

The TEXAS

Triangle

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PFLAG Houston Stops Traffic with Billboard Campaign...

HATE HURTS
Parents, Families and Friends
of Lesbians and Gays

PFLAG HOUSTON

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www.pflaghouston.org

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...and Statewide Projects Aim to Neutralize Threat to GLBTs

SAFETY FIRST:

PFLAG Projects in Dallas & Houston Aim to Neutralize Threat to GLBTs

By Nancy Ford
TRIANGLE Editor in Chief

As more and more national attention is focused on the increased violence perpetrated against gays, lesbians, bisexuals and trans-genders, equally, more and more individuals are committing themselves to ending the violence and hatred through the most effective proven means:

education.

Currently projects in Houston and Dallas, both under the auspices of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, are actively committed to making schools and workplaces safer places for everyone, regardless of sexual orientation.

PFLAG Houston is conducting a billboard campaign to remind motorists of three very basic concepts: *Hate Hurts*, *Unconditional Love*, and *Safe Schools*. The vibrant billboards, erected throughout the bayou city in late March by Eller Media, have been strategically placed throughout high traffic areas in Houston, and will remain for at least three months.

ly a year ago, with PFLAG members thinking of appropriate slogans themselves. "We wanted something brief, something memorable, something punchy," Null said.

"I think if you look at all these slogans — *Hate Hurts*, *Safe Schools*, and *Unconditional Love* — there's nobody who could argue with those. How could you? How can you not say that these are very positive slogans?" she reasoned.

So far the group has received no negative response from religious right factions or others, Null said.

"We're not trying to provoke negative reaction; we're really just trying to raise consciousness, raise awareness, and educate both the straight and the GLBT communities that live here," Null continued. "We think this can keep families together. By calling PFLAG, families that are in a state of disarray and confusion and misinformation and befuddlement can get put on the path of making contacts that should help dispel the myths and misinformation.

"And keep families together," reiterated this proud mother of a lesbian daughter.

The cost of the billboard educational campaign is not small, Null said. "The cost is about \$2500 a month for one billboard. If we can keep them up for a year, that will cost approximately \$100,000. After three months, they will move the billboards to another location for us so we have more exposure. But we are still very much in need of raising funds."

Several foundations are slated to contribute, including Chase Bank. "We have written letters [seeking donations from] members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual trans-

"I think the uniqueness of PFLAG is that we can bring together people who are often placed in adversarial position. I'm thinking that Holly Near song, which goes 'We are a gentle, loving people. We are old and young together, we are black and white together.'

"So often these groups are put in opposition to each other," she continued. "PFLAG can bring them together because it's a safe haven for both groups of people. To bring these two groups of people together is just a real blessing for both. Both learn from each other."

Null recalled one gay man who told her about the first time he came to a PFLAG meeting. "He was driving down the freeway, clutching the steering wheel, clenching his teeth, and just feeling as nervous as he could be, and feeling that even after he found the place he couldn't come in. Well, he did come in, and he has stayed with us for years. He saw parents and families who said, 'There's nothing wrong with you; we love you the way you are.'"

"Likewise, it happens in reverse," she marveled. "One of the greatest advantages is, [parents] can see in our meetings healthy, stable, and adjusted, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people. This is a way for them to realize the world has not come to an end because their child has come out to them. They can often gather a sense of security from this."

Judith Yates is familiar with the danger and discrimination. Currently a private investigator with Bryan and Mixon, Inc., the Dallas PFLAG member was chosen in 1995 as a candidate to the prestigious W.F. Bolger Training Academy in Potomac, MD. Following three

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The campaign was initiated by Houston PFLAG-ers Irv and Jane Smith. "Jane is our helpline coordinator," PFLAG Houston secretary Sue Null explained. "She came to the conclusion after years on the helpline that we really needed to do something to make ourselves more visible. So often she would get calls from people who would be totally oblivious to the fact that we as an organization existed and what we do not only for parents and families, but for the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community."

This is the second time PFLAG Houston has embarked on such a massive media blitz. "We did billboards about four or five years ago. One of them was a big picture of a family reunion, and the slogan at the top said 'Someone you know and love is gay.' It was great, it got a very favorable response.

"But they were only up for about a month or six weeks," Null said. "We thought we really needed to do something to keep them up longer, which is why this has come about."

