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EDITORIAL CARTOON

## Bar Raids Shed False Light on Gay Community

By Norm Kent, Publisher

Police raids on one local bar have again given the television media an opportunity to present to the public a false, dishonest, and misleading picture of the gay community.

The gay community is not about horny men in dark bars getting their rocks off. To suggest or intimate the same, as television crews did last month, is a disservice and disgrace to all of us.

There are a few other events we have been involved in that may have not made the lead news stories on the local ABC, NBC, CBS, or WSVN stations lately. Let us suggest they might want to cover a few of these stories.

They might not have some reporter feverishly standing outside a gay bar late at night, but they would then present us in a true rather than a false light.

The gay community is the Sunshine Cathedral or Congregation Etz Chaim gathering en masse for a spectacular Christmas concert, or a High Holy Days service.

The gay community is the Stonewall Library collecting volumes for the ages, and hosting a speaker's forum that includes nationally known gay figures speaking to small local groups.

The gay community is Pridelines holding a forum for youth that offers social opportunities, counseling and positive coming out experiences, or the development of an unprecedented senior day care center for gays.

The gay community is the Hurricane Showdown Softball Tournament and the bowling leagues that gather weekly at Manor Lanes or annually in a benefit for Poverello.

The gay community is the Dolphin Democrats presenting Governor Howard Dean of Vermont or the Log Cabin Republicans presenting author and activist Richard Tafel.

The gay community is Gay Lauderdale.com and Face to Face hosting County commissioners, marketing executives or community leaders at business luncheons.

The gay community is Pride South Florida's and PGFL's Pridefest, featuring thousands of decent civic-minded gay souls, walking communally up and down the streets.

The gay community is the GLCC hosting bingo nights, meetings, celebrations and passings, and a home for the heart and soul, hub and spokes of the gay community.

The gay community is dozens of guest house owners restoring properties on the Fort Lauderdale beach, enhancing real estate values, promoting tourism and developing a business network they proudly call the Rainbow Carpet Alliance, pumping millions into local businesses.

The gay community is the countless volunteers for SAVE Dade and Americans For Equality, donating their time and dollars, hours

and energy, to preserve and protect the human rights we hold and cherish so dearly.

The gay community is Art for AIDS Dinners, the Dade Human Rights Foundation, and countless bars and entertainers hosting parties and nights of remembrance.

The gay community is a GLSEN video educating educators and promoting tolerance, and it is ACT-UP reminding us all that the battle against AIDS and disease is not over.

The gay community is the White Party salute to those who are no longer with us, and the millions of dollars this event has raised to support volunteers, researchers, and physicians who still fight AIDS in the hospitals and hospices.

The gay community is the LAMBDA Chorale performing at the Amaturio Center, and the Gay Men's Chorus of South Beach hosting a Christmas Concert at the Colony Theater; the Public Theater holding a Gay and Lesbian festival, and *The Express* partnering with the Fort Lauderdale Film Festival to showcase a monthly film series.

The gay community is the Gamma Mu Foundation raising funds to raise AIDS awareness in rural areas, and provide scholarships for students doing research into gay and lesbian projects.

The gay community is you reading this paper and getting inspired to join the Nadadores swimming team, the wrestling club, or the Lambda Auto Club, or any one of the countless organizations that come together for individual good and social growth.

The gay community is the formation of a Gay and Lesbian Legal Clinic designed to serve the needs of elderly, indigent, and infirm, and it is Seniors Active in a Gay Environment making their golden years more productive, meaningful, and spiritually rewarding.

The gay community is Community Health Care and CenterOne, Care Resources and Broward House, clinics anywhere and everywhere that recognize within our community there is opulence and affluence to be sure, but needs to be addressed, and good people to address them.

The gay community is the thriving real estate enhancements and improvements to dozens of communities from South Beach to Victoria Park, from the Manors to North Miami.

The gay community is cities recognizing the need for gay law enforcement officers, counties passing gay domestic partnership agreements, and communities electing openly gay and lesbian legislators, even though there are more still that remain foolishly in the dark closet of despair and self-degradation.

The gay community is something you can be proud of. As you put your head on the pillow at night, you have a right to smile with pride that you have partnered with progress, and placed your heart and soul in a community with a conscience, that is making a difference.

## Letters to the editor

### Hunker Hunks Down and Resigns from Dolphin Board of Directors

After serving as a Board Member of the Dolphin Democrats for three years, I regret that I will no longer be seeking office.

