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BIWEEKLY

IN TWO SECTIONS

ON
THE SUBJECT OF

SEX

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'UNNATURAL ACTS'

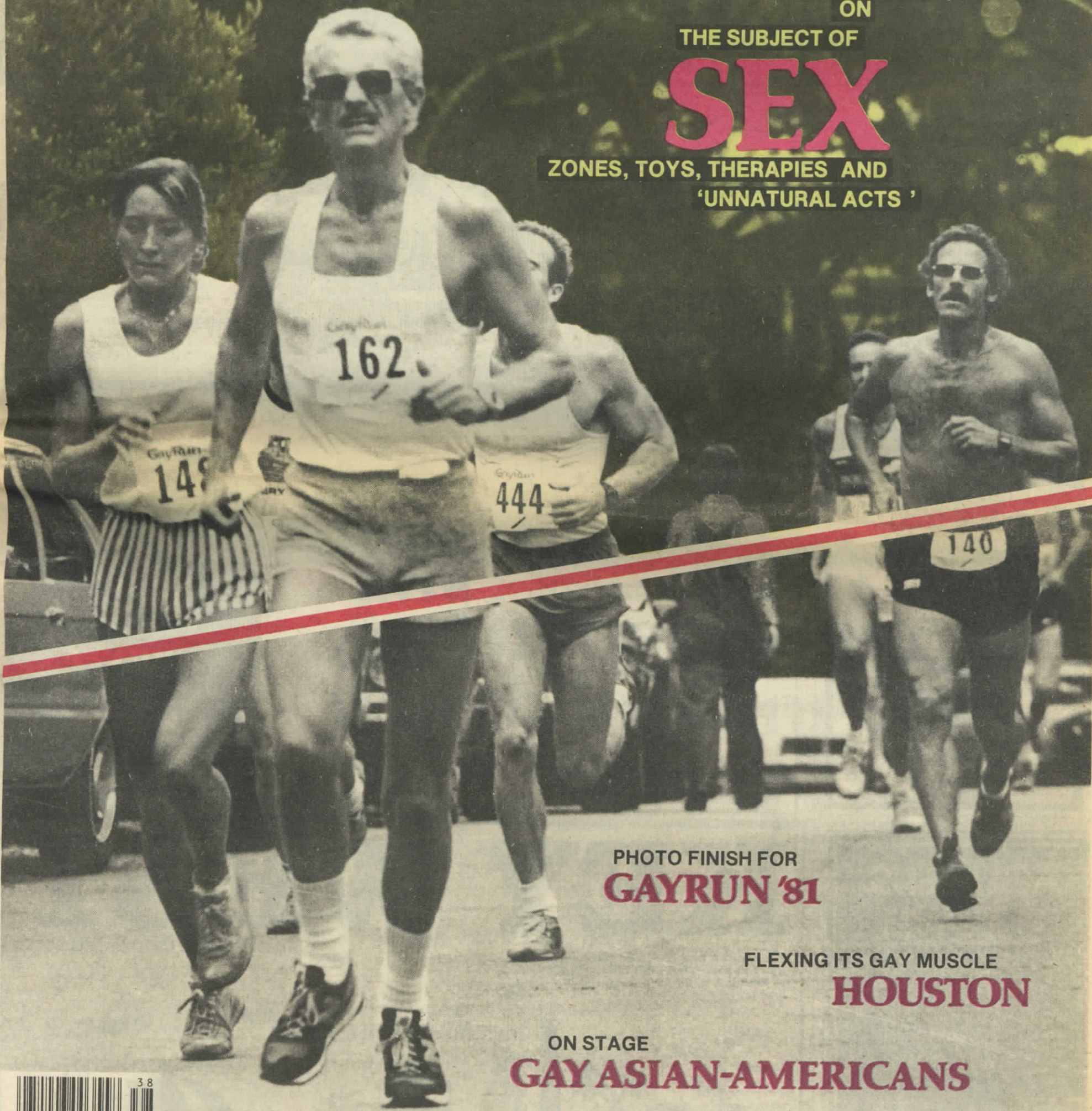


PHOTO FINISH FOR
GAYRUN '81

FLEXING ITS GAY MUSCLE
HOUSTON

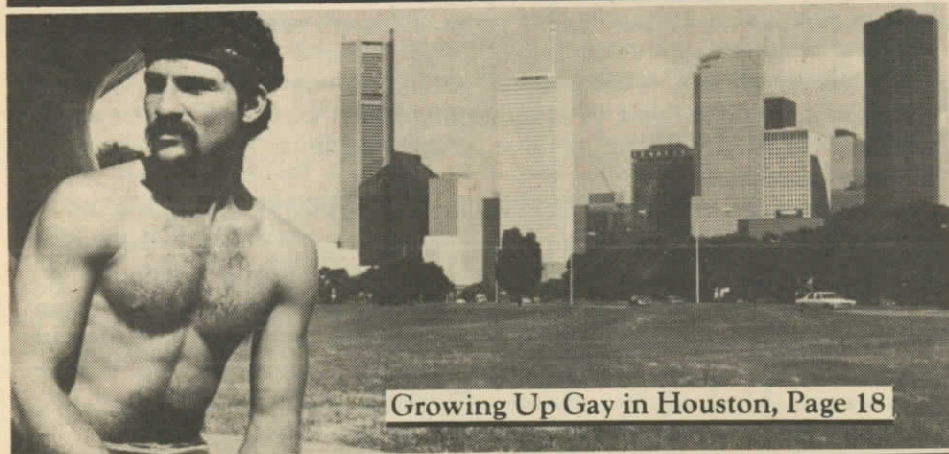
ON STAGE
GAY ASIAN-AMERICANS

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Issue 326
September 17, 1981

