifically with the 2012 election when there’s going to be a lot of organizing around progressive causes and equality causes.”

The TCRA has already identified two districts that seem particularly queer-friendly—one in Lake County and one near Springfield—and has begun organizing grassroots campaigns to elect queer politicians in those areas. The organization hopes to help finance campaigns with its political action fund.

Vital Bridges to merge with Heartland Alliance

BY KATE SOSIN

Vital Bridges clients will soon have access to a range of new services. The 23-year-old AIDS service agency will merge with Heartland Alliance July 1.

Vital Bridges announced the development June 1.

“Joining Heartland will help us to do this even more successfully, as they have a large, professional medical and behavioral health staff,” Debbie Hinde, president and CEO of Vital Bridges, said in a statement. “Both organizations are committed to developing and implementing a chronic care model that integrates health care and the social services.”

Vital Bridges will keep its Edgewater office, but the agency will become a division of Heartland Health Outreach and be renamed “Vital Bridges Center on Chronic Care.” According to the statement, Vital Bridges will maintain all of their services, and staff will remain the same.

Vital Bridges is the largest provider of food and nutrition services in Chicago. The agency serves more than 2,000 clients annually, according to its website. Heartland Alliance provides medical care to patients with HIV/AIDS, among other services.

“We’re excited about the opportunities this brings about for the City of Chicago,” said Karen Batia, the Executive Director of Heartland Health Outreach. “[Clients] can go to one place and get those services. It means those organizations can do what they’re really excellent at together.”

According to the statement, the boards of directors of both organizations voted to approve the merger late last month.

While AIDS services organizations have suffered in the poor economy, Batia said the merger was more “strategic” than financial.

“It should make the quality of services improve,” Batia said, adding that the Vital Bridges Center on Chronic Care will now be a one-stop care destination for many living with HIV.

However, Batia also said that the merger could make Vital Bridges a more attractive grantee because it will serve clients in a more holistically.
Affinity launches fundraising campaign

BY ERICA DEMAREST

It all started with a parade. In 1993, Lisa Marie Pickens and her then-partner ran a support group for Black queer women out of their Hyde Park home. The African American Womyn’s Alliance, as it was known, hosted monthly events and distributed newsletters promoting women’s and queer rights. “We thought we were the only Black lesbians on the South Side,” Pickens says with a laugh. “And, of course, we were not.”

The couple soon found dozens of like-minded women and pieced together a plan to walk in the Bud Billiken parade. With a two-mile-long route that weaves through Washington Park, Bud Billiken is the oldest and biggest African-American parade in the United States. Pickens submitted via certified mail a parade application that clearly stated the group’s sexual orientation. It was rejected. She then submitted a second application—late, crumpled and purposefully ambiguous. It was accepted.

The Womyn’s Alliance alleged discrimination, challenged the decision denying them the right to walk, and won. Fresh off their parade success, the burgeoning activists met with friends and allies to plot their next move. “We thought it would be great to create something like [Horizons or the Center on Halsted] on the South Side of the city,” Pickens said. “That’s kind of how Affinity was born, with people really wanting to be who they were in their own communities, and making sure there were resources available in their own communities.”

Affinity is a Chicago-based social-justice organization that works on behalf of Black LGBT communities, focusing on health and youth issues. It celebrated its 16th anniversary this year, but still doesn’t have a permanent home—and it’s working to change that. The nonprofit recently launched a fundraising campaign to raise $40,000 by the end of July. Executive Director Kim Hunt said Affinity has its eye on an undisclosed commercial space in Hyde Park that it’ll share with two other nonprofits—each of which works with women of color and the queer community. If plans succeed, Affinity’s as-yet-unnamed center will be the first and only LGBT resource facility on the South Side.

“We think that the community really feels its time for such a space on the South Side of the city,” said Pickens, who co-founded Affinity and serves as its board president. The organization has been renting space in a Unitarian church for several years, but recently outgrew the 1,200-square-foot location. Its new home will total more than 6,000 square feet.

“For community groups, this is a real issue,” Hunt said. “So many grassroots organizations don’t have spaces of their own. These are kind of kitchen table operations that are doing such incredible work with so few resources. That’s one of the things we’re so excited about.” With a larger space, Hunt said, Affinity will not only improve its existing programming, but also create new initiatives.

One of the organization’s hallmark programs, for instance, is Its Youth Leadership Institute. Formerly known as Affinity’s youth program, the organization’s annual Youth Summit. In a larger venue, Hunt said, Affinity can open its doors to even more young leaders while maintaining a youth lounge and drop-in center. Younger community members will be able to take part in organized programming or simply enjoy a safe space.

The organization is also looking to expand healthcare services. “We think that mental health is an area that’s been neglected, both in the larger African American community and certainly the LGBTQ community,” said Pickens. “One of the things I’m most excited about is having space to allow to offer mental health services to community members in group settings.”

Affinity has identified $40,000 as the amount needed to cover moving and start-up costs, while simultaneously creating a cushion for its impending rent increase, which will be steep. The organization will host several fundraising events over the course of the next two months, and its progress will be tracked with a thermometer on its website.

On June 10, Affinity is sponsoring “From Rags to Riches: A Benefit for Affinity Community Services,” which will feature an art sale, raffle and open mic performances. Suggested donation is $15.

State Rep. Mark Beaubien dies


Beaubien, 68, collapsed at a House Republican fundraiser at Arlington Racetrack. According to IlHouseGOP.org, Beaubien received his B.A. degree from Northwestern University in 1966 and his J.D. from the Northwestern University School of Law in 1967. Beaubien and his wife, Dee, had been married for more than four decades and have two sons and five grandchildren.

“He will be sorely missed,” said Lowell Jaffe, political and policy director for The Civil Rights Agenda (TCRA), said in a statement. “Representative Beaubien was a statesman, he voted his conscience and wasn’t afraid of the prevailing political winds.

“It’s particularly sad as we celebrate the enactment of civil unions, the votes were close and he spoke with Republicans who were afraid to do the right thing out of fear of opposition in the next primary election. Ironically, I was in his district today, enjoying the beach in Wisconsin. The people there are fiercely independent and I hope Republican leadership respects his legacy by appointing a replacement that honors his commitment to civil rights.

“This is truly a tragic loss for Illinois,” said Anthony Martinez, TCRA’s executive director. “I recall the time that Representative Beaubien stood in support of Representative Deb Mell after she announced her engagement to longtime partner Christin Baker on the floor of the Illinois House of Representatives. He stood for the will of the people and that is the mark of a true Representative. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family.”

Gay Republican David Vallaena, a Chicagoan, posted on Facebook: “Mark listened to me as well as thousands of Illinois’ gay, lesbian and bisexual citizens. He heard and understood the need to allow all Illinoisans to be equal. He made a promise to me three years ago in the hallway behind his Capital Building office that he delivered upon [Nov. 30, 2010] with the bravery to be the casting Republican vote for contactual civil unions.

“I saw Mark at a political function a few months ago and once again thanked him for his vote on civil unions. He replied back to me what I knew he would. He said, ‘I was the right thing to do, you know that as well as I do, and hopefully the rest of America will come to realize it sooner than later.’

“Mark was a good and honorable man. The world is a better and changed place because he had the bravery to reach up and grab the moral arc of the universe and help pull it toward justice. I will miss him dearly.”

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OPALGA reaches crossroads

BY STEVEN CHAITMAN

Serious questions about the future of the Oak Park Area Lesbian and Gay Association (OPALGA) have arisen lately, including whether the group should continue to exist. At a year of fund-raising to clear itself of debt, the community-based LGBT nonprofit and its board of directors recently found itself scrambling to identify its purpose.

At one of two annual membership meetings, held May 5, approximately 40 members discussed the focus of OPALGA going forward. Board of Directors Co-Chair Greg Raub said that addressing the question of whether the organization should dissolve helped frame the discussion at the meeting.

“Now that we’re not just focused on fund-raising, is there still a reason for an organization like this to exist?” Raub said. “We wanted to pose that question to our members. No one expected the organization to shut down, but it was more of just a way to say ‘Let’s get together and talk about where do we go from here.’”

OPALGA formed in 1989 to unite members of the local LGBTQ community, provide group support in the form of programs and services and advocate for non-discrimination both locally as well as in Chicago and Illinois. One of its chief accomplishments was amending Oak Park’s Human Rights Ordinance to prevent discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment, housing and public accommodations.

In 2009, the organization closed its meeting space and focused primarily on settling its debt. Programs, such as Women Like Me, a group for women who have come out after heterosexual relationships were relocated. Women Like Me became part of the Lesbian Community Care Project at the Howard Brown Health Center.

After a successful annual gala fundraiser back in the fall, Board of Directors Co-Chair Cheryl Johnson also said that the group is working on a membership book to improve communication.

In the immediate future, OPALGA remains dedicated to one of its annual traditions: selling doughnuts at the Oak Park Farmer’s Market on Saturday June 4. Volunteers for “Donut Day” are still needed; email Ray Johnson at info@opalga.org for more information.

OPALGA will hold a pot-luck dinner Friday, June 10, at Al Maresso, 911 Hayes, Oak Park, 7–9 p.m. See “OPALGA’s June Potluck” on Facebook for more information.

OPALGA’s June Potluck

**Get Fit With Us**

Frontrunners/Frontwalkers meet every Tuesday and Saturday at the Totem Pole at Addison and Lake Shore Drive.

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<th>Tuesdays 6:30PM</th>
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*Except for these special Saturday events:
June 9: Meet at Universal Sole, 3052 N Lincoln, 9:00am (Free pancakes for participants afterwards)
June 26: Proud To Run, Montrose Harbor

**Edgewater society unveils PRIDE exhibit**

BY TERRENCE CHAPPELL

The Edgewater Historical Society (EHS) premiered its first LGBT exhibit, Edgewater PRIDE: Oppression to Expression—which focuses on the accomplishments, milestones, and notables of the LGBT movement—June 3.

Through newspaper clippings, bios, memorabilia and other historic staples, the exhibit features a visual storyline that follows and toasts the LGBT movement. EHS offered visitors the opportunity to look at the early days of the movement, politics, the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame, friends of the community, businesses, organizations, and the arts.

EHS Chair Will Rye, who also sits on the society’s board, said, “Edgewater is a very diverse and welcoming community. The LGBT community has been here a long time, so I saw this as a great way to talk about the history and political activism of the community, all of which makes Edgewater what it is today.”

The Gerber/Hart Library donated certain pieces for inclusion into the exhibit. Kathy Gempel, vice president of EHS, acted as the curator for the event. Gempel said she developed a storyline approach for the pieces versus a chronological one because she felt a storyline one provided a better grasp and inside look into the LGBT movement.

“As the curator for this exhibit, I learned that there was an incredible amount of energy given to trying to get people their rights, fairness; people respond to social issues with just not collecting votes, but also artistic, creative responses. There’s just different ways to step up in your community and makes things happen,” said Gempel.

Famous local magazine covers, event posters and headshots of influential policy makers are all part of the exhibit—including Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame 2012 nominee Shelil Lukin, who is featured in the “Friends of the community” section. Although Lukin said she was honored to be a part of the exhibit, she felt that her work is nowhere near done in the LGBT political movement and believed that people have a lot more in common than they think.

“There are certain groups who hate everyone; they hate Jews, Blacks and gays. The important thing that we all have to remember that when hatred comes down the road, we all have to stick together,” said Lukin.

The exhibit will be open to the public through Sept. 15. On Saturday, June 18, at 10 a.m. at the North Shore Baptist Church, 5244 N. Lakewood, there will be a panel with community leaders on the political background of the LGBT movement on the North Side; Crain’s Chicago political editor Greg Hinz will moderate.

See http://www.edgewaterhistory.org for more information.
PFLAG’s ‘Heartland’ gala

June 2 at Chicago’s Hotel Palomar to celebrate three individuals for their work in the LGBT community.

The three honorees were Affinity Community Services Executive Director Kim L. Hunt; Chicago Police Department LGBT Liaison Officer Jose Rios, and state Rep. Greg Harris, who sponsored the new civil-unions law in the Illinois House.

Well-known comedian and Queer As Folk star Hal Sparks hosted the event. At one point, he said, “We live in a country where fat is genetic but gay is a choice.” He also said, “The states are ahead of the federal government and that is the way it has to be.”

Sparks and the three honorees agreed that PFLAG was an important resource for the LGBT community and they were honored to receive recognition from the organization. “We feel that PFLAG is a very important resource for anyone who identifies with being LGBT,” Hunt said.

Rios was unable to attend the ceremony but had provided a video speech. “I would especially like to thank PFLAG for recognizing the work I do in the community,” he said.

Harris said, “PFLAG was a mighty force in moving this forward. People went door to door with petitions. They made this happen. Freedom is never free. It must be earned and it must be fought for. I look forward to fighting for equality in this state and in this country.”

Even though the event was filled with individuals who were excited at the recent successes of the community they all still recognize that the struggle is not over. “Let’s work together to move this effort forward in every state, every city, every community. Only then will truly have equality,” PFLAG Executive Director Jody Huckaby

PFLAG National President Emeritus John Cepek added, “The heartland is where the LGBT equality movement will be won and PFLAG will be here to see that victory.” Text by Courtney Ruholl and photos by Hal Baim; more online at http://www.WindyCityMediaGroup.com

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Photography: Lehto/Life.Style, River North Dance Chicago
Chicago to run transgender TV show

BY KATE SOSIN

Chicago may soon get due credit for having one of the most active and diverse transgender populations in the country. Locally based cable production company Towers Productions is looking for transgender youth for a new TV series, slated to air as soon as early next year.

The series, still in early stages of development, will follow between four and seven transgender people 18-24 as they navigate life in the city. “We’re looking for fascinating personal stories,” said Towers Productions VP of Development and Executive Director Mike Schmiedeler. Schmiedeler and crew are working with the West Side AIDS prevention organization, Taskforce Prevention and Community Services, to cast young Chicagoans for the show. The organization was featured on a Towers Production series in 2006 called Runaways, which aired on MSNBC. That series followed a young transgender Chicagoan, Angie, who went to Taskforce for services. According to Schmiedeler, Angie’s story elicited the strongest reaction from audiences.

Producers were like ‘Man, I could make a whole series just on Angie,’” Schmiedeler said. “That idea kind of stuck with us.”

Alicia Ozier, the executive director of Taskforce Prevention and Community Services, is casting the series, saying she hopes the show will be an opportunity to educate mainstream audiences on transgender issues.

“It’s still difficult for youth to be accepted within their churches, within their communities,” Ozier said. “In this case, I think that it will be an opportunity for the larger community to learn.”

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Gay and lesbian survey studies have opened doors and minds in leading corporations and organizations, which in turn have recognized the value of their LGBT employees through the implementation of equal benefits and other policies and practices. These companies have been a catalyst, leading to sweeping changes in national and local legislation.

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Taking an annual pulse on market trends through surveys helps demonstrate the LGBT community’s growing power, and influences positive change.

We respect your privacy. All personal survey data is held securely by Community Marketing, Inc., a gay-owned and operated, independent market research and communications firm based in San Francisco, and will not be sold to third parties or used for marketing purposes. CRM was founded in 2002 and is proudly NGLCC-Certified. Thank you!

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Celebrations

Couples get civil-union licenses

BY ANDREW DAVIS

Dozens of same-sex couples lined up outside the Vital Records office at the Daley Center June 1 as the Cook County Clerk’s office began offering civil-union licenses at 7:30 a.m.

One couple, Rosalind and Betsy, told Windy City Times that “it’s a really happy day because we can get at least some of the rights as heterosexual couples.” Betsy recounted popping the question, as Rosalind cried: “I surprised her. I was going out of town for the weekend and we love Shaw’s Oyster Bar [in Schaumburg]. I got some flowers and I know the bartender. She thought I was just giving her flowers because I was going out of town, but I gave her the ring—and I thought she was going to pass out.”

The couple, who actually met through the dating agency In Good Company four years ago, said they arrived at the office at 6:30 a.m. (It opened at 7:30 a.m. to start distributing the licenses.)

The first couple to get a license was Janean Latricia Watkins and Lakeesha Harris. As they received their license, the administering county employee started to cry—and then the couple did so as well.

Officials then ushered Watkins and Harris into a reception room filled with gifts donated by 20 local businesses and organizations, including Eli’s Cheesecake, Lambda Legal, Crew Bar + Grill and the Goodman Theatre.

In the room, Watkins told reporters, “We’re overwhelmed. I’ve never seen [Lakeesha] cry over something like this. It means a lot to us.” Harris added, “I’m just overwhelmed with emotion right now. ... This has been a long, long road. So many activists have worked for so many years in the state of Illinois, I just want you guys to know that we appreciate you.”

Watkins then said, “We all appreciate everybody who’s worked so hard to get this done—all of the hours of tailing over how we’re going to make sure people understand our family...”

“We’ve been through every worst-case scenario in our minds, [such as] who would take our kids if something happened,” Harris said. She then thanked state Reps. Greg Harris and Deb Mell for their parts in getting the civil-union measure passed.

“Thank you so much,” Watkins echoed. “They plan to take part in the June 2 Millennium Park mass civil-union ceremony. Civil-union licenses will be available to same-sex and heterosexual couples. All couples need to meet the following criteria:

—Be at least 18 years old;
—Not be related to one another;
—Have valid, current identification, such as a driver’s license, state ID or U.S. passport;
—Pay a $35 license application fee. (Personal checks and Visa will not be accepted.)
—Not be related to one another;
—Have valid, current identification, such as a driver’s license, state ID or U.S. passport;
—Pay a $35 license application fee. (Personal checks and Visa will not be accepted.)
—Couples who are currently registered as domestic partners in Cook County will receive a $20 discount and their domestic partnership will be automatically dissolved.

A variety of sponsors provided some wonderful gifts for the new civil union license recipients.

Photos by Andrew Davis
The morning started off chilly and gray, but by the time the first civil union was declared at 10:13 a.m. on June 2, the sun had come out and the ground on Millennium Park’s Wrigley Square had been littered with rose petals. The event, “Unions in the Park” was an unqualified success, with dozens of media covering the event.

“I promise to truly see you and hear you, holding our bond above all others,” Nicole Bechaka told Staci Slattery in front of their family and friends. Moments later, a circuit court judge declared them spouses.

Emotions ran high as an estimated 36 same-sex couples were unionized before a crowd of hundreds, just one day after the Illinois Religious Freedom Protect and Civil Union Act granted state recognition to Illinois same-sex couples for the first time.

Quadree Holmes shook tearfully as he was unionized with his partner, Troy. Vernita Gray smiled wide-eyed as she exchanged rings with her partner, Pat Ewert. Jim Darby seemed to bounce giddily as he was joined with Patrick Bova, his partner of 47 years.

“To be here not protesting, here in the sunlight in Millennium Park in front of the mayor and governor, it really is remarkable,” said Art Johnston, a founder of Equality Illinois and owner of Lake View’s Sidetrack bar. Johnston got a civil union with his partner of 38 years, José (Pepe) Peña.

The Chicago Gay Men’s Chorus kicked off the ceremonies and a string quartet from Stitely Entertainment provided background music before the ceremonies.

Several public officials attended the event. Among them were openly gay state Reps. Greg Harris and Deborah Mell, who sponsored the civil-union bill in the House, and new Rep, Kelly Cassidy; openly gay Ald. James Cappelman and Tom Tunney; Lieutenant Gov. Sheila Simon; and Circuit Court Clerk Dorothy Brown.

Jeff Zacharias said he and his partner, Brad Easton, decided to get a civil union in Millennium Park because they want show the world what families can look like. The couple has a 14-year-old together, and their parents came to witness the big day.

Longtime LGBT activist Vernita Gray said that, for her, the day had been a long time coming. “I’ve been thinking about this day since 1969 … that’s when I came out,” she said. Gray looked around the park, “I can barely blink. I can’t stop looking,” she said laughing. “There’s more people getting married here than I marched with in the first gay pride parade.”

Among those unionized were Mona Noriega, the newly appointed Commissioner of the Department on Human Relations and her partner Evette Cardona who co-founded Amigas Latinas. Steve McDonagh and Dan Smith, known professionally as culinary specialists The Hearty Boys, were also joined, as were Janean Watkins and Lakeshea Harris, the first Chicago couple to obtain civil-union licenses June 1.

At the far end of the park, at Michigan Avenue and Washington Street, a handful of protesters stood quietly protected by police with anti-gay banners in hand. Few paid them any attention, and some attendees even remarked that they were relieved that protesters didn’t show, illustrating how little impact the protests had on the day’s festivities.

Gov. Pat Quinn was on hand to congratulate the newly appointed Commissioner of the Department on Human Relations and her partner Evette Cardona who co-founded Amigas Latinas. Steve McDonagh and Dan Smith, known professionally as culinary specialists The Hearty Boys, were also joined, as were Janean Watkins and Lakeshea Harris, the first Chicago couple to obtain civil-union licenses June 1.

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The list of couples participating in the June 2, 2011 Unions in the Park event is below. Several couples were allowed to join at the last minute, so the formal number of those getting unions was either 35 or 36.

Speakers included Jim Bennett of Lambda Legal announcing the couples and emcee Gaylon Alcaraz, representing the Advisory Council. Bill Greaves, director of the Advisory Council, was also among the event organizers.

The officiants were judges of the Circuit Court of Cook County, led by Chief Judge Timothy Evans. The others were judges who are part of the LGBT group Alliance of Illinois Judges, with President Jim Snyder and Vice President Colleen Sheehan. Other judges officiating: retired Judge Tom Chiola, Stuart Katz, Patricia Logue, Michael McHale, Mary Colleen Roberts, Andrea Schleifer, Lori Wolfson and Mary Trew. Rev. Laura McLeod also officiated.

The couples “united” were:

- Frank Baiocchi and Robert Hunt
- Jenny Blake and Susan Blake
- Kimberly Broach and Hadasaw Price
- James Darby and Patrick Bova
- Paul Dombrowski and Joe Serio
- Bradd Easton and Jeff Zacharias
- Shirley Lee Edwards and Rev. Brenda Lee
- Jaime Garcia and Daryl Rizzo
- Ted Grady and Dr. Ross Slotten
- Vemilta Gray and Pat Ewert
- Laura Hartman and Anne Dickey
- Monica Henao and Mireya Hurtado
- Qadree Holmes and Troy Holmes
- Arthur Johnston and Josi (Pepe) Peña
- Angelica Lopez and Claudia Mercado
- Steve McDonagh and Dan Smith
- Shanelle Moffet and Tenisha Watkins
- Allen Nichols and Jef Johnsen
- Mona Noriega and Evette Cardona
- Nichole Pagano and Jamie Pagano
- Erica Peterson and Wanda McDaniel
- Myra Rodriguez and Janiea Rivera
- Julia Rodriguez and David Sinski
- Mercedes Santos and Theresa Volpe
- Carla Shaw and Karen Behen
- Diana Shull and Margaret Burke
- Staci Slatterly and Nichole Bechak
- Gillian Smith and Sarah Conner
- Tiffany Thomas and Audrey Thomas
- Janean Watkins and Lakesha Harris
- Roy Wesley and Mark Weber
- Connie Woodson and Regina Peoples

Additional couples added included:
- John Pennycuff and Robert Castillo
- Yvonne Zipter and Kathy Forde

Couples at the June 2 ‘Unions in the Park’ event

Got something to celebrate? Send us information on your civil union, anniversary, adoption, marriage or any other joyous moment in life to appear in our new section, Celebrations. Please send an email to andrew@windycitymediagroup.com and let Windy City Times join in your celebration.
Forty-three LGBT couples gathered on the steps leading up to the Chicago History Museum Friday June 3 to be a part of the newest milestone in Illinois’ history by joining together in civil unions.

The event, a fundraiser for The Civil Rights Agenda (TCRA), was called “Unite with Pride,” and that sentiment was present in all of the couples and guests.

“I was blown away,” said attendee and longtime activist Rick Garcia. He emailed Windy City Times after going to a few other civil-union ceremonies he thought he was “all cried out.” However, he added, “I hadn’t even started.”

Judge Mary Trew of the Ninth Judicial Subcircuit, herself a member of the LGBT community, officiated the ceremony. She said civil unions were “our state’s way of recognizing that two people, regardless of gender, can come together.”

After a performance from the Chicago Gay Men’s Chorus and opening words from Trew, leaders from different faiths—including Evangelical Catholic, Baptist and Unitarian—offered their blessings.

“The church was present in grand style,” Garcia stated.

All of the couples then joined hands and faced each other to exchange vows and rings. After the ceremony each couple walked down the aisle to the applause of their friends and families.

Guests enjoyed hors d’oeuvres and drinks and were able to tour the museum’s “Out in Chicago” exhibit (complete with the first issue of The Windy City Times). The judge and religious leaders signed the new civil union licenses in the foyer, where portraits of the happy couples were also taken. A DJ got the crowd dancing after a champagne toast.

In the program, the Civil Rights Agenda, who’s been fighting in Springfield to pass the Civil Union Act, said the event celebrated “a great advance in our civil rights in Illinois.” Unite With Pride was a perfect way to recognize the long-awaited and historic occasion.

Text by Lisa Klein and photos by Kat Fitzgerald (MysticImagesPhotography.com); many more online at http://www.windyCityMediaGroup.com
Catalyst gets civil-union ball rolling
June 2

Six same-sex couples were treated to a free civil-union ceremony and wedding celebration at Chicago's Catalyst Ranch, compliments of 16 Chicago-area wedding vendors.

The couples, who were selected via a Facebook contest, were joined in a group ceremony exactly one minute after midnight June 2 in front of friends and family members. The couples and their guests enjoyed full services, free of charge, from wedding vendors such as Jeremy Lawson Photography, Toast & Jam DJs, Entertaining Company Catering, Pollen Floral and Bleeding Heart Bakery. Images by Jeremy Lawson Photography.
BOOKS

John D’Emilio on Allan Berube’s ‘Desire for History’

BY YASMIN NAIR

The late gay community historian Allan Bérubé is best known for his revelatory book, Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II. His unexpected death in 2007 left unfinished a major research project on the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union (MCSU). The MCSU eventually disbanded after a ferocious anti-Communist and anti-union campaign was historic for a number of reasons, the most prominent among them being that it was a fiercely interracial union committed to both a class solidarity and cross-class cooperation. After his death, two of his closest friends, John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman, set about undertaking over the course of his life. D’Emilio, would showcase the variety of research he had undertaken over the course of his life. D’Emilio, was among the first, if not the first, to write about the MCSU. He was writing which is: to see this radical union as a queer-friendly place in the 1930s where people knew that many of the members were queer-identified in some way or another, and they were totally integrated into the union and the politics of the union.

YN: There’s an interesting autobiographical detail [connected to what he writes about his class anxiety] about his father, who he describes in terms of how “his need to justify his existence by satisfying his bosses, and his sacrifice of himself through hard work to make our lives better, slowly killed him with a lifetime of stomach ulcers and finally with cancer.” Bérubé died from ruptured stomach ulcers at around the same age as his father had been at the time of his death.

JD: Yes. We don’t inherit them genetically, but we inherit the emotional worries of our families. Allan had this one moment, when he got the MacArthur Fellowship, which gave him 60,000 for five years and, literally, for the first time in his life, there were no financial worries. But he lived his life worrying about how he would support himself and do his work. And eventually it took him.

YN: Given how academia is now, in terms of the formalization of the production of queer knowledge and queer history, do you think it’s possible for someone like Allan Bérubé to emerge? It was difficult enough for him: it took a long and hard time to produce his body of work, and he worked independently at it from the start, developing and taking around his slide presentations, working on his research.