The idea for the campaign was re-born approximate-

Hurts, *Safe Schools*, and *Unconditional Love* - there's nobody who could argue with those. How could you? How can you not say that these are very positive slogans?" she reasoned.

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Several foundations are slated to contribute, including Chase Bank. "We have written letters [seeking donations from] members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered community, and we have spoken to twenty or thirty various GLBT groups around the city," she said.

SAFE SCHOOLS	PFLAG HOUSTON
Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays	713-807-7878 www.pflaghouston.org

Null calculated that one billboard, for one day, costs a little less than \$100. "We'd really like everyone in the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered community and their supporters to have a sense of ownership of a part of that billboard. Even if it's only half of it billboard for one day, I think it would be great for everyone to think 'I own a little part of that billboard.'"

Contributions may be sent to PFLAG Houston at 2700 Albany, Suite 304, Houston Texas, 77006-1559.

Null believes the PFLAG billboards will not only educate non-GLBTs, but will encourage GLBTs, as well.

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"Likewise, it happens in reverse," she marveled. "One of the greatest advantages is, [parents] can see in our meetings healthy, stable, and adjusted, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people. This is a way for them to realize the world has not come to an end because their child has come out to them. They can often gather a sense of security from this."

Judith Yates is familiar with the danger and discrimination. Currently a private investigator with Bryan and Mixon, Inc., the Dallas PFLAG member was chosen in 1995 as a candidate to the prestigious W.F. Bolger Training Academy in Potomac, MD. Following three years of rigorous testing and clearance procedures, Yates was chosen to begin a career with the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

Following coming out in a Margarethe Cammermeyer-esque security clearance interview, Yates, who identifies as bisexual, was fired because of her sexual orientation.

"I came out during the very last interview because I felt if I don't tell, it's going to look like I have something to hide," Yates said. "As a federal officer, I can't have that."

It was this temporarily paralyzing experience with discrimination, after grappling with a severe case of situational depression induced by it, that inspired Yates to create "Safe Spaces in Work Places".

With her partner Chelle Funderland and PFLAG Dallas volunteers, Yates has put together an informative packet and presentation ideally suited for corporate diversity training.

"Safe Spaces in Work Places is mostly focused on what can we do personally," Yates explained. She describes this educational campaign as "an organization

lesbian, bisexual, and loved ones."

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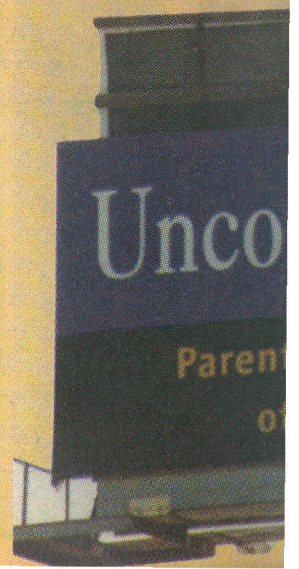
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Falling under PFLAG Dallas’ organizational umbrella, Safe Spaces in Work Places offers information including tips on how to create a safe space in the workplace, how employees can identify and dispel workplace discrimination, and resource information. It is designed to be applicable to a small business or a sprawling corporate empire, Yates explained.

“The idea is to build awareness, because discrimination is everywhere,” she said. “It’s in the Federal Government, it’s in the little Mom and Pop stores, it’s in the corporations. It exists everywhere in some form.

“Hopefully ENDA [the Employment Non Discrimination Act] will be passed,” she added. “But you can have all the non-discrimination policies in place but if they’re not being practiced, it’s worth nothing. The Postal Inspection Service had the best diversity class I have ever seen when I was there.”

“But at that time, unbeknownst to me, a file was being compiled on me.”

Since the project’s inception, Yates and Funderland have spoken to numerous PFLAG audiences across Texas to spread the Safe Spaces word.

“What I’m doing is talking about my story and the project, then asking people in the audience to take them

continued. “I was not involved in anything. I didn’t vote! It’s not that I didn’t care; it’s just that I didn’t feel it affected me. I was thinking, ‘Well, the radical PFLAG grandmas can take care of it. We’re just going to live quietly with our 2.5 cats and dogs, and go on about our business.’ Then I kind of fell into the cauldron. And hot water motivates.”

Running in tandem with the Millennium March on Washington, PFLAG’s National Conference, entitled Family Voices for Equality” is scheduled for April 28-30 in Washington DC. Yates has been selected to be a panel member for the “ENDA/Workplace Fairness” Session at the PFLAG National Conference 2000 in Washington, DC on April 29. The April trip will mark the first time she has returned to the DC area since being fired — a trip she looks forward to with notable triumph.

