

OUT THIS WEEK**Emily Cruz promotes conference cruise**

In 1988, the Texas Lesbian Conference began as a small conference for lesbians throughout the state to gather, network, share information and have a good time. Over the years, the conference has moved among Texas' major cities and flourished. This year, the board decided to do something different and take a cruise.

Emily Cruz, pictured below at right with her sister, has been involved in the conference since 1988. "It wasn't my idea, but I jumped on the bandwagon and have been with it ever since," she says. She is a past board president and has been involved in planning each of the conferences when they have taken place in Dallas.

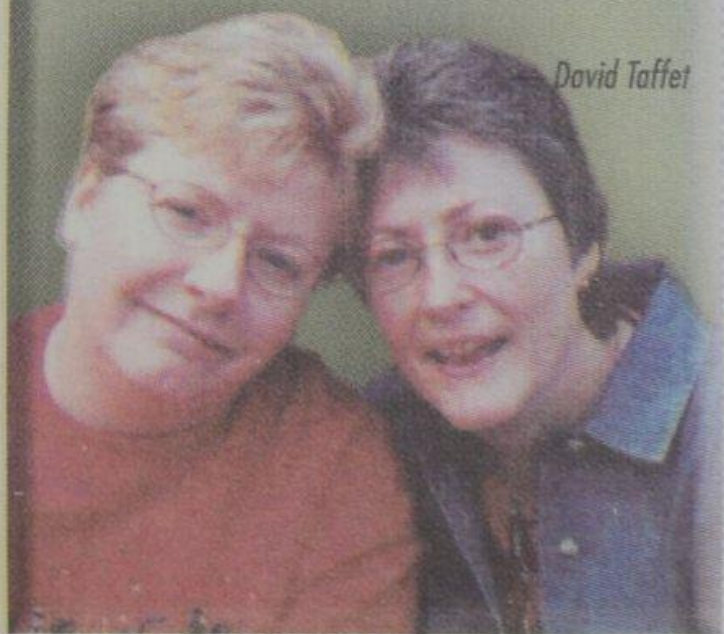
As happens in the life cycle of all events, attendance ebbs and flows, and last year attendance was down. Because of that, Cruz says, the board decided to shake things up and do something really different this year. The four-day cruise aboard a Carnival ship leaves from Galveston for Cozumel on Oct. 17. The theme, "What lesbians really want," will be reflected in a workshop Cruz will conduct, "Where do we go from here?"

Over the years, Cruz explains, the conference has amassed "a large treasury." Her workshop will focus on where the Texas Lesbian Conference is headed. Should the conference continue with more cruises, return to the rotating city format? Or is the annual conference worth continuing at all and what should be done with the money? Although she expresses hope that the conference will continue, she notes that the need for this conference is not as great as it was in 1988. With groups like Women's Business Network, for which she has served as program chair and board member, and Women's Communities Association, in which she is also active, women have other outlets that didn't exist in the past.

In addition, Cruz says there isn't the same need for separate women's groups today. "The girls play with the boys better than we did before," she says. But the Texas Lesbian Conference might be partially responsible for that. As the only statewide, annual lesbian conference in the country, the organization has attracted top-name speakers and entertainment through its 15-year history. Empowered, energized and armed with ideas from the conference, women have returned to their communities and created many of the new groups that now benefit men as well as women.

Cruz is looking forward to the conference aboard ship and taking a few days off from her busy schedule juggling school, studying for a degree in business management, a full time job with a pharmaceutical company and a part-time house-sitting business. Information on the cruise can be found at www.texaslesbianconference.com.

Texas Lesbian Conference. Oct. 17-21. From \$439 per person. 1-866-200-2086.



David Taffet