JD: Yes, there could still be a new Allan today, it’s just that there could never be too many of those people because living the life of a freelancer unattached to institutions, without a family background that supports you, is always very difficult. While Allan wasn’t unique, he was practically unique. So there could be another Allan, unfortunately there aren’t going to be many because this is one of the things we mean by class in America.

YN: Right, a reality which we deny, as he points out in “Class Dismissed,” where he writes that “In the United States, the idea of “middleclassness” is used as a powerful disciplinary practice that confuses class relations, denies the existence of class...thwarts class solidarity and cross-class cooperation and mobilizes racial sentiments.”

[In the context of his class analysis and work on academic production], do you think that his sort of work is more likely to be sustained within conventional academic networks, which also means you have to learn a way of presenting history? It’s not that Bérubé wasn’t an excellent and rigorous historian [but I’m wondering about how historical production gets marked]...

JD: I see what you’re saying. The nice thing about universities being open about this kind of work in LGBT history is that you can do the work, you can be employed, students can come to school and learn about this and they can take courses in it as part of their education. The down side is that the pressure in that world to write what you write, in a way that you’re speaking to other people in that world rather than to a public, is very, very great and if you don’t have community connections or the experience of starting this work in the context of community life, it’s very hard to do.

And so that’s the down side—the price of inclusion is that borders get erected around who your audience will be. Allan was always speaking to community audiences. Even when he spoke at academic conferences, there was nothing pretentious, he was not framing it in a theoretical language that is the language of the privileged. We used to talk about this all the time because I try to do the same thing: I always try to write in a way that you don’t have to read a whole lot of other things in order to read what I write. I’m not trying to address my academic peers, I’m writing for a public audience.

Read much more of this interview online at http://www.WindyCityMediaGroup.com.
It was a cold December night when a friend asked Welder Ramiro Vasquez to go with him to a local bar. Vasquez didn’t want to leave the comforts of his warm home and now jokes that he basically was forced to go out that evening.

That’s when, where and how Vasquez met Chris Boisselle—and the two hit it off, immediately. Boisselle called Vasquez the next day and arranged their first date.

Four years later, they are the happy couple, four years together.

“I made a good impression that night, I guess,” Vasquez said, laughing. “If I hadn’t gone out that night, we probably never would have met. It’s very serendipitous.

“I thank my friend every day.”

Vasquez is a visual artist, with a small studio inside their third-floor apartment. Boisselle, 27, originally from Chicopee, Mass., is a family practice doctor at Illinois Masonic Hospital.

Vasquez has been painting since elementary school, when he joined the school’s art club and begged his parents to continually buy him art supplies.

He has completed more than 40 paintings of various sizes. He also draws, sketches and sculpts.

His largest painting measures about 58x32 inches and offers his rendition of the Old Town neighborhood.

“I’m developing my own style, and it’s still evolving,” Vasquez said. “It’s now more abstract than it once was. More fluid, more loose.

“I’m trying to figure out who I am as a person, and then translate that into my art.”

Vasquez spends 20 or 30 hours on every painting, often grinding out five-hour shifts. His paintings cost about $500 on average and are available on his website, http://www.welderramiro.com. They are acrylic- or oil-based, and he always hangs his work in his home before selling them, to see how they may look in others’ homes.

He regularly paints cityscapes. In fact, he often walks around Chicago, never worrying if he’s lost, and then finds a spot that he wants to paint. So, he takes a photo of the location with his cell phone and the process has begun—if he doesn’t have painting supplies with him at the time. “I try to take advantage of all this city has to offer,” he said. “It’s fun incorporating all of my hobbies—exploring, painting and going out for lunch.”

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Moscow Pride: A response to Obama’s statement

The first and most important thing that needs to be said is that we are very fortunate that no LGBT activists exercising their right to peaceably assemble were killed near Red Square on May 28.

While Western media sources have made a great deal out of the fact that a few visiting Western activists got some minor injuries at the hands of the police or fascists, they have been virtually silent about the fact that a leading Russian transgender activist, Anna Komarova, a longtime member of the GayRussia organization, was kicked three or four times in the head while he lay on the pavement and, due only to good fortune, was not seriously injured or killed.

Another participant, Elena Kostyuchkina—a nun with Novaya Gazeta newspaper who came out of the closet as a lesbian on that day, joining the protest with her rainbow flag—was still hospitalized as of my last information from Moscow by May 30. I do not know the nature of her injuries, or the prognosis for her recovery.

The primary responsibilities for these near-tragedies lies with the fascists, who were charged with only minor crimes, and the Russian government that allowed the serious crimes of assault and attempted murder to occur, despite possessing overwhelming force. These crimes did not occur in some back alleyway or obscure side street, but in broad daylight literally about 50 yards away from Red Square.

Secondary responsibility for these crimes lies with all of those non-Russian governments, including the Obama administration, which valued their trade and military relationships with the Russian government over speaking out for human rights. President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton—who are fond of talking to the Russian Pride organizers directly appealed to all Western embassies to issue public statements to the Russian government before the protest.

All of these governments, including the Obama administration, failed to do so. The U.S. embassy told Pride organizers that they would simply “monitor the situation.” As a result, the Russian riot police apparently felt that they had a free hand to conduct themselves in the same brutal manner as at previous Prides.

The U.S. embassy in Moscow did finally issue a brief statement after the attacks on Moscow Pride only after the event, signed by a lesser State Department official (http://ipolitical. usembassy.gov/eng/texttrans/2011/05/20110531095808us6.131709e-02.html?CP. rcss=trueazziN nihilOG). In Western news articles, the roles of myself, Dan Choi and other international activists in Moscow Pride 2011 were magnified out of all proportion to our actual impact. LGBT Russians suffered the greatest degree of violence and took far by far the greatest risks—and continue to do so—and yet their sufferings have gone almost totally unnoticed by the international press. The least we can do as people in the West is speak out about impending violence before it happens, and thus help forestall that violence.

LGBT rights activist Andy Thayer is president of the Chicago organization Gay liberation Network.

Send letters and viewpoints to Andrew@WindyCity MediaGroup.com. Items may be edited for length or clarity.

A more recent image of Kobi Burks. Image courtesy of Burks.
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The Pleasures and Intensities of AIDS Activism; or, Making a Place for Yourself in the Universe

BY DEBBIE GOULD


Arguing that confrontational direct action was needed to fight the exploding AIDS crisis, oppositional activist groups began to emerge in 1986–87 out of lesbian and gay communities around the United States. With cumulative deaths nearing and soon surpassing twenty thousand nationally—the vast majority of them gay and bisexual men—lesbians and gay men formed direct-action AIDS groups in San Francisco (Citizens for Medical Justice, summer of 1986), New York (the Lavender Hill Mob, summer of 1986), and Chicago (Dykes and Gay Men Against Repression/Racism/Reagan/the Right Wing turned toward direct-action AIDS activism in early 1987).

ACT UP formed in New York City in March 1987, and other chapters soon sprouted up across the country, forming a national direct-action AIDS movement. Through raucous demonstrations, acts of civil disobedience, disruptions, die-ins and other forms of street theater, meetings with government and other officials, and eye-catching agitprop, ACT UP and similar direct-action AIDS groups intervened in every aspect of the AIDS epidemic, with tremendous effect.

What was it like to be in ACT UP during its heyday in the late 1980s and early 1990s? Across dozens of interviewees there is remarkable consistency in people’s positive memories of what ACT UP meetings and events felt like. That is not to say that participants’ experiences were all the same or that there were no bad feelings in the movement. Indeed, some mention feeling like outsiders. As well, many ACT UP chapters experienced painful internal conflicts in their later years. Nevertheless, people repeatedly speak of the exhilaration of protest actions and meetings, the erotic atmosphere of meetings, feelings of camaraderie and connection with others in the movement, and a sense of fulfillment that derived from taking part in something larger than oneself.

To Jeff Edwards, ACT UP/Chicago meetings were electric: “There were so many energetic and smart people doing so many things. … So much was happening in that room … so much passion, and imagination, and urgency” (Edwards 2000).

Charles King recalls being moved, bodily, at his first ACT UP/NY meeting: “Standing in the back of a packed room at the Gay and Lesbian Community Center, I found myself heaving dry sobs, hoping no one could see my visceral reaction. At last there was something I could do. I could fight back. And even if we didn’t win, I wouldn’t be going down alone” (King 2007). People lived ACT UP, and one reason was that the movement gave many people a sense of belonging, perhaps for the first time. David Barr walked into his first ACT UP/NY meeting in May 1987 and said to himself, “Oh my God, I’m home. … I had been waiting for this. I liked the energy in the room and I liked the approach. … It was really sexy. There were all these really cute guys and they were interesting and they were political and I had just never seen anything like it before. I thought, ‘Finally, I’ve been looking for this all my life!’ I really felt like I was home” (Barr 2002).

ACT UP was an emotionally enticing place. Although ACT UP/NY member Allan Robinson was critical of the racism he encountered in ACT UP, he found that “an energy in the room” made him go back, “again and again” (Hunter 1993, 59). He recalled, “Outside of all my criticism, I found an energy in the organization that was frankly exciting. That energy helped me deal with the loss, anger, and the frustration with societal indifference I was encountering. I think that, in retrospect, ACT UP has satisfied that need for many people. So many people need that kind of conduit to deal with those feelings” (Hunter 1993, 60).

ACT UP was a place that normalized and thereby authorized anger, that allowed people to shelve their grief for a period and instead “turn grief into anger,” a place that generated pride in queerness and in defiant street activism.

Jim Eigo attended his first ACT UP/NY meeting by mistake but was so taken by it that he stayed:

“I went to the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center in November of 1987. … I went there thinking I was going to a forum that Lambda Legal Defense was presenting on what we should do in the wake of the Bowers v. Hardwick decision. … [The forum] was going to be on the second floor of the Community Services Center. But I thought it was on the first floor. So, I sat down in an ACT UP meeting, and I very quickly knew that this was not Lambda. It was the most vital political meeting—even before the meeting started—the most vital group of people I’ve ever sat among in my life. The table by the entry was full of literature that everybody was producing themselves and had out. And there was a buzz everywhere. And then when the meeting started—and it was quite clear that unlike any political meeting I had ever been to in my life that this was really, actually being run by the people, from the floor, for themselves, for those concerns that were central to their lives at this time—it just blew me away. I knew right away that it was a group that I had to become involved with immediately.” (Eigo 2004, 18–19)

ACT UP’s radicalism—in the realms of sex, tactics, critique, and vision—not only directed a powerful challenge against the state and its dominant institutions; it also ushered in alternative modes of feeling, thinking, and being for many lesbians and gay men, many of whom began to identify as queer. The movement’s radi-
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Another aspect of ACT UP that drew many to the movement was its democratic character. Contrasting ACT UP/NY to other political groups she had been in, Marlon Banzhaf recalled ACT UP as “very exciting, because this was a different kind of group. It was not a top-down group, it was a bottom-up group, even though there were hierarchies within ACT UP about who was cool and who got to cruise whom and who got to do what. It was still a very democratic group” (Banzhaf 2000). ACT UP/Chicago member Ferd Eggan described an instance when these democratic principles manifested themselves at a pre-curious moment during a national demonstration in Chicago. The demonstration had flowed into the street by that point, but police officers on horses were blocking our way.

“We were surrounded by all the horses and everything. So I got on the mike and just asked people whether they wanted to fight through the horses and take the streets, or not... And we actually voted in the middle of the street that we would just take the street... People decided that they would just fight the horses and go take the street. And then we did. And I think that was my favorite moment, really, because it was like people deciding what to do, en masse, right in the middle of this demonstration.” (Eggan 1999)

I remember the exhilaration of that moment as well—more than a thousand activists collectively deliberating in the street and ultimately deciding to push our way through the phalanx of cops and horses. That sense of freedom generated through defiant and collective self-determination was thrilling, in part because participatory decision-making and collective self-rule are generally absent from most of our lives.

As a collective, ACT UP participants shared many values, but the movement tended to groupthink more or less successfully with its caucus and affinity group structure—a facet of the movement that contributed greatly to ACT UP’s non-hierarchical, decentralized, and democratic character. Caucuses of women, people of color, and people with immune-system disorders (PIDS) provided a degree of autonomy to those underrepresented groups. Self-organized affinity groups of people who wanted to engage in direct action together similarly operated relatively autonomously from the larger group. This cellular, self-organizing structure engendered creative, exciting, and mediating demonstrations, but more than that, it allowed for multiplicity within the movement—in terms of priorities, tactics, demeanor, and identity.

Participants consistently remark on ACT UP’s vibrant sexual atmosphere. Michael Thompson described ACT UP/Chicago’s meetings as “really sexy,” adding, “there were just a lot of hormones in the air at times.” He was particularly taken with the sexual expressiveness of lesbians in ACT UP. “To be around lesbians who were also being sexy was really cool. Because that [intermixing of men and women] is not something that generally happens in the queer world. It was generally segregated” (Thompson 2000). Polly Thistolthwaite fondly remembered ACT UP/NY’s meetings: people sat in each other’s laps, brushed up against one another, and cruised each other (Thistolthwaite 1993). Given the prevailing climate of sexual fear in the late 1980s—in both gay and straight worlds—ACT UP’s celebration of queer sexuality was a political act. Indeed, many ACT UP members experienced their bodies as the battleground on which the AIDS war was being fought, in terms of both the fight against HIV and for sexual freedom. Jeannie Kracher saw ACT UP/Chicago’s sexual culture as a form of resistance to dominant society’s efforts to “shut us down sexually” (Kracher 2000). ACT UP recuperated queer sexuality in part by creating a new venue where sex and activism were thoroughly joined. Meetings were filled with flirtation, cruising, touching, and kissing, along with heady discussions with life-and-death stakes, discussions that themselves were sexy in their intensity. ACT UP’s ethos made holding queer sex, and lots of it, feel like a political act, and the close physical contact of our civil disobedience actions, along with our chants and agit-prop and the ACT UP uniform itself—T-shirt, jeans, leather jacket, combat boots—sexualized ACT UP protests. There was an erotic charge to everything we did. Probably as a result, even meetings that went on for hours often felt electrifying rather than tedious.

Along with its erotics, the movement was awash in humor as well as sheer fun. In the face of homophobia and other indignities, AIDS activists camped it up. Gilbert Martinez recalls flirting with the police officer who arrested him at a demonstration targeting the National Institutes of Health in 1990: “When I was arrested at NIH, this real hunky cop asked me if I wanted to walk or be carried. And I said, ‘Are you kidding me? I would never walk and pass up the opportunity of being held in your arms!’” (PDZ 1997, 63). Activists sometimes even responded to death and grief with humor. Marion Banzhaf remembered a New York affinity group satirizing the frequent ACT UP chant “How many more must die?” when it made a T-shirt that said, “Harmony Must Die.” It was an instance of “turning this expression about genocide and loss into an internal satire” that only ACT UP members would understand (Banzhaf 2002). In a climate of bigotry, antigay violence, illness, death, and unending if submerged grief, campy humor was a creative response that offered much-needed psychic relief and release.

ACT UP participants sometimes injected queer sensibilities and humor into the most unresponsive of places. At a national ACT UP action in April 1990 for universal health care, close to one hundred and fifty AIDS activists from across the country were arrested in Chicago, effectively overwhelming the city’s jail system. Because there were not enough jail cells for all of us, the police initially put everyone into a large room, unsegregated by gender. We were euphoric from the protest action and happy to be together, so there was a lot of animated discussion along with hugging and kissing and general excitement. Our jubilant conversations quickly reached a high pitch, and the officer in charge tried to gain control over the room by demanding that we cease kissing and that we sit “girl-boy-gil- boy.” His order was met with giggles as we all rearranged ourselves like obedient school children (the gender queers among us ensuring that we weren’t that obedient). Then, at frequent intervals, ACT UP/Chicago member Ortez Alderson stood up and reminded us all that “there is to be noooooo same-sex kissing in the jail,” and on cue we all resumed kissing, boys with boys, girls with girls, girls with boys, gender queers with all.

ACT UP was affectively intense, and that quality, inextricably intertwined with ACT UP’s sexism, humor, and fun, drew people to the movement and inspired them to return again and again. Being surrounded by illness and death and collectively fighting the state and dominant social institutions on issues with life-and-death stakes filled our lives with meaning and purpose and generated immense feelings of connection and affection toward one another. ACT UP/Chicago member Mary Patten has written about the intensity of life in ACT UP, highlighting the ways in which our activism and every other aspect of our lives were inseparably, delicately, entangled: “A friend remembers: ‘Those were the days when we would go into Suzi B’s (a since-closed dyke bar), and we knew everybody (and everyone knew us).’ The connective tissue between our ‘private’ and our ‘public’ lives—between the ways we did political work and organizing, had sex, played, theorized, and mourned—was strong, elastic, sometimes barely noticeable” (Patten 1998, 389).

Patten’s friend is me, and I recall the loss I was feeling when I said that to her after ACT UP’s decline. As Patten notes, our social, sexual, emotional, intellectual, and political lives were tightly interwoven. ACT UP meetings were more than meetings; they were a place to fight AIDS, and they also were cruising grounds, a chance to channel one’s grief and frustration and to revitalize feelings of anger and pride, a place to struggle, learn, and grow, an opportunity to enact newly emerging queer identities, and a place
to reimagine the world. Sexual liaisons were a chance to have sex, and also a way to learn more about safe sex as well as an opportunity to elaborate queer theory. Parties allowed us to dream up our next action and to mourn the most recent deaths. Creative demonstrations provided fodder for theorizing, while study groups reinvigorated our street activism. Every aspect of our lives connected to every other, and it all seemed vital. Engaged in world-making with like-minded people, we felt exuberant, joyous, engaged, connected to one another, sexy, and consequential. To be sure, there were conflicts within the movement, but for a number of years we addressed them in a manner that, at least for many, maintained strong positive feelings and identification with the movement and with one another.

ACT UP/Chicago member Carol Hayse recalled the strong sense of solidarity that developed between gay men and lesbians, the “joy in rediscovering each other” (Hayse 2000). ACT UP/Chicago’s Frank Sieple also recalled the intense connection he felt with other members of ACT UP: “The camaraderie just can’t be replaced. It’s like going, I’d imagine, you know, people that go into some sort of battle together…. World War II, or something. And you’re with these people and planning things, and going through these things. And some people die, you know, it’s just like a war” (Sieple 1999).

People’s descriptions of what it felt like to participate in ACT UP recall Emile Durkheim’s notion of collective effervescence. The term conveys the “transports of enthusiasm” and “a sort of electricity” that comes from people amassing and being physically close to one another in a manner that “launches them to an extraordinary height of exaltation” (Durkheim 1995, 217). The amassing of large numbers of people who see themselves as in some way connected and acting together for a collectively desired end generates a “bodily awareness of copresence” that can unleash immense “emotional energy” (Collins 2001, 28). Movements, in that sense, are locations for the “transmission of affect” (Brennan 2006), sites where bodily intensities are relayed among participants.

Our sentiments of exhilaration and elation stemmed in large part from being engaged in defiant, confrontational activism with other social outcasts who were committed to fighting the AIDS crisis and building a more just and joyous world. Mark Harrington’s memory of an after-demo dérive through the streets of New York points toward the sheer euphoria in collectivity:

“[My] favorite part [of ACT UP/NY’s 1989 ‘Stop the Church’ action] was afterwards, when we got away from the church, started marching around the city and sat down in Times Square. Because it seemed like we were free, we were happy, we were all together, and nobody could stop us. It was just one of those nice moments that happens when you do things in activism, where there isn’t any reason for what you’re doing, it’s just an expression of collective joy or power.” (Handelman 1990, 117)

ACT UP/Chicago member Sharyl Holtzman’s comments about the aftermath of a national ACT UP demonstration in San Francisco against Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis Sullivan similarly convey the intensity of feelings of joyousness and collectivity within the movement:

“When Sullivan was finished, [the members of ACT UP who had participated in the demonstration] marched out of Moscone Center, feeling absolutely ebullient, and walked down Fourth Street to join the [Lesbian and Gay Pride] Parade. As we neared Market [Street], we saw the ACT UP colors, the Silence = Death signs, and for a split second we froze in amazement. Out of over 200 entries in the Parade, ACT UP was crossing the intersection just as we were arriving…. Like lovers who had been kept apart in a battlefield, we ran toward them—our friends, our fellow warriors, our family. It was exuberant and unbelievable. People were jumping in the air; they were hugging, they were crying, they were laughing through their tears.” (ACT UP/Chicago 1990, 4)

A movement’s demonstrations, actions, and other events—its rituals—allow participants to move outside of the everyday mundane, or, more apt in this case, out of everyday devastation, and to be transported into a more meaningful existence that holds out potential for self and social change. Such happenings have an almost sacred quality to them, part of what gives them tremendous intensity. In describing the feelings he experienced during an affinity group action, ACT UP/NY member Jon Greenberg provided a glimpse into such ecstatic affective states. Prior to the risky action, everyone was afraid, but, Greenberg states:

“[We] knew that it was only fear, and rather than let that stop us, we used it to propel us into further action, to confront and push through the barrier of our fear and be liberated even as our bodies were being arrested and jailed. There was an otherness about those moments. We all felt it. We all knew that we had, if only for a moment, an hour, a day, become larger than we had...
been the day before. We each became part of the other, and as a unit our collective spirit crossed an illusory boundary which we only knew was an illusion after we had crossed it. … Through collective empowerment we declared who we were and how we felt and made a place for ourselves in the universe.” (Greenberg 1992)

Those who engaged in ACT UP actions were already sympathetic to the movement’s worldview, but the experience of doing an action—of “becoming caught up in it not just imaginatively but bodily” (Geertz 1973, 116)—often amplified people’s identification with ACT UP and with their comrades and intensified their commitment to fighting AIDS.

In a world where impersonal, abstract forces shape daily lives and can generate sentiments of being out of control, of inefficacy, of helplessness and hopelessness, social movements are often a space that engenders rich and textured counter-feelings. In addition to filling our lives with intensity and a sense of meaning and purpose, the exciting swirl of ACT UP’s protest actions and meetings allowed us to reinvent ourselves, to carve out a place where we could be angry, oppositional, defiant, hopeful, sexual, and happy, a place where we could engage in collective projects of world-making. ACT UP participants invariably comment on the important role the movement played in their lives and specifically recall the intensity of their feelings while in the movement. Jeff Edwards remembers feeling like “we were making history.” (Edwards 2000). Michael Thompson noted how intense it was to be involved in a movement where participants were dying: “It was a very special time to be with people who you knew might not live through their lives…. To be in a political movement where the movement was dying. There’s nothing quite like that.” (Thompson 2000).

Jeanne Kracher echoed Thompson’s sentiments about the illnesses and deaths of comrades in the movement: “We were experiencing things that for people our age were very heavy. I mean, when I think about how you and I went and took care of Ortez and changed his diaper five times in one night and carried him to … all of that stuff, how old were we then? I was in my early 30s and you were in your mid-20s. I mean, there’s a way that you don’t experience that in this society … coming from the background we come from.” (Kracher 2000)

ACT UP participants faced both a society where street activism was frequently disparaged and a community that had a history of hesitancy about angry, confrontational activism. Direct-action AIDS activists were bucking both systems, and they took some heat for that. The intense feelings generated in the movement—of self-affirmation, purposefulness, connection to others, shared resolve, love—fortified a commitment to ACT UP, helping the movement to flourish into the early 1990s.

I’ll conclude with a comment about the pleasures and intensities of social movements more generally. Through protests and other activist manifestations, social movements unravel commonsense knowledges, counter the subtle and not-so subtle power relations that pervade our lives, reveal sizable cracks in people’s apparent complacency, and show that social arrangements are neither inevitable nor immovable. Even more, movements are expressions of desire for different forms of social relations, different ways of being, different worlds. They are a space for resurrecting squelched desires and developing new ones, for articulating and enacting what previously might have been unimaginable. They surprise, entice, exhilarate, electricly.

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In the early 1980s, as the federal government largely ignored the AIDS crisis that was beginning to explode across America, New York textile designer Patricia Green and Stendig International Vice President Larry Pond (who died from AIDS-related complications in 1992) became alarmed that colleagues were getting sick and dying all around them. No one seemed to be paying attention. So in April, 1984, they formed what was originally called the Design and Interior Furnishings Foundation for AIDS (which in 1994 became the Design Industries Foundation Fighting AIDS), better known as DIFFA, to help out.

“When we started in 1984, we were truly so grass-roots,” said David Sheppard, who began working as a DIFFA volunteer that year in Atlanta and became the executive director of DIFFA National in 1995. “People would get together in showrooms after work and literally pass a hat to pay for someone’s cab fare to the doctor or their [electric] bill. It was friends helping friends, really—the design industry was hit very hard, very fast.”

As the epidemic escalated, the volunteers recruited associates in all fields of fine design and the visual arts, including architecture, fashion design, interior design, photography and consumer product design. They also realized that it was necessary to become more organized, so they established a set of bylaws and a mission—to benefit programs which provide direct care and preventive education in HIV and AIDS. They hired their first employee, who initially worked out of the Interiors Magazine office, sitting at whichever desk happened to be empty each day based on who didn’t show up for work. Not long after, DIFFA was loaned a windowless basement office from which to operate. In 1985, they made their first official grant to God’s Love We Deliver, an association which distributes food to people living with AIDS.

DIFFA National also acts as a parent organization, managing insurance and workers’ compensation coverage, annual audits and other duties that the regional chapters, many with only a volunteer staff, don’t have time to handle. The chapters each pay a program fee to the foundation to help offset costs.

DIFFA National has final approval over each chapter’s grantmaking selections, although Sheppard said that’s basically just a technicality. More important, he believes, is the foundation’s role as a resource for the regional chapters, as well as acting as a clearinghouse for best practices by developing a Dining by Design training manual, hosting a “boot camp” for chapter directors to share new ideas and help avoid past mistakes and other initiatives including creating national sponsorships to help bring top design industry names to local chapters for their events.

“For Dallas’ denim jacket event, we’ll ask someone like Ralph Lauren to do one and send it to be auctioned there, because we have those relationships,” Sheppard said. “We also got Ralph Lauren to do a table for Chicago last year for their Dining by Design. And we have several chapters that do holiday events, so we’ll go to four or five big names and say, ‘Will you do five?’—because they’ve got some staff person in the back that can just duplicate it. And we’ll send one to each city.”

DIFFA National has also made a commitment to the next generation by partnering design industry students in New York with a professor from their college and a mentor from an industry leader such as Gensler and Associates, a prominent...
Dance for Life: 20 years of creative combat against HIV/AIDS

By Joe Franco

“My mission here in Chicago is just to make dance happen,” Keith Elliott did not know it in 1992, when he co-created Dance for Life with Todd Kleche, but their idea would become the “largest dance performance-based AIDS fundraising event in the Midwest.”

Elliott’s passion for the art of dance led him to work towards what would become Dance for Life. He pitched the idea to Harriet Ross, who suggested that he “get the big guys” and involve the larger dance companies, including Hubbard Street Dance Chicago and Gail Kalver, then its executive director. “She made all the calls,” said Elliott of Ross. That only issue on the table was the lack of a beneficiary.

“Dance for Life sounded like something really special,” said Danny Kopelson about the Dance for Life concept. As the public relations go-to at the AIDS Foundation of Chicago, he certainly had the wherewithal and enthusiasm to help make Dance for Life a reality. In its first year at the Organic Theatre, Dance for Life sold out all 400 seats. In the past 15 years at the Harris Theatre, Dance for Life had sold out all 1,500 available seats each year. Now in its 20th year, the organization has moved to the 4,000-seat Auditorium Theatre at Roosevelt University. “We had no idea that Dance for Life would be so successful,” said Kopelson.

Since its beginning, Dance for Life has raised more than $4 million for local AIDS charities, including the AIDS Foundation of Chicago and the Dance for Life Fund. “The AIDS Foundation is an umbrella funding organization,” said Elliott, noting that the foundation is able to spread funds over a wider area.

The Dance for Life Fund was originally established in 1994 to benefit dancers with HIV and AIDS. The fund personally affected the lives of hundreds of dancers. It has covered basic necessities of dancers living with HIV. In some cases, the fund even provided airfare for dancers without the resources to see their families; with others, it helped cover funeral expenses for those who succumbed to the disease, “Dancers in Chicago are frequently not provided health insurance,” said Kopelson.

“We wanted to make it easier for them to bear their costs,” said Elliott. “It’s tough being a dancer,” added Elliott.

The event’s dancers come from numerous companies across Chicago. Dance for Life features four permanent companies: Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Giordano Jazz Dance Chicago, River North Chicago Dance and The Joffrey Ballet. Dance for Life also features one other dance company; this year, Ron de Jesus Dance will join the ensemble. This is not only a “wonderful opportunity for others to see the established dance companies,” said Kopelson, but also “gives the smaller companies exposure to an audience they might not normally have.”

In no other venue can one see talent from five companies perform together for a common purpose.

That singular purpose is to dance, in spite of AIDS. It gives the public a unique opportunity to see dance as both performance and message. “Helpless. In one word, that’s what we all felt,” said Elliott about the early days of the AIDS epidemic. “We were seeing friends who were dying. Their talent? It just wasn’t on stage anymore. So we wanted to honor those who have passed.”

Dance for Life has stayed true to that message. “It’s not about sadness and loss but about joy and celebration.” This is a reminder,” said Elliott, “that while we are here, we can still celebrate and raise money for those in need.”

Elliott said that it was “evident what it means to the dancers just by what they bring to the show.”

Dance for Life for its 20th performance will be Saturday, Aug. 20, at the Auditorium Theater. Tickets for the performance will be available for purchase June 15. Pre-order tickets now by contacting 312-922-5812. Visit www.danceforlifechicago.com.

Keith Elliott, Danny Kopelson and Harriet Ross are all interviewed on www.chicagopasthistory.org for their work on AIDS/HIV and Dance for Life in Chicago.
Nelson Vergel, AIDS expert, talks HIV and healthy aging

BY KATE SOSIN

Nelson Vergel is not what you think of when you say “AIDS over 50.” With hefty round muscles pushing out against a tight blue t-shirt and a lively demeanor, Vergel looks more like Mighty Mouse than a person resistant to nearly every HIV drug on the market. But Vergel is in the business of debunking myths about aging with HIV, and while his own HIV is a struggle, he’s also the living example of his work.

Vergel presented some of the latest findings on HIV and aging at Center on Halsted May 31, during his free talk, “Promising Advances in HIV Cure and Healthy Aging Research.” The event was sponsored by Test Positive Aware Network.

The Houston-based author and activist focused heavily on the scientific reasons why a cure to HIV/AIDS is both a distant dream and an impending reality. But while Vergel is following progress on possible cures, his own work focuses on informing other HIV-positive people on the changes HIV causes in the body and strategies for living well with the virus.

“We’re getting older. What is the quality of life going to be?” Vergel asked an audience of about 30 people. According to Vergel, medication is just one of four useful in battling HIV. He also includes stress reduction, exercise, and nutrition.

In three years, he said, there will be four once-a-day HIV pills on the market (there is currently just one—Atripla). Still, HIV drug production is slowing because it’s less profitable than other drugs.

“We’re moving into a new world,” Vergel said. “We don’t have guidelines.” The thing is, we don’t have standards,” he said. “We’re getting older. What is the quality of life going to be?” Vergel asked. “We don’t have guidelines.”

“We’re not talking about bottoms or tops or women or men,” Vergel said. “[HPV] is affecting everyone.”

Medicine aside, exercise is the best medicine, said Vergel. “We [HIV-positive people] have an acceleration of the aging process by about 15 years,” Vergel said. “Frailty in aging is most related to body strength.”

New research has also shown merits of some vitamins in relieving some HIV symptoms. D vitamins can help maintain bone strength, while B vitamins can help relieve depression. Vergel warned, however, that patients talk to their doctors about vitamins as some can interact with HIV medications.

Vergel doesn’t stop at health, however. His talk also included strategies for fighting changes in body fat and muscle over the skin (also known as lipohypertrophy and lipoatrophy) because Vergel said, “it’s not about getting older. It’s about attainment to remain vigilant about getting screened for other illnesses, especially HPV.

“We’re not talking about bottoms or tops or women or men,” Vergel said. “[HPV] is affecting everyone.”

“Frailty in aging is most related to body strength.”

New research has also shown merits of some vitamins in relieving some HIV symptoms. D vitamins can help maintain bone strength, while B vitamins can help relieve depression. Vergel warned, however, that patients talk to their doctors about vitamins as some can interact with HIV medications.

Vergel doesn’t stop at health, however. His talk also included strategies for fighting changes in body fat and muscle over the skin (also known as lipohypertrophy and lipoatrophy) because Vergel said, “it’s not about getting older. It’s about getting your healthy look back as you age.”

Vergel thinks that a lot of doctors are reluctant to offer facial treatments to HIV patients who lose fat under facial skin because they see it as unnecessary, but he said that changes to body weight prevent some people from going on medication at all. However, a number of treatments exist for preventing weight changes while on HIV medication.

Finally, Vergel discussed testosterone treatments, which he has covered in his latest book Testosterone: A Man’s Guide. Testosterone is often taken by HIV-positive patients to combat fatigue, lack of motivation, poor appetite, and muscle loss. Vergel warns that those should be taken with caution because they can fuel cancer.

Before making any decisions, he said, talk to your doctor. But do your own homework, too, he said because not every doctor will cover all the bases on HIV management.

“The thing is, we don’t have guidelines,” he said. “We don’t have guidelines.”

Information on Vergel’s work as well as his complete slideshow presentation is available on his website: www.powerusa.org.
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THEATER

That's 'Wife.' Page 36.
Photo from The Detective's Wife by Liz Lauren

MOVIES

Photo of Ewan McGregor by Andrew Toyer

SPORTS

‘Better’ days. Page 47.
Photo of Sean Chapin by Ross Forman

SCOTTISH PLAY SCOTT

Screen to stage

BY SCOTT C. MORGEN

Catch Me If You Can and Priscilla, Queen of the Desert

Catch Me If You Can and Priscilla, Queen of the Desert: The Musical were two of the most hotly anticipated screen-to-stage Broadway musical adaptations of this past season. It’s also intriguing to note that both shows have strong ties to the LGBT community in terms of subject matter, or via openly gay creative team members.

So it’s disappointing to report that neither show satisfies the hype and buildup. Both shows have great appeal and are undeniably flashy, but neither fully lives up to their creative and artistic potential.

Catch Me If You Can is a reunion for many of the people responsible for the 2002 mega-hit Broadway musical Hairspray. Aside from award-winning book writer Terrence McNally, the Hair-spray collective back in action on Catch Me If You Can includes songwriters Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman, director Jack O’Brien and choreog- rapher Jerry Mitchell.

In transforming the popular 2002 Stephen Spielberg film Catch Me If You Can into a big Broadway musical, the creative team hit upon a seemingly ingenious staging concept. Just as the dogged FBI agent Carl Hanratty (Norbert Leo Butz) is about to apprehend the master teenage con man and embezzler Frank W. Abagnale, Jr. (Aaron Tveit), the criminal pleads to offer his side of story to justify his actions ...

But there are times when the staging concept doesn’t mesh well with the narrative. Away from Mitchell’s snazzy staging of production numbers, the more introspective scenes struggle to fit in. Not all of the songs are winners here like they were in Hairspray. For example, the duet “Little Boy, Be a Man” attempts to give Butz’s Hanratty and Tom Wopat’s drunken Frank Abagnale, Sr. a chance to bond and reflect. But the moti- vation behind the number doesn’t connect to the two characters very convincingly. Also, the femme fatale questioning number of the former Mrs. Abagnale, Paula (Rachel del Benedetti), starts off promisingly enough, but eventually goes no- where as a combination variety show segment that also forwards the plot.

However, perhaps the biggest structural fault is waiting so late in the show to flesh out the love interest, nurse Brenda (underused Hair-spray alumna Kerry Butler). Though Brenda and her amusing Southern parents (played well by Linda Hart and Nick Wyman) are introduced at the top of the show, they end up feeling like afterthoughts.

So despite so many great elements on display in Catch Me If You Can, (particularly the wonder- fully characteristic turn by Best Actor nominee Butz as the square and relentless agent Hanratty), the show strangely doesn’t fully gel. But the expectations for lightening to strike twice after the more introspective scenes struggle to fit in. Nor is waiting so late in the show to flesh out the love interest, nurse Brenda (underused Hairspray alumna Kerry Butler). Though Brenda and her amusing Southern parents (played well by Linda Hart and Nick Wyman) are introduced at the top of the show, they end up feeling like afterthoughts.

The fact that so many pop hits can be switched in without affecting the overall script by Steph- an Elliott and Allan Scott essentially shows what a dubious artistic enterprise Priscilla is in terms of musical theater storytelling.

Now there’s no denying the amazing talent and stagecraft on display in the show, par- ticularly the outrageous costume creations of designers Tim Chappell and Lizzy Gardiner (the same Academy Award-winning design team be- hind the 1994 film) and the amazing sets of de- signer Brian Thompson (the spinning turntable bus particularly stands out).

Priscilla seems custom designed to please throngs of bachelorette party girls and differ- ent generations of gay men who want nothing more than an evening of wall to wall glitter and camp. But for more discerning musical theater fans, Priscilla can be written off as a crowd- pleaser more concerned with surface flash rather than any genuine deep-hearted emotion or sen- timent.


Priscilla, Queen of the Desert and Catch Me If You Can are the lucky four nominees.

Priscilla, Queen of the Desert continues its open run at the Palace Theatre in New York.

The Detective’s Wife

Playwright: Keith Huff
At: Writers’ Theatre, 664 Vernon, Glencoe
Tickets: 847-242-6000; http://www.writerstheatre.org; $50-$60
Runs through: July 31

BY JONATHAN ABBABANEL

Three years ago, playwright Keith Huff had an immense success with his two-character Chicago cap-drama, A Steady Rain. Huff’s successor play in some ways flips the coin of that one: The Detective’s Wife focuses on a woman whose homicide detail husband has been gunned down in an Uptown alley, the same locale as much of the action in A Steady Rain, but this one is a one-character play and definitely a ghost story, too.

It’s stylish stuff in text and performance. Huff’s writing is extremely intelligent, literate, smart and entertaining with references to Lewis Carroll, Hamlet and psychology which fall easily into the guts grittiness, you won’t find it. The Detective’s Wife basically has as much meat as you can possibly need, but the play sails over it. Huff’s language is more contrived than a multi-character play—A one-person work, too, always is going to seem as guided by director Gary Griffin, who pauses to infuse their familiar personae with fresh nuance. A sturdy supporting company and clever low-budget technical effects—notably James Ogden’s astonishingly versatile turntable—also guarantee an entertaining evening for City Lit first-timers.

Don Bender (left) as Mr. Sherlock Holmes and Jerry Bloom as Dr. John H. Watson in The Sign of the Four. Photo by Johnny Knight

THEATER REVIEW

The Sign of the Four
Playwright: adapted by Terry McCabe
from the story by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
At: City Lit Theater at Edgewater
Presbyterian Church, 1020 W. Bryn Mawr
Phone: 773-293-3682; $25
Runs through: July 3

BY MARY SHEN BARNIDGE

Page-to-stage translations of material dating from a time when print comprised the sole vehicle for mass communication are often difficult to bring off. Take, for example, this second in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s series featuring his master detective, Sherlock Holmes: Our plot begins with Holmes and his sidekick, Dr. Watson, approached by an orphaned governess seeking the identity of an anonymous benefactor who may also harbor a grudge against her now-deceased father. Holmes is intrigued by the intellectual challenge, Watson is smitten by the winsome supplicant and both vow to solve the mystery.

After encountering an array of eccentric personalities from all levels of Victorian London’s social spectrum, as well as a brush with a locked-room murder involving exotic weapons and a thrilling boat-chase on the Thames in pursuit of their quarry, they capture the culprit responsible for these bizarre events. In a play conceived as a play, this would conclude the dramatic action, leaving only a short epilogue for Holmes to revel in his success and Watson to declare his romantic intentions. Doyle, however, insists on the perpetrator of the fatal crimes first revealing the circumstances leading up to his arrest.

A full 30 minutes of straightforward second-act exposition conducted among three men seated in a parlor presents no problems in prose, but can seem like an eternity in live-performance time. Fortunately, Terry McCabe’s adaptation provides us visual interest as the facts are brought to light, by means of the personnel figuring in the miscast’s confession silently and simultaneously acting his serpentine yarn of stolen riches, thwarted plans, prison colonies and blood oaths. Thus are playgoers of non-literary bent relieved from protracted verbal discourse.

This device will prove unnecessary for who-dunit fans, Victorian Lit aficionados and Sherlock Holmes groupies (an audience base numbering in the millions). Let’s not forget, either, the drawing power of Don Bender, repeating for the third time his portrayal of the sleuth, ably flanked by Jerry Bloom as the phlegmatic Dr. Watson (stepping into the role vacated by the late Will Schult), who together evade cliché to infuse their familiar personas with fresh nuance. A sturdy supporting company and clever low-budget technical effects—notably James Ogden’s astonishingly versatile turntable—also guarantee an entertaining evening for City Lit first-timers.


CRITICS’ PICKS

Aces, Signal Theatre Ensemble, through June 16. Even Las Vegas con-artists get the blues, but sometimes, says Jon Steinhagen in this impishly irreverent comedy, a card-sharp angel from Reno might drop in on your casino table. MSB

The Madness of George III, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, through June 12. Playwright Alan Bennett’s view of 18th Century history is distinctly modern in his witty but populist play, brilliantly produced at CST with a riveting title performance by Harry Groener. JA

Sketchbook: Evolution, Collaboration at Chopin Theatre, through June 25. There’s always something daring and new in each edition of Sketchbook, so don’t miss out on what Collaboration has cooked up for 2011. SCM

Watership Down, Lifeline Theatre, through June 19. Rabbits have always numbered among the most empathetic of folk-tale creatures, and never more so than in this classical myth transposed to lapin culture with all the heroic violence and glory intact. MSB

Don Bender (left) as Mr. Sherlock Holmes and Jerry Bloom as Dr. John H. Watson in The Sign of the Four. Photo by Johnny Knight

---By Ababanel, Barnidge and Morgan
Despite the protests of theologians and scientists, ours continues to be a fundamentally unpredictable universe, rife with uncertainty that we have learned to tolerate in most circumstances. Let the number of random occurrences suddenly increase, however, and people get nervous. Name a source for the disturbance, and the unease, having found a focus, intensifies. If the aforementioned source should prove widespread, the vulnerability engendered thereby may manifest itself in hallucinations, psychosomatic maladies and other spurious afflictions—all of which are then exhibited as irrefutable evidence of attack by unseen powers.

What makes such mass delusions less frequent today than during, say, the early medieval ages is the diminished isolation provided by improvements in communication—enlightenment rejected by the lovers whose descent into despair author Tracy Letts recounts in the second play of his career. Army veteran Peter is fleeing the authorities—in particular, doctors whose therapies he mistrusts. Barmaid Agnes has “hermitized” herself in response to harassment by her abusive ex-husband and the long-ago disappearance of her child. When these two frightened individuals meet, their doom is sealed.

It’s easy for us to jeer at frightened individuals—hypochondriacs, alien abductees, conspiracy theorists—but Letts’ narrative locates us within Peter and Agnes’ world, drawing us gradually into the darkness that begins with small inconveniences common to shabby country motels (balky air conditioners, misdirected phone calls, annoying insects), then proceeds to escalate in successive increments descending too swiftly to permit reflection. Oh, perceptive playgoers may see a pattern to the progress, one person initiating each new step and the other following, but in the end, what remains are still two humble mortals, paralyzed by terror, whose only escape from suffering is suicide.

Co-directors Kimberly Senior and Jack Magaw have forged an empathetic production tailored to Redtwist’s elbow-to-elbow space, assisted by the conviction brought by Andrew Jessop and Jacqueline Grandt to their respective roles. A precisely-timed technical score eases us slowly into a bunker-mentality where the hum of traffic on the highway outside fades into the staccato report of helicopter blades, where domestic appliances operete of their own volition and outsiders assume suddenly sinister aspects. By the time we witness the room’s inhabitants, scared by stigmata, covering in their tinfoil-and-fly-strip fortress against what has become an exhaustive campaign of diabolical proportions, the irrevocable logic of their plight is as transparent as it is horrifying.

Expect a little bit of extra electricity in the Broadway musical smash Chicago, since the touring ensemble always seems to perk up when they play in the show’s namesake town. So don’t miss your chance to see this six-time Tony Award-winning revival in the Windy City, once again featuring John O’Hurley (Seinfeld, Dancing with the Stars) in the role of the slick lawyer Billy Flynn. Chicago plays through June 12 at the Oriental Theatre, 24 W. Randolph. Remaining performances are at 7:30 p.m. June 8, 9 and 10, 2 and 8 p.m. June 11, 2 and 7:30 p.m. June 12. Tickets are $30-$95. Call 800-775-2000 or visit http://www.broadwayinchicago.com. Photo of O’Hurley courtesy of the tour.
Carter brings ‘Butch Boi’ to museum
REVIEW BY CHELSEY CLAMMER

Directed and produced by C.C. Carter, “The Butch Boi Chronicles” opened to an eager crowd June 3 at the National Museum of Mexican Art.

Two years in the making, Carter explained in her introduction how she wanted to create a space and show with which butches and their femme partners could find a connection.

“Chronicles” brings to the forefront the cultural, historical and personal lives of butch lesbians. Bringing together 16 readers from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds for this one-time show, the play touched on topics from butch icons (such as Leslie Feinberg and Bessie Jackson) to strap-ons, academic theories on sex and gender and those awkward gynecology exams. Dressed in red T-shirts with black ties printed on them, each actor read the scripted pieces with passion and excitement.

The highlight of the show was Kit Yan’s spoken word pieces. Yan delivered to the crowd phenomenal original work about finding where his trans body fits within the butch and lesbian communities, as well as deciding which bathroom to enter—a topic with which most of the butch actors can commence. In “Third Genders,” Yan declared, “my gender is a boy who looks like a girl who likes boys.”

While the show ran three and a half hours long with just one five-minute break, the audience—who appeared to be composed mostly of friends and lovers of the people involved with the show—held strong through the play’s end.

Interspersed with impromptu dancing on stage and candid moments in which the readers spoke directly to audience members, “Chronicles” provided laughs and understanding of the butch community. Presented by the Lesbian Leadership Council and the Chicago Foundation for Women, “Chronicles” hopes to be a Chicago-centric show in the future.

All-stars help Season of Concern

A cast of Chicago all-star actors and full audience of supporters came out May 23 to the Mayne Stage for a reading of the Oscar-winning classic All About Eve to raise money for Season of Concern (SoC). Also, the annual Larry Sloan Awards were presented to former SoC Board President Barry Taylor, longtime SoC fundraiser Karen Bronson and the AIDS Foundation of Chicago. The cast included Hollis Resnik, Larry Yando, BJ Jones, Heidi Kettenring, Sandra Delgado, James V. Meredith and more. Photos by Hal Baim; more online at http://www.WindyCityMediaGroup.com

‘Twist’ singles party, performance June 12

The Route 66 Theatre Company and Nerds at Heart celebrate Gay Pride Month with A Twist of Fate, a “woo and view” singles party and performance for queer men on Sunday, June 12 at the Mercury Theater, 3745 N. Southport.

Eligible bachelors make a date with desirability over themed icebreaker activities, a complimentary cocktail and hors d’oeuvres (3 p.m.). A performance of the recently extended A Twist of Water—a portrayal of a gay father raising his daughter—follows at 4 p.m. After the show, there will be a meet-and-greet with director/co-creator Erica Weiss.

Event tickets are $44.50 and include admission to the mixer and the show; see http://www.nerdsatheart.com or http://www.mercurytheaterchicago.com.

Last ‘Dixie’ show June 12

The final performance of Dixie’s Tupperware Party will be Sunday, June 12, at the Royal George Theatre Cabaret, 1641 N. Halsted. Written by Kris Andersson, the production is playing in Chicago as part of a 42-city national tour.

The performance schedule is as follows: Wednesday and Thursday at 7:30 p.m., Friday at 8 p.m., Saturday at 3 p.m. and Sunday at 3 p.m. See http://www.dixiestupperwareparty.com.
Beginners; film notes

The set up for Beginners, the sophomore film from writer-director Mike Mills (his first being Thumbsucker) sounds so unbelievably melodramatic (straight out of Douglas Sirk) that you can almost hear the cries of disbelief that he must have heard when trying to sell it.

"Picture this," one imagines Mills pitching. "A 75-year-old father reveals to his straight son after his wife's death that he's gay and that he intends to embrace his new life. Then he gets terminal cancer." However, the resulting movie—with Ewan McGregor and Christopher Plummer as son and father and Melanie Laurent and Goran Visnjic as their respective lovers—couldn't be any less melodramatic. Rather, it's poignant and darkly funny all at once. Sonber, winsome, silly, vibrant and delightfully inventive, Beginners is one hell of a rewarding movie. It only deepens the experience to discover that the material comes directly from Mills' own life.

Retired museum curator Howard tells his illus- trator son, Oliver, that he doesn't just want to be "theoretically gay." He wants the whole enchilada, and gets it quickly—the circle of gay comrades, a cute boyfriend (Visnjic, who audiences will remember most vividly from The Deep End), a bent for gay activism and, most decisively, a previously missing lust for life. This all stupefies the cautious, commitment-phobic Oliver. (The two are like a gay/straight variation on Auntie Mame and nephew Patrick.) Then, after four years of embracing his new lifestyle comes the cancer diagnosis.

Mills sketches all this out, tongue firmly planted in cheek, within the first few minutes of the movie as McGregor narrates—with the aid of subtitles for Howard's adorable terrier, who plays it to a T. It's a captivating performance after another (following up on his winning work in I Love You Phillip Morris) matched by Plummer, who gets a role (at last!) that allows him to show a complexity of emotions and a sweetness that his typical villain parts don't even hint at. Laurent is bewitching and maddeningly elusive while Visnjic is strange and funny.

It's a very gentle, bittersweet movie with a wistful mood—the sunlight feels as if it's coming from a distant planet—while the dry humor is augmented by the retro tunes and a vintage-sounding, tinkling piano on the soundtrack. The whole thing sounds "precious" and more than a tad dloying (don't forget the adorable little dog) and touchy-feely but Mills' true-to-life dialogue, assured directorial touch, insightful characters and these marvelous actors belie any hint of sentimentality or phoniness. Rather, Beginners is a powerful homage not only to one's parents but to the power of community—the gay community, in this case.

Film notes:

—Yet another one of those filmed stage performances is coming to a movie theatre near you. The show in question this time is the classic comedy The Importance of Being Earnest by the legendary gay playwright and bon vivant Oscar Wilde. The production is the recent revival at the Roundabout Theatre, which, in the hands of out actor/director Brian Bedford (who also appears in drag as Lady Bracknell), took Broadway by storm. Broadway fans on a budget will be able to see the filmed version (in HD no less) June 9, 12, 14 and 26 at the Music Box Theatre, 3733 N. Southport. www.musicboxtheatre.com

—The Music Box is also the place for what promises to be another memorable evening at the movies for queer audiences. On Saturday, June 11, at 5:30 p.m. Robert K. Elder, author of The Film That Changed My Life, begins a film series based on his book. Elder and queer icon John Waters will introduce the 1939 fantasy masterpiece The Wizard of Oz, which hugely influenced the kitsch auteur. Waters and Elder will also discuss its powerful impact after the screening followed by a book-signing. (Both Elder's book and Waters' recent Role Models will be offered for sale.)

—Queer DVDs worth checking out: Undertow, the sexy Peruvian gay fantasy-romance (Ghost meets Brokeback Mountain) is out on DVD and is a must for the collection. Although writer-director Keith Hartman's You Should Meet My Son! also debuts this week, it isn't exactly in the same category but it has charm to spare and a sweetly comedic—and at times deeply felt—lead performance from Joanne McGe as a Southern conservative mom who quickly readsjusts her expectations when she discovers that her little boy is That Way.

Check out my archived reviews at http://www.windycitymediasgroup.com or http://www.knightsinthemovies.com. Readers can also see feedback at the latter website.
MOVIES

‘Beginners’ director Mike Mills on the film and his own life

BY RICHARD KNIGHT, JR.

Writer-director Mike Mills’ new movie Beginners is a tremendously moving and funny relationship picture that draws on Mills’ own personal experience.

When he was close to 75, Mills’ recently widowed father announced that he was gay and was going to pursue the lifestyle with verve (which he did), however, four short years later, tragedy struck when the father was diagnosed with terminal cancer. In the film, Mills has cast Christopher Plummer (in the kind of performance that wins a lot of acting awards) as Howard, a varia-
minal cancer. In the film, Mills has cast Christo-

The story of father and son is paralleled by a tentative romance between Oliver and a young French actress (winningly played by Melanie Lau-

WINDY CITY TIMES

A closer look at ‘OUT in America’

OUT in America premieres June 8 on PBS.

One of your favorite scenes in the movie is the one where the father announced that he was gay and was going to pursue the lifestyle with verve (which he did). However, four short years later, tragedy struck when the father was diagnosed with ter-

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THIS IS WHAT LOVE FEELS LIKE.

www.BeginnersMovie.com
The notion of a collective tribute to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people who have been overlooked by history (or obscured by historians) is not new. Numerous writers—scholarship, with meticulously researched detail, have been written; they are the cornerstone of GLBT studies coursework in college, serve as source material for additional research by other historians, and in some cases, inspire people who like to explore history on their own— which is how The Legacy Project got its start in Chicago. With many of the people who are encompassed under “GLBT history” there is ready agreement as to who was who, who did what, and when they did it. And, in many cases, why they did what they did is readily discernible, as well. But, in some others, when motives and intentions are less clear, speculation (or complete avoidance) often takes over where the facts leave off. When it comes to non-hetero-normative sexuality, history itself can become quite subjective, no matter how many potentially influential factors are otherwise uncovered.

As a result, our concept of historical “accuracy” necessarily becomes fluid, as greatly influenced by the methods, personalities, and beliefs of the person doing the research—and the era in which it was done—as it is by the aims and interests of the people who judge whatever conclusions are drawn. The only thing one can be certain of is that, to some extent, the story can be rewoven, and perhaps even rewritten, as and, as a result, one must never rely on any single source. Nowhere is this more important than when discussing GLBT historic figures.

At the risk of being deemed facetious, it seems that without direct video confirmation of sexual activity there is a curious propensity on the part of many historians to regard individuals rumored to be homosexual as being most likely non-sexual. This is usually justified because the individual in question left no written declaration that they were actually homosexual, no personal, unambiguous evidence, without which numerous corroborating aspects of the individual’s personal relationships, social habits and anecdotal information are dismissed as circumstantial.

Even inarguable romantic mismixes between persons of the same gender are deemed “incidental” if they lack graphic sexual content (not a common feature of 18th- and 19th-century correspondence). Leaving aside the observation that no one is expected to declare their heterosexuality to be regarded as such, operating under these assumptions, any hope of gleanning some truth about these complex lives is lost if an historian fails to at least acknowledge in the accounting that same sex-relationships—which existed quietly (and, in many cases, openly) within the matrix of older societies—could not be “documented” without the benefit of institutionalized marriage available to them — making it impossible to arrive at any realistic assessments, even when faced with the evidence. Hewing to the academic rigors of their profession, many historians sum-up their forays into the past with an obfuscating declaration that the individual had “no known romantic attachments”—a conclusion drawn with alarming alacrity—and, thus, “history” is written. Some regard this reluctance to apply labels because England’s laws of Primogeniture denied economic rights to younger children; and, in the latter of whom lost her family’s ancestral home on whom little has been written), because they either kept a low-profile during their lives or were overlooked (consciously or unconsciously) by historians, has meant that there is, over all, less scholarship to consult; 4) A lack of explicit personal writings or the willful editing or outright destruction of what documentation did exist by the individuals themselves (such as Lorena Hickok) or on the part of family members who tried to control what information was allowed into the public realm (as was the case with Michelangelo)—has contributed to false information being taken as fact—in some cases for centuries; 5) Long-held cultural biases, which continue to dictate that deep religious convictions are somehow mutually exclusive, have led many historians to conclude that individuals who were renowned for their religious devotion (such as George Washington Carver) could not also be gay (or any other religion in evidence to the contrary being ignored)—and 6) The unavailability of marriage across all cultures, which has prevented same-sex relationships from being socially codified alongside opposite sex couplings, has made it impossible to draw a clear-cut conclusion about whether an intense, decades-long relationship between two persons of the same gender was sexual—even when all the evidence points in that direction—a burden which is borne by gay people alone. Taken together, the bar to “prove” homosexuality has been set vastly higher than that required to support the common assumption of heterosexuality made of everyone. Also, because over much of the last two centuries, any suggestion an individual may have been anything other than heterosexual would have been considered libelous, few researchers have been willing to make the claim or include the inference in their work—especially if the historic figure still had a life-crippling, legacy-stealing thing—particularly when there are so many who deliberately capitalize on it for their own benefits.

This is of gravest concern when addressing the environment our children are forced to endure in our nation’s school systems. The lack of history significantly facilitates the complete absence of GLBT contributions to world history and culture in today’s textbooks—forces GLBT youth to grow up in a void, without historic relevance, subject to the social conventions and cultural biases of our society, vulnerable to the violence such ignorance can incite.

It is precisely because sexual minorities have so often been rendered invisible by historians that a new paradigm must be adopted by any researcher who expects to effectively study a people whose only hope for living in peace through much of the last few centuries required them to conceal evidence of their own existence.

However, the challenges facing those who must cull through vast resources of varying accuracy and often incomplete data to find GLBT role models are huge: 1) Selective editing done by many historians whereby certain individual’s non-hetero-normative sexuality has been minimized, altered or deleted has resulted in gaping inconsistencies in the historic record; 2) The bulk of GLBT history, having been written from a Western-European/U.S. perspective, has made information about Asians, Hispanics/Latinos/as, Eastern-European/Russian, Middle Eastern and Native American peoples more difficult to come by, skewing the tenor of the available scholarship toward the dominant culture; 3) The general obscurity of many GLBT individuals (especially those who were transgender, about whom little has been written), because they either kept a low-profile during their lives or were overlooked (consciously or unconsciously) by historians, has meant that there is, over all, less scholarship to consult; 4) A lack of explicit personal writings or the willful editing or outright destruction of what documentation did exist by the individuals themselves (such as Lorena Hickok) or on the part of family members who tried to control what information was allowed into the public realm (as was the case with Michelangelo)—has contributed to false information being taken as fact—in some cases for centuries; 5) Long-held cultural biases, which continue to dictate that deep religious convictions are somehow mutually exclusive, have led many historians to conclude that individuals who were renowned for their religious devotion (such as George Washington Carver) could not also be gay (or any other religion in evidence to the contrary being ignored)—and 6) The unavailability of marriage across all cultures, which has prevented same-sex relationships from being socially codified alongside opposite sex couplings, has made it impossible to draw a clear-cut conclusion about whether an intense, decades-long relationship between two persons of the same gender was sexual—even when all the evidence points in that direction—a burden which is borne by gay people alone. Taken together, the bar to “prove” homosexuality has been set vastly higher than that required to support the common assumption of heterosexuality made of everyone. Also, because over much of the last two centuries, any suggestion an individual may have been anything other than heterosexual would have been considered libelous, few researchers have been willing to make the claim or include the inference in their work—especially if the historic figure still had
A sample plaque.

Legacy walk to transform Halsted Street into a walking museum

BY CARRIE MAXWELL

With Pride month upon us comes more news from the Legacy Project. This walking museum along a half-mile stretch of Halsted Street showcasing biographies of notable LGBT people across history will take shape with a Gala Luncheon in October of this year and a dedication to take place on Oct. 11, 2012, National Coming Out Day. The dedication will be exactly 25 years to the day that Victor Salvo and Lori Cannon conceived of the idea while attending the Second March on Washington in 1987. Since the project was first announced, a board of directors has been elected and installed. Community leaders and politicians have also come on board with their support. The project has also been contacted by educational institutions and programs such as the Illinois Safe Schools Alliance, Prevent School Violence Illinois and several GSA (gay-straight alliance) advisors to develop curricula and other educational materials based on the Legacy Walk which will be used to combat bullying and promote awareness and acceptance of the LGBT community.

Members of the new board of directors are Salvo (founder/executive director), Laurie Dittman (board chairperson), Paul Faichild (board vice-chairperson), Owen Kehnein (board secretary), Jason Hendrix (board treasurer) and six additional board members: Cleo Wilson, John Menefee, Leslie Scheber, Paul Highfield, Geni Spinella and Lori Cannon. Dittman said, “I am very proud to be involved with the Legacy Project. As with any study of history, the Legacy Project will help solidify Halsted and Lakeview as a center of LGBT history in Chicago and across the nation.” Tunney said adding “I am proud that the project will impact our community’s history to residents and visitors alike and look forward to making it a reality.”

Since the 44th Ward is also home to the Northalsted Business Alliance, which is charged with the upkeep of the landmark rainbow pylons, Salvo contacted the alliance about using the pylons for the installation, and the board was very receptive. The alliance will be assisting the project in various ways including coordinating meetings with the city or having their streets cleaning team clean up and care for the project installations (which will take up the bottom half of the pylons).

“We think the project is a wonderful opportunity to recognize the important contributions of the honorees, as well as educating the neighborhood and our considerable tourist population,” said Patrick Harms, Northalsted Business Alliance President and owner of Circuit nightclub. Harms went on to say “The neighborhood will become a living museum of sorts with plans in the works for a visitor’s resource center and gift shop to compliment the outdoor Legacy Walk. Bringing visitors to our area is just one of the functions that the project will perform, however, there’s much more to it than that. The Legacy Project is already building bridges and several groups have expressed interest in developing educational materials based on the project—materials that we hope would help LGBT youth and ultimately prevent school bullying.”

U.S. Rep. Mike Quigley, whose congressional district encompasses the Lakeview area where the rainbow pylons are located, said, “Through out the history of this country, the contributions of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people have been minimized, or worse—outright ignored neighborhood where the Legacy Walk will be located, adding that “This is not just important locally, but also nationally and internationally. I am very excited to see it come to fruition. I am certain that the Legacy Project will become a destination unto itself.”

Bill Greaves, the City of Chicago’s liaison to the LGBT communities, said “It’s an interesting project that reflects the depth of the LGBT history and culture in our city and we are happy to be involved in bringing it forward. Alderman Tunney’s office is working on the project and has the support of the City.”

“We have had a tremendous price to live in a society that has denied our historic relevance… it is at the core of every lie, every exaggeration, every myth that has ever thwarted our push for equal justice. It is the very reason why we have had to fight to begin with. If there is one thing I truly, truly hope and pray The Legacy Walk accomplishes, it would be to know that it gave straight kids destined to become bullies a reason to stop and reconsider—and LGBT kids on the dark road to suicide a sense of who they might one day be possible for them if they just hang in there. If we can accomplish that, then we will have taken a huge step toward the day when, maybe, we won’t have to fight any more,” said Salvo.

Salvo also noted that the Gerber/Hart Library has signed on as the fiscal agent for the project. Funding for the project will be made primarily through corporate underwriting, philanthropic grants, private donations/sponsorships and community donations.

Already, there have been dozens of presenta tions to a variety of PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) chapters and educational institutions. As the project moves forward, Dittman said a booth will be set up at Northalsted Market Days in August to get the word out to the public. Winger Marketing has agreed to serve as their public relations firm on a pro bono basis. Noted LGBT historian, University of Illinois at Chicago professor and author John D’Emilio has also sent a letter of support for the project.

For more information, to make a tax-deductible donation or to submit your own nominations for the project (which will remain in the fall of this year) please visit their website www.legacyprojectchicago.org or contact them at 312-608-1198. To get the latest updates on the projects progress go to their Facebook page here http://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Legacy-Project/1247484087576962 and their twitter feed here http://twitter.com/legacywalk2012.
Giants fan delights in ‘It Gets Better’ video

BY ROSS FORMAN

SAN FRANCISCO—Sean Chapin is a San Francisco Giants fan who proudly wears his black Giants’ jacket through the Castro District, the city’s predominantly gay neighborhood. Chapin, 35, an accountant, is quick to tag pitcher Brian Wilson of the defending World Series champions as his favorite player.

Chapin’s joy for the team’s success last fall will, at the very least, be matched later this season when his favorite team releases an “It Gets Better” video.

The Giants will be the first professional team from any of the big four male sports (baseball, basketball, football and hockey) to release such a video, aimed at troubled LGBT youth.

“The idea started with Kobe Bryant, when he said the homophobic slur [earlier this spring] that he did,” Chapin said. “It was very unfortunate that he said it, but was more unfortunate how it was handled. He initially said he did not mean what he said, so, in essence, he did not take responsibility and did not apologize for his words.”

“With the LGBT civil-rights movement accelerating at such a fast pace, and the majority of Americans now in agreement with [allowing] same-sex marriage, to me, it felt like it was the right time for a team to take a pro-active stance of difference, especially when a lot of homophobia and homophobic rants.”

“I just figured, now was the right time for a team to do a video,” Chapin said. “San Francisco is a city that truly believes in diversity and differences, and celebrating those differences with open arms. So the Giants were a perfect team to ask.”

Chapin first wrote an email to the team’s website, and then recited it at different spots around the team’s stadium to drum up support. He also aired his appeal on his YouTube channel.

The folks at the It Gets Better project noticed, and featured Chapin’s appeal on their Facebook page. That helped spur about 700 signatures of support for Chapin’s idea.

“I thought that [total] was good,” said Chapin, who admits he was resigned to the fact that the Giants would not do one.

However, Chapin kept at it, and when change.org expressed interest in his idea, things catalyzed. The website featured Chapin’s appeal, helping push the signature tally to more than 6,500.

“One thing I’ve learned in this process is ... the only thing that can stop you is the fear that you’re not going to succeed,” Chapin said. “A lot of events were, in essence, working in synergy with one another. There was the homophobic comment from Kobe Bryant, the homophobic comments from the Atlanta Braves pitching coach, [professional hockey player] Sean Avery coming out in support of same-sex marriage, the [Phoenix] Suns executive came out, and more.

“Among the signs of Chapin’s appeal to the Giants are four San Francisco mayoral candidates.”

“I’m just absolutely ecstatic,” Chapin said. “I think the Giants are going to make a huge world of difference, especially when a lot of homophobia tends to stem from the sports environment, the sports culture.”

“When the Giants make their It Gets Better video, I think it’s going to have a huge impact, and I think other [professional] teams will be inspired and encouraged to do the same.”

Inaugural ‘Pink’ event a success

BY ROSS FORMAN

It was a complete sign of unity and support for the inaugural Paint The Park Pink, organized by the Chicago Metropolitan Sports Association’s (CMSA’s) Summer Women’s 11-inch Softball League.

At least one player from all 52 teams playing at the Waveland Fields June 5 sported some pink on their uniform or body in support of breast-cancer awareness. Event organizers said that 40 percent of the teams were completely decked out in pink for the day, regardless of what their team’s traditional color scheme is.

“We’re talking pink hats, shirts, shoe laces, boas, skirts, Superman-eseque caps, bandanas and more.”

“It was incredible, unbelievable,” said Elizabeth Wackerlin, 27, who lives in Bronzeville, plays for the Halsted’s B-Division team and was one of the event’s organizers. “When I pulled into the park, all I could see on all four fields was pink. It was a great feeling, a great sight.”

The event was held the same weekend as the annual Susan G. Komen 3-Day Walk For The Cure, and done in partnership with the Howard Brown Lesbian Community Cancer Project (LCCP).

There were banners hung at all four field declaring it, “Breast Cancer Awareness Day” and prizes were awarded to the best-dressed ‘pink out’ winners, including a team’s fee for the 2012 season.

“It was a great event and will only get bigger and better next year,” said Jennifer Howard, 39, a Rogers Park resident and one of the event’s organizers. “It was an emotional day, an emotional weekend for many. I personally heard from five women [in the league] today who said they are breast cancer survivors. That really tells me that we’re doing the right thing.”