Ever since that unanimous vote for the President Percy Johnson and his Board last year, working with Johnson has been most rewarding.

I have seen him excel with creative ideas in reaching out to officers, members and community each month and it has pleased me to see his willingness to involve board members in all activities and issues.

However, due to some disharmony on the Board caused by the treasurer disrupting meetings with long rambling diversions, I have decided to put my time and energy into other areas.

What has been most unpleasant was seeing an aura of mean spirit arise, piqued by that *pitch of poison* with the potential to bring shame to the Dolphin Democrats – contrasted dramatically to President Percy Johnson's efforts to bring harmony and collegial spirit to the club.

Specifically since August, meetings have been hampered by the treasurer refusing to produce a monthly detailed treasury report. At times, we received only a credit/debit total, always with a

three or four thousand dollars debit.

We are still uninformed about whose debts are outstanding. When questioned, many excuses were given — too busy or ill, etc. Yet he never requested help.

The treasurer's fierce, sometimes screaming, retort seemed to be his attempt to intimidate or silence others. His ongoing threats to quit appeared as empty as those treasurer's reports.

For positive energy, the Nominating Committee has recommended Gloria Rosen as the next treasurer. For 27 years, she has been in the finance industry in sales, managing millions of dollars for her clients. A mature professional adult at last, as well as being a hard working, intelligent and cooperative team player.

As part of my departing words, it is my hope that all the Committee's nominations are chosen: Officers: Johnson, Kasten, Finkelstein and Rosen. For the Board: Arnold, Hasselkus, Glasser, Lyons, Rose, Sheehan and Woods-Alcide.

And God..Buddha or whoever is there... Bless North & South America and everyone else.

George Hunker

### Leather Bar Raids Will Have Ripple Effect on Tourism

I am writing to express my concern over the recent bar raid at Chaps, and the new police policy of prosecuting anyone engaging in sex or nudity at any other bar, as explained forcefully in the *Express* editorial of January 28.

Ever since Chaps first opened in June of 1997, it has clearly permitted sex in designated areas on their premises. Before then other leather bars did the same thing, going back at least to 1994. Everyone in the community was well aware of this, whether or not they chose to participate, and it is inconceivable that the authorities did not know what was going on throughout this time. Any activity involved only consenting adults. Patrons entered freely with full knowledge, and no one was forced to observe or participate in any activity against their will.

Under the circumstances it was natural for patrons to assume that some arrangements had been made with the authorities, and they could therefore expect to be safe from police or other outside harassment, as long as they obeyed the club's rules. It might have violated some law, but a wise policy would allow this since no one was being harmed. If every law were enforced to the hilt, we would probably all be in jail. It certainly gave people a good alternative to such settings as parks and mall bathrooms, which I fear may become popular again.

I am certainly not a "leatherman", nor do I pretend to understand the leather culture. However, the large numbers of cars in all the parking lots of leather bars attested to their popularity, and indicated that some perceived needs were being met. I find it hard to believe that these bars can do the same business if people can only stand and stare at each other's costumes. Several will probably have to close.

What bothers me most is the timing of this drastic change in policy. No one was complaining, and everything seemed to be going smoothly. The gay community and its businesses were recognized as keeping the local economy and tourist industry going, when so many straight businesses were hurt by Sept. 11. There is a domino effect: leather conventions once planned for Ft. Lauderdale may well relocate, and gay tourists may be reluctant to visit if the police climate appears hostile. This will adversely affect the guest houses and other business establishments.

It would be very naïve to imagine that the raid and its aftermath was not an attack on the gay community as a whole. To be sure, there are plenty of other organizations still going strong, including the ones I most value. However, I see no plausible explanation for the new policy and its timing except as the first step in a more extensive backlash and attack on our community. It is natural that our opponents would begin with the least respectable, and thus most vulnerable elements, but why stop there if we accept it meekly? Will the bathhouses be next? The clothing-optional guest houses?

Ten years ago GUARD (Gays United to Attack Repression and Discrimination) would have been up in arms, leading protests and investigations of what was really going on, and certainly not satisfied with pretending that the authorities were previously unaware. Yet I have heard nothing from them. Are they defunct? Is anyone else serving as a watchdog? Have we become so dangerously complacent that we were unprepared for a 1950s-style bar raid, complete with sensationalistic television?

John C. Graves, Ft. Lauderdale

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