“I last saw Washington through tears of defeat. When I return my tears will be happy ones,” she said. “I am overwhelmed and honored by this opportunity. PFLAG once helped save my life. I hope to do the same for others.”

Will she pay a visit to Bolger Training academy? “I thought about stopping in,” Yates admitted. “I even thought about saying ‘Thanks for firing me, because you’ve made my life 100 percent better than it ever would have been.’

“And something else,” Yates added philosophically.

Yates estimates more than one hundred Safe Spaces packets have been mailed to and received by employers. So far the reaction has been favorable. “I find that, when I tell my story—hard as it was initially—it’s what motivates people to act,” she said.

“What’s funny is, before this ever happened to me, I was the most politically apathetic person ever,” Yates con-

panel will be representatives from Human Rights Campaign, GLAD (Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders), and several people involved in workplace GLBT and equality organizations. GLBT issues and fairness in the workplace will be discussed and audience participation will be encouraged, according to organizers.

Yates, Sue and Jim Null, Houston PFLAG President Jeanne Edmunds, and hundreds of representatives from throughout the United States will attend the more than 45 workshops scheduled for Saturday, April 29. Scheduled topics, according to the PFLAG website at www.PFLAG.org, will include support group facilitation, organizing families in communities of color, difficult family issues, grandparent’s issues, cyberactivism, public speaking, and fighting the radical right effectively.

Presenters at the conference will include nationally-recognized experts, leaders of chapters with successful programs, and representatives of leading national GLBT and mainstream groups.

Stockard Channing is scheduled to appear at the weekend-long conference, entitled “PFLAG: Family Voices for Equality.” The award-winning actress will be starring in the Lifetime Television original movie, *Jane’s Coming Out Party*, concerning a mother who learns her daughter is a lesbian. The program scheduled to air in August.

Other notable personalities expected to participate in the conference include Dennis and Judy Shepard; former Methodist minister Jimmy Creech; former Rep. Steve Gunderson (R-WI); Catholic Bishop Thomas Gumbleton; and Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA).

As she looks forward to participating in MMOW and PFLAG’s national conference, Null said joining PFLAG five years ago has offered her and her husband Jim an opportunity “to develop a greater sense of compassion and understanding for people.

“Our own personal growth has been tremendous, and it’s opened doors we never would have imagined,” she concluded.

Collaborating with The Family Pride Coalition and Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE), PFLAG will produce that weekend what organizers are hoping will be the largest lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender family event ever held in DC: a

in opposition to each other. To bring them together is just a real challenge for each other." She told her about the meeting. "He was driving a steering wheel, clenching his jaw as he could be, in the place he couldn't go. He has stayed with us people who said, 'There's something about the way you are.'" "I hope," she marveled. "I hope [parents] can see in their children, [adjusted, gay, lesbian, etc.]. This is a way for things to come to an end because they can often gather a

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"What I'm doing is talking about my story and the project, then asking people in the audience to take them and mail them to various corporations and businesses. They can enclose an anonymous letter, or just send as-is."

"Some of the PFLAG parents enclose a letter saying 'My child is gay, lesbian, bi or transgendered, and that they've been through work harassment too, and this is not uncommon. Please read the enclosed material.'"

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"And something else," Yates added philosophically. "In the field, you have to rely on each other for your life in some situations. Now, how do I know as a law-enforcement officer that I can trust my back up? It's happened...where officers weren't backed up because they were perceived to be gay or were known to be gay."

Accompanying Yates on the



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Collaborating with The Family Pride Coalition and Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE), PFLAG will produce that weekend what organizers are hoping will be the largest lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender family event ever held in DC: a child-friendly Family Garden, where thousands of GLBT parents, children, aunts, uncles and grandparents will gather during the MMOW Rally.

Sponsored by gay.com, the Family Garden will have space for picnics and play, as well as activity areas for children of all ages. The project is patterned after the hugely successful Children's Garden that has come to be a tradition at many Pride Festivals throughout the country.

The Family Garden, organizers said, will provide families with safe and engaging activities, including toys for toddlers, crafts for children, team building for adolescents, a special teen area, clowns and characters, magic, science, music and puppet shows. Diaper-changing stations, family first aid, a children's "potty area" and a breast-feeding tent will also be available.