The winning team for the PINK-OFF Contest was Spin. “Playing a double-header, the Spin team showed up decked out in pink feather boas, breast cancer ribbon socks, pink T-shirts and a whole lot of attitude,” organizers said.
The right buttons

Pictured is a selection of Chicago Pride and other gay buttons. From the private collection of Lee A. Newell II

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Pictured is a selection of matchbooks from gay bars and businesses, and even a political campaign (Ron Sable for 44th Ward alderman). From the private collection of Lee A. Newell II
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Mo’Nique dishes on Precious, comedy and her gay fans

BY JERRY NUNN

The comedienne and actress known the world over as Mo’Nique is heading to Milwaukee Pridefest with her stand-up act this weekend. Beginning with the UPN series The Parkers, Mo’Nique eventually led to her multiple award-winning role in Precious: Based on the Novel Push by Sapphire. She currently hosts her late-night talk show The Mo’Nique Show and talked about it among other things Nunn on One.

Windy City Times: Hello, Miss Mo’Nique. How are you?
Mo’Nique: I am wonderful, sugar. How are you doing?

WCT: Great and very excited about you coming to Milwaukee Pridefest.
MN: Me, too...

WCT: I wanted to go through the history of your career. Did you study acting in school?
MN: The best studying I did was watching television. I took drama but it was one of those requirement courses. But it wasn’t something that I thought would be the route I was going to go on.

WCT: How did you audition for The Parkers?
MN: I actually didn’t audition for The Parkers. I had a talk-show pilot at the time and it didn’t go. The agent I was with at the time took that pilot to Larry Little at Big Ticket Television, he put it in and asked if I could act. She said “Of course,” and that is how The Parkers came about.

WCT: So you did always want to do a talk show and it is still going strong on BET?
MN: Yes and fabulous.

WCT: Have you had a special guest that meant a lot to you?
MN: Every last one means a lot to me to have on that show. Without every last one I couldn’t sit where I sit.

WCT: Did you know the movie Precious was going to change your life?
MN: You know Precious changed my life but not in ways anyone would imagine. How would you say that it changed my life?

WCT: I would say it was a whirlwind for you with all of the awards and attention.
MN: That actually had nothing to do with my life changing. When I read that script, by the time I got to page ten of the book, I said to [director] Lee Daniels, “Oh my God. If we do this right it will save lives.” Well, I didn’t know that the life I was talking about was my own. That is how it forever changed my life.

WCT: I know you performed at Showtime at the Apollo before that is a tough crowd, from what I have heard.
MN: Okay, [laughs] I tell you, Jerry, that was one of the best experiences of my life because you really got to feel the history that was in that building. When you touched that log then you knew you were touching that log of the greatest entertainers of all time. For me that crowd makes that show. You know what I am saying?

WCT: I do.
MN: They opened their arms up to me. It was just beautiful. I started the “wop wop.” Get their ass out of here, baby! They told me one time, “Mo’Nique, you can’t be involved in the show like that.” I said, “Yes, I can. If they can’t

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Windy City Media Group
Chicago Pride

SOMMAR BREEZE
Sat.-Sun., June 11-12
Thousands are expected at the Andersonville Midsummersfest.

Out in Lakewide Explore the history and architecture of Lakewide, America’s first officially recognized gay neighborhood. Learn about its status as a burgeoning suburb in the early 1800s, the opening of Brissy Field, and the LGBTQ businesses that helped the area boom in the 1970s. $15, 7 p.m., Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark, www.chicagohistory.org.

Friday, June 10
Gay Liberation Network on Ohp Access Network TV Gay Liberation Network live call-in show on CABLE TV. 6:30-6:55 p.m. 27 p.m., Channel 21 in Chicago Cabq TV. http://www.gayliberation.net

Pride Comedy Show From Adam Guarino come comedy night of world-class comedy. Headlined by Chris Doucette from NYC. Plus special guests by Bill Cruz, Meredith Kachel and Matthew Len. Co-hosted by Ever Mairal, 7:30 p.m., Mary’s Attic, 5400 N. Clark, http://www.hamburgernmacy.com/chicago.

24th Annual Milwaukee PrideFest: Co-moderne Mique Non-A Two-Spirit variety show. Free, but tickets are required. Doors open at 6 p.m., taping begins at 7 p.m., 6:30 p.m., 3234 N. Halsted, http://www.promipf.com.

Saturday, June 11
NW Indiana Rainbow Days 4th Gay Pride Parade In 1800s NW Indiana, the grand finale to its 4th Gay Pride Parade on June 11th, 2011 at 12noon, beginning at Miller Ave. & Grand Blvd in the Miller section of Gary, Ind. The Pride picnic will immediately follow at Marquette Park 12 p.m., 219-801-3775, http://www.nwitimes.com/

17th Annual Whole Streets Art Festival Two days of art, 250 juried artists, cuisine of local restaurants, music performances by 10,000 Maniacs and American English in the city of the largest and most recognized gay and lesbian arts and culture scene for entertainment every night; schedule 12 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Wells Street, between North Avenue and Division, in Chicago’s Old Town neighborhood, http://www.wsgala.org, Andersonville Midsummersfest Two days of music, dancing, kids’ entertainment, and delicious food vendors from around the city offering some of the best eats while dance troupes and cutting-edge bands keep the party going; full schedule online. Through June 12, 12 p.m., 773-665-4842, Clark and Foster Chicago, http://www.anders-sonville.org/midsummersfest.

Chicago’s lesbian feminist chorus’ Pride concert and dance Artistic Associates celebrate Pride month with a concert and dance featuring songs about dancing and songs to dance to. “Shall We Dance?” is dance featuring songs about dancing and “Shall We Dance?” is

FLARE ESSENCE
Tuesday, June 14
“United in HIV: Take Control Through Unity & Advocacy,” a social event for National HIV Testing Day on June 27 presented by Cyan Flare (United House) for the Chicago Black Gay Men’s Caucus and Rae Lewis-Thatcher, the “Shop Living with AIDS.” HIV testing will be offered on site. Free, but optional $10 donation (Includes a free drink ticket). 7 p.m., Sidetrack, 3349 N. Halsted, http://www.lovelyruthrotha.com.

Join the Impact Chicago planning meet- ing for the summer season of Chicago’s regular weekly planning meeting. Join the Impact Chicago planning meeting for the summer season of Chicago’s regular weekly planning meeting.

Sunday, June 12
Irv Leder Elder Electronic Trio LGBT Change can sponsoring the Tom Leder Electronic Trio featuring one of the world’s only platinum award gay artists performing during pride month. Doors open at 7:30PM. Pre-show VIP reception from 5-7PM at Downtown Bar & Lounge. Event is 17+, 7:30 p.m., 792-870, House of Blues, 329 N. Dearborn, http://www.jgbcharge.org


Milwaukee Pride Parade “Filling the Streets with Pride” route will be down South 2nd St. between Greenfield Ave and South St. with staging starting at noon. More info to come. 2 p.m., PrideFest Milwaukee, 200 N. Harbor, The Summerfest grounds, http://www.pridegarage.org

Monday, June 13

Two DaysɔPRECEDING PAGE

Windy City Media Group
Chicago Pride

THE ‘SPIRITS’ WORLD

Tuesday, June 14
Two Spirits, a documentary about the Native American two-spirit tradition, airs on WTTW.

Image courtesy of Christostra Apache

TUESDAY, JUNE 14
Cyan Flare (above) will present “United in HIV: Take Control Through Unity & Advocacy” at Sidetrack, 3349 N. Halsted. Photo courtesy of Flare
BILLY MASTERS

“I design a lot of my own clothes and I think for women of my age, over 40, there’s very few things you can wear. Everyone’s either too goffle, or it’s too mummys/groany, so I think I have some very good ideas.”—Joan Collins talks about her plans to start a fashion line for women her age—over 40. To say nothing of over 50 …, over 60 … and over 70?.

Over the last year or so, I’ve gone on a little trip down memory lane. I’ve looked up old friends (some—I’m not a saint), I now regularly get together with my grade-school classmates—people I was with day in, day out for many years. I’ve even messed some “what ifs” by reconsidering old relationships. I’ve revisited many old beasts and tried to learn what worked and what didn’t. So, in a way, I’ve developed my own little time machine. I’ve always wondered what I’d do if I could return to my earlier self. Would I make some different decisions? Would I treat certain people differently? Would I give myself a break? Or, better yet, just appreciate what my life was—and is?

I bring this up apropos of Bob Smith’s new book, Remembrance of Things I Forgot. Certainly no one would expect a sci-fi novel from one of the founding members of Funny Gay Males. However, in a way, that’s what he’s written. The boy-friend of Bob’s central character has developed this time machine and the hero “inadvertently” travels back 20 years and meets up with—and flirts with—his former self. I’ve often said I’m dating myself, but I never meant it literally! There’s so much more to this book—it’s a science-fiction adventure, a political thriller, a road-trip saga and a gay love story. Take out the sci-fi angle and I could be describing Oprah and Gayle! Seriously, this book is completely unique and written in a personal and familiar style that Bob has perfected for years on stage. If you know him as a performer, you can almost hear him saying this story aloud. (I’ve always felt that Smith’s biggest strength as a comedian was his brilliant writing.) I don’t want to give it all away, but if you’re looking for something to read that’s fun, thoughtful and provocative, have I got a book for you!

While I was re-examining my life, I wondered why I am so often attracted to people and situations that can (and often do) lead to nothing but doom and destruction? This point was driven home while I had The Bachelorette on in the background and recognized, much to my surprise, one of my former paramours! They do tend to spring up when one least expects it. First I thought that maybe since I’d been re-evaluating my romantic choices, maybe he was doing the same. However, given his sexual proclivities with men, I somehow think that Ashley’s equipment will not be able to deliver quite the impact of mine—not to toot my own horn. I usually left that to him!

In these days of political correctness, many people take issue with Lisa Lampanelli and her brand of non-discriminatory insult humor. I am not one of those people; I adore Lisa—and she just gave the gay community another reason to love her. When comedy’s loveable Queen of Mean heard that Fred Phelps and his cronies from the Westboro Baptist Church planned to picket her show in Topeka, Kansas, because of her gay stance, she encouraged them to come out in droves. In fact, she promised to personally donate $1,000 to the Gay Men’s Health Crisis for every picker. Her motives were simple—the more people who showed up spewing hate, the more money they’d raise for the very people they purport to hate. Kinda clever. There seemed to be some discrepancy over the number of picketers, Lisa said, “My driver counted 44 people, but the next day, someone from those assholes said they had 48. I’m not going to quibble, so I said, ‘Let’s make it an even 50’—and if they don’t like that, they can suck my dick.’

Former transsexual prostitute Toni Newman is making quite a splash with her autobiography, I Rise—The Transformation of Toni Newman (which I bet has more laughs than that Chaz Bono memoir). In the book, Toni talks about some former clients, and one of the biggest is rapper LL Cool J. In an interview with Hip Hop Weekly (which I’m sure you all read), s/he talks openly about the encounter: “I had sex with LL Cool J. At that point, he had been one of the top five dates I ever had. I made over five-hundred dollars. For a street prostitute doing fifty-dollar blow jobs and hundred-dollar hotel dates, he gave me five times more than I had already made. I wasn’t aware until we got into the encounter and the glasses came off that he was in fact LL Cool J. We were a versatile group, and when I say versatile, that means the other person gives and receives.” In another interview, she says that LL was fully aware that she was a man prior to them having sex. LL’s manager calls the book “pure comedy”. But I like to laugh, so I know what I’ll be taking to the beach this summer!

In our “Ask Billy” question, Randy in Maine asks, “Have you seen the new show ‘Extreme Makeover: Weight Loss Edition’? The personal trainer is HOT! Who is he?” That would be the lovely Chris Powell, who eschews the term personal trainer—he calls himself a “transformation professional.” I call him yummy! I’ve known of him for a few years—even since he turned up on Saint Oprah’s show and helped that guy who was morbidly obese lose over 300 pounds … and his virginity, now that’s a transformation I’d pay to be a part of! Although Powell has a slight accent that would identify him as gay, he’s described in press material as a “married father of two.” I presume that means he’s straight, but that won’t stop me from running some scorching hot photos of him on BillyMasters.com.

When I’m showing off my advanced vocabulary with words like “eschews,” it’s definitely time to end yet another column. But what a way to kick off Pride Month. And a book review?? How eru- dite. (There’s another one.) It makes me wonder what will turn up next on www.BillyMasters.com, the choice for discriminating gossipers. I am abandoning Los Angeles for the entire summer. Back to Boston for Pride, and then NYC, Provincetown—oh, the possibilities are endless. However, if you’ve got a question, you can always reach me at Billy@BillyMasters.com and I promise to get back to you before LL asks me out on one of those reciprocal dates! So, until next time, remember, one man’s filth is another man’s bible.
Ray J. Koenig III and Clark Hill PLC

Ray is a legal authority on all of his practice areas, which include probate, trusts, guardianship, estate planning, and elder law, including the litigation of those areas. He is a longtime advocate for and member of the LGBT community, and is involved in several charitable groups, community associations, and professional organizations. Ray is a member of Clark Hill PLC, a full-service law firm consisting of a diverse team of attorneys and professionals committed to our clients and our communities.

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Pride Drag Show
6:30pm DEBORAH COX
9:00pm ULTRA NATE
SOUTH STAGE
5:00pm The Personnel
8:00pm Sixteen Candles
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SAT 6.25
FESTIVITIES START AT 4PM
NORTH STAGE
12:30pm - Miss Fozzie’s Pet Parade
1:30pm - 3:00pm - 5:30pm
Pride Drag Show
2:30pm MYA
3:30pm XELLE
7:00pm CRYSTAL WATERS
8:00pm INAYA DAY
9:30pm KIM ENGLISH
SOUTH STAGE
12:00pm Lakeside Pride Show Band
2:30pm Chicago Redline
6:00pm Rock Candy
8:00pm Wedding Banned