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OGDEN ROBERTSON

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THE MADDING CROWD

BY DENNIS FORBES



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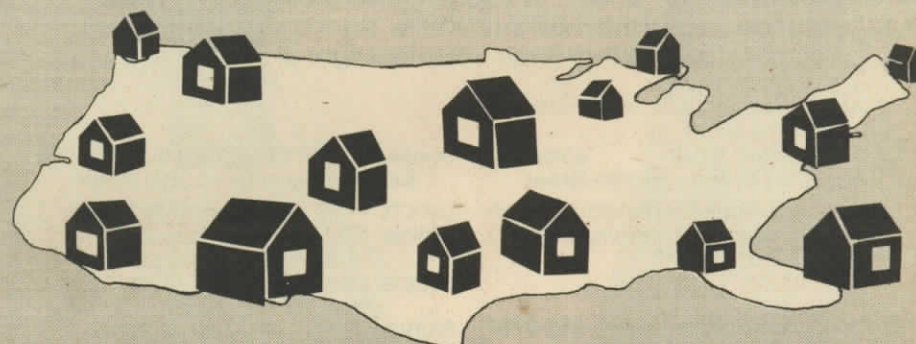
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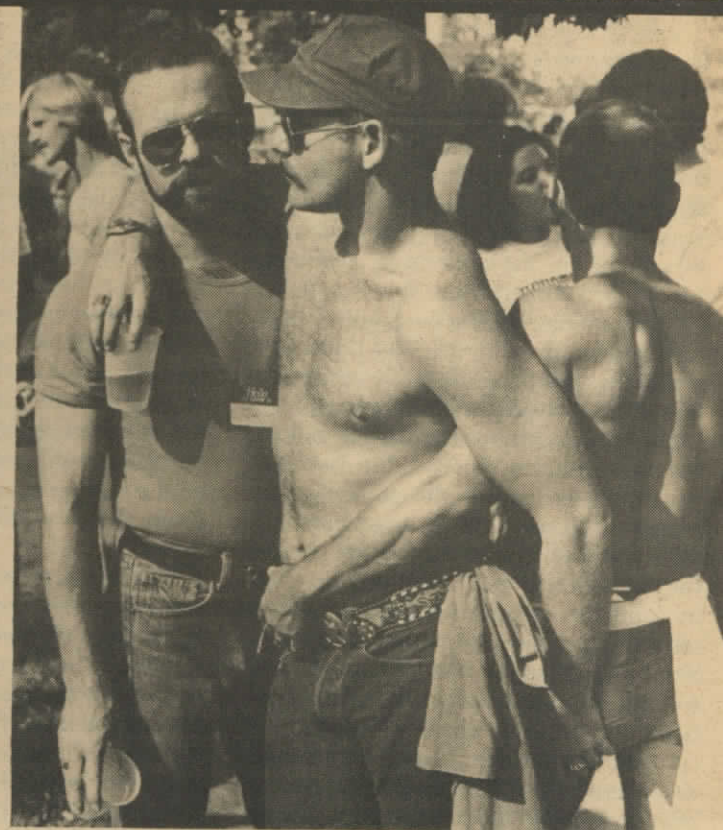
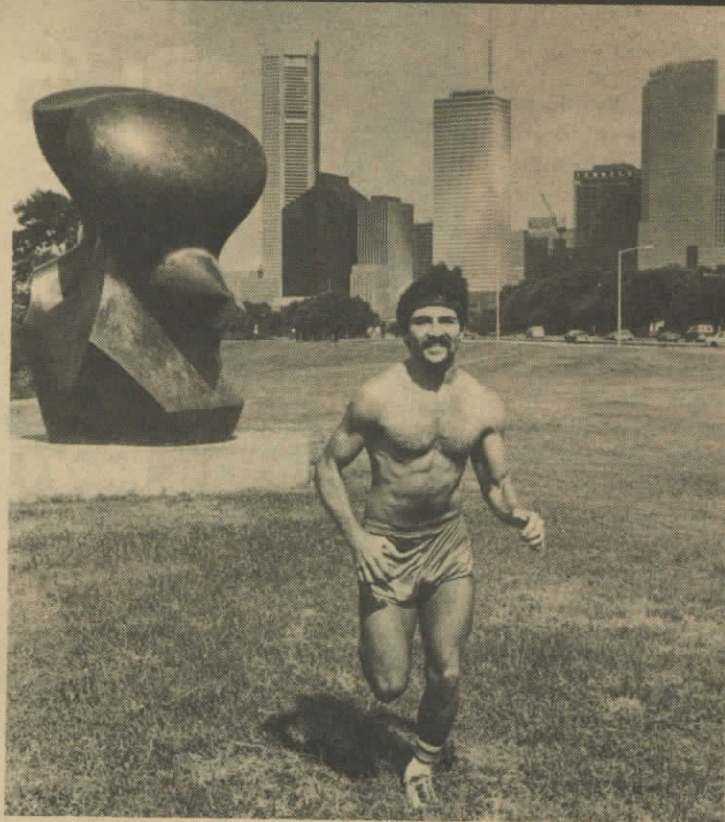
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“Give us another two years and we’ll be crowned the gay mecca of the world,” activist Larry Bagneris says of Houston. And while it might just be Texas-style bragging, the fact remains that Houston’s gay community has come a long way in the past six years.

Bagneris should know. He is a board member of the Houston Gay Political Caucus, the country’s largest local gay organization. In fact, the GPC’s mailing list of 9,000 is rivaled only by that of the National Gay Task Force (on whose board Bagneris also serves). He points to this year’s Gay Pride Week, which he chaired, as particularly significant. The “week” was actually 11 days jam-packed with concerts, speeches, parties, rallies and events for special interest groups within the gay community. Houston gays even imported the Los Angeles Great American Yankee (GAY) Freedom Band. And this year the police estimated the parade crowd at more than 60,000—three times the turnout just two years ago.



Night scene on Westheimer

HOUSTON

HOT SPOT

Largely due to the GPC, the Houston political establishment has come to take the gay vote—and therefore gay people—seriously. The big breakthrough came in the fall of 1979, when soft-spoken Eleanor Tinsley, backed by a crack gay campaign machine, upset incumbent City Councilman Frank Mann. The 20-year veteran of the council, a dyed-in-the-wool homophobe, had made a big media splash when he referred to Tinsley’s campaign workers as “queers and oddwads.” Tinsley’s election created a progressive majority on the council and put other officeseekers on notice that the gay bloc would have to be reckoned with.

In 1980, 9 of the 10 precincts targeted by the GPC went for Jimmy Carter, despite the generally heavy Houston and Texas vote for Ronald Reagan. “We did a damned good job,” Bagneris says of the GPC effort. “It proved that our bloc vote is very solid.”

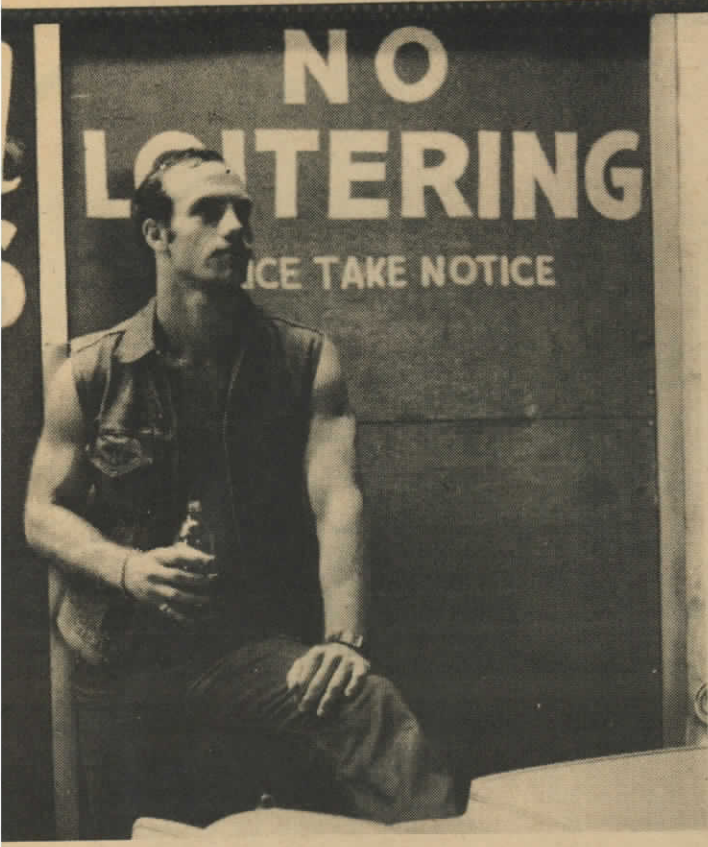
This year gay eyes are on the fall race for mayor, since the outcome could set a whole new tone for the city’s gay community. Incumbent Mayor Jim McConn has not impressed Houston gays, who will probably support City Controller Kathy Whitmire. But it’s not even certain that Whitmire will make the run-off in a four-way race in which two of her opponents are heavily backed by downtown financial interests.

Houston political activism has paid off beyond the city limits too. In Washington Congressman Mickey Leland is one of the most outspoken advocates of gay rights, and in Austin state Rep. Debra Danburg has been very supportive of gay and lesbian issues.

Combined with the highly visible gay community, Houston’s strong economy has made the city a magnet for gays from throughout the South and Midwest. As a result, the Montrose district has come

Montrose Singers perform with the Montrose Symphonic Band





Brunch at Baja's

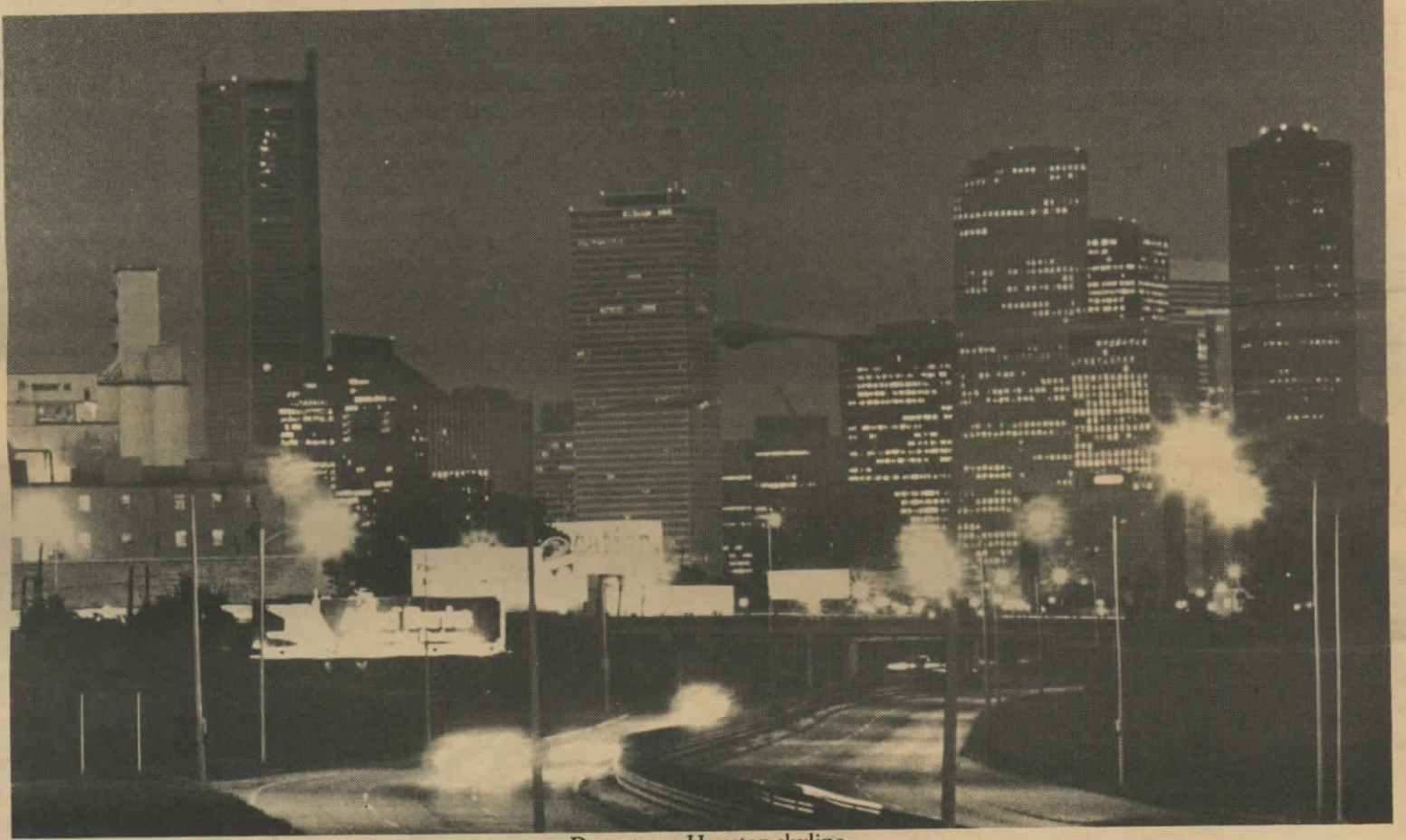
money are in the closet," laments Steve Shiflett, founder and former president of the GPC. "Compared to other cities of our size, Houston's professional community is much more closeted." To reach that hidden constituency, Shiflett this year founded an organization called Citizens for Human Equality (CHE), which works with neighborhood groups on issues of direct concern to residents. One current priority is crime in the Montrose. "There are so many muggings now it's unbelievable," says Shiflett. "It's not a gay or straight issue. It's a quality of life issue." CHE has helped raise money to fund the Montrose Patrol, a volunteer group that watches over the predominantly gay area.

The same visibility that has resulted in increased antigay attacks has also produced positive changes. Whereas five years ago there was just a handful of gay organizations, Houston now boasts more than 60. Many of them meet at the Montrose Activity Center, a kind of gay community facility on Holman. Two gay publications, the local *Montrose Voice*

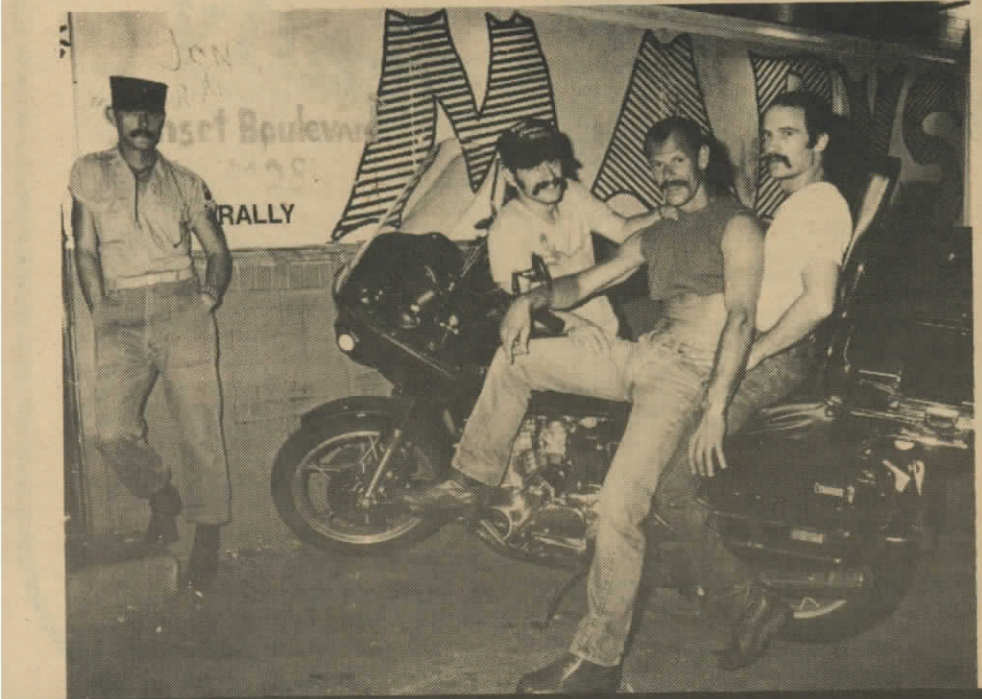
OF THE SOUTH

BY SCOTT P. ANDERSON

Photographs by Ogden Robertson



Downtown Houston skyline



alive with a variety of gay retail businesses, restaurants and bars. Once the seedy center of straight hipdom, Westheimer Road today is not unlike Christopher Street or Santa Monica Boulevard, except for the massage parlors and female hookers flourishing alongside the gay-oriented establishments. Houston's boomtown atmosphere, a direct result of the oil and electronics money that has poured into town, is also evident in the healthy gay business sector. The publicity-shy Executive and Professional Association of Houston, though primarily a social organization, now has more than 230 members.

The low profile among Houston's professionals is a source of frustration for some activists, who believe that the city's high-paying jobs and redneck surroundings make moneyed gays unwilling to be more open. "Most of the people with

and the statewide *This Week in Texas*, keep gays up to date on political and social happenings. Besides Houston's gay band—which, with its colorful Texas flags, thrilled participants in the 1979 March on Washington—the Montrose Symphonic Band, the Montrose Singers and the Bayou City Men's Chorus are all chiming in with a message of harmony for the larger community. There are two gay gyms in town and several eateries, including the classy Baja's, that bespeak a newfound gay pride. The Houston Guest House (see page 22) provides a comfortable retreat for visiting gay tourists right in the heart of the Montrose. And, of course, the city offers the full complement of baths, bars and adult bookstores. One bona fide movement bookstore, Wilde 'n' Stein, is among the most comprehensive gay and feminist outlets anywhere in the South.

Despite this political and cultural pro-



WARRIOR ... naturally

Home of Houston Motorcycle Club

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Local gay leaders include (standing at left) 1981 Gay Pride Week director Larry Bagneris; GPC founding president Gary Van Ooteghem; Eddie Chavez, director of Montrose Sports Association. In foreground are Lee Harrington (left), GPC president; Montrose Counseling Center director Gary Treese; Citizens for Human Equality president Steve Shiflett; and visiting Gay Rights National Lobby executive director Steve Endean.

Last year, an off-duty HPD officer shot and killed local gay activist Fred Paez just days before Gay Pride Week. The Paez incident served only to polarize further a divided city. This year, the third annual police-gay softball match was canceled following internal bickering in the HPD. The fact that the gays had a great match against the fire department did little to advance any rapprochement with the police.

In spite of police-gay friction, however, local media treatment of gays remains fairly good. Certainly no one can live in Houston without realizing that gays live there too. The local community got a nice shot in the arm in May when KPRC-TV ran a multipart series on Houston's gays. While some lamented the superficiality of the show, everyone agreed that its positive tone spelled out a clear message: Houston's gay community has arrived.

Exactly how far it has come is demonstrated by Lee Harrington, current president of the GPC. Like so many others, Harrington is a transplant to Houston, having moved there in 1978 after being heavily involved in a Christian outreach program during his college days in Alabama. Harrington's first visit to Houston was mindblowing. "I could not believe my eyes," he says of his first



The distaff staff of Kindred Spirits bar

gress, one major sore point remains: police-gay relations. The Houston Police Department has always had a reputation for brutal treatment of minorities, and harassment has long been a fact of life for Houston gays. During the summer of 1979, gay and other minority leaders testified on alleged police brutality at hearings called by the U.S. Commission

weekend there. "They almost had to drag me back on the plane Sunday night."

Now, three years later, Harrington calls the political progress gays have made in Houston "phenomenal." And he sees still bigger things ahead. "Even now, we don't believe in ourselves



Houston draws such national personalities as MCC founder Troy Perry and comic Robin Tyler, shown here with Mary's general manager Andy Mills (right).

on Civil Rights. As a result of the GPC's Operation Documentation, more than 100 incidents of antigay harassment were presented. Nevertheless, the commission exonerated the HPD in the fall of 1979, saying there was insufficient evidence of civil liberties violations.

as much as we need to. We have much more power than we think."

Even if it doesn't replace New York, Los Angeles or San Francisco as the gay mecca, Houston will certainly have shown that gay power can work.

(continued on next page)



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HOUSTON DIRECTORY

[The following is a partial list of Houston's many organizations of interest to gay men and lesbians; for others check local gay media. All phone numbers are Area Code 713.]

Astro Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf
529-8514

Bavou City Men's Chorus
523-5228, 522-9318

Black and White Men Together
529-5006

Crisis Hotline
228-1505

Families and Friends of Gays
664-5339

Gay Hispanic Caucus of Houston
529-4484

Gay Political Caucus
Box 6664
Houston, TX 77006
521-1000

Gay Resource Services
University of Houston Central Campus
749-3489

Houston Health Department
1115 N. McGregor
522-4201

Human Rights League
Box 3624
Houston 77001
523-6969

Montrose Activity Center
1423 Holman
528-8369

Montrose Patrol
Box 3833
Houston 77001
3329 Richmond
528-CARE

Montrose Singers
527-9669

Montrose Sports Association
Eddie Chavez, director
7615 Garden
Houston 77012
921-0816

Montrose Symphonic Band
527-9669

Texas Human Rights Foundation
1519 Marvland
526-9139

Texas Gay Task Force
528-3636

HOUSTON GUEST HOUSE

DOWN-HOME COMFORT
IN THE MONTROSE



Ridin' off to Houston and need a place to hang your Stetson? The same neighborhood that voted for Barbara Jordan, making her the first black elected to Congress from the Confederacy since Reconstruction, now has another example of progressive social thinking: a gay guest house.

Located on a quiet, tree-lined street smack dab in the middle of Houston's gay Montrose district, the Houston Guest House has all the advantages of a genteel Southern home—and then some. The handsome Victorian has been freshly painted and refurbished, with seven guest rooms decorated in styles ranging from traditional American to High Tech and Western. There's also a bunkhouse that accommodates four.

Besides the lush landscaping, swinging porch chair and overhead fans (remember, it's a hot town), the guest house has its own spacious sundeck and swimming pool. There's always coffee going in the comfortable lobby area, which also has a

TV. The friendly staff members are always around to offer helpful advice on local activities. Operator Stewart McCloud is clear about what he wants the Houston Guest House to be. "We value the traditional western values of openness and self-sufficiency, along with a friendly sense of community," he says. "We don't want Houston to become another San Francisco or New York."

The down-home atmosphere of the guesthouse is apparently valued by local gay groups, who use the place for social and fund-raising events. The feisty frontier spirit is obvious when McCloud notes proudly, "Houston is goin' someplace where no place has ever been before." Houston Guest House is clearly part of that trend.

[Houston Guest House, 106 Avondale, Houston, TX 77006; (713) 520-9767. Rooms with baths \$40, rooms with shared baths, \$30. Major credit cards accepted, reservations advised.]