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Merry
Christmas-in-July

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▼ ▼ ▼ DATELINE: HOUSTON

'Take Back the Streets' march, rally repeats mass turnout for 1991 protest

By SHERI COHEN DARBONNE

The New Voice Editor

A march and rally commemorating the July 4, 1991 gay-bashing murder of Paul Broussard and the massive demonstration in reaction to it, surprised even the organizers last Saturday, July 11 by turning out a crowd to match the original.

The event was planned by Queer Nation and endorsed by Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, Gay and Lesbian Hispanics Unidos, Gays and Lesbians of Rice, Houston Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus, among others. It was only minimally publicized, leading to speculation that participation would not carry the weight of its desired message. As a few hundred people gathered at the starting site, one gay activist and event supporter observed with some relief: "They do seem to be getting a nice little crowd here."

But by the time the march departed the site, the group had mushroomed and spilled over to both sides of the street, and the marching lines also continued to expand. By the time of its conclusion, the official police estimate—generally a

very conservative marker—put the crowd's size at 1,500.

Scott Lewis, a Queer Nation member who coordinated plans for the march and emceed the rally that followed in a parking lot on Montrose, later smugly recalled from the stage to an audience of about 2000 that he was confronted by friends only two weeks before who asked, "...Well, what about 'Take Back the Streets Two?' Should we go on with this thing or what, do you think anybody will show up? Well... what do you think?"

"Take Back the Streets II," subtitled "We'll Never be Silent Again" at the corner of Drew and Montrose where Broussard was attacked and killed last year and ended in the Kwik Kopy parking lot, where the rally was held. The march, escorted by Houston Police Department and Harris County Constable officers and the scripted, heavily political rally were glaringly more orderly than the July 13, 1991 protest. It appeared, however, to be equally loud, particularly as the



The "Take Back the Streets II" march and rally Saturday, July 11 drew an unexpectedly large crowd



memorial, stood with them. Armstrong, who walked with the other marchers on to the rally site, later joked that "there's nobody in the bars yet anyway, it's

council member and congressional candidate Ben Reyes; Carolyn Mobley of Metropolitan Community Church of the Resurrection, judicial candidate Poppy Northcutt and Nancy Rodriguez, Broussard's mother.

Lewis read statements of support from Mayor Bob Lanier, Police Chief Sam Nuchia, State Sen. Rodney Ellis,



Among rally speakers was comic Nancy Ford, who showed her serious side

particularly as the marchers in the line traveled the twisting route through the Westheimer-Pacific Street bar districts.

In a somewhat ironic moment, the crowd stalled for a few moments outside a cluster of bars on Pacific Street, chanting "Out of the bars and into the streets!"—while the owner of the bars, Charles Armstrong, who participated in and helped fund the me-

Scott Lewis, member of Queer Nation and rally organizer, reads letters from of support from officials

nobody in the bars yet anyway. it's too early."

Speakers at the rally included Chris Bacon, president of the Houston Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus; activists Annise Parker, Deborah Bell and Brian Bradley; business owner Larry Lingle, District C City Council member Vince Ryan; comic Nancy Ford; Sgt. Joe Scott of Constable Jack Abercia's office; Camilla Reyes, wife of

from Mayor Bob Lanier, Police Chief Sam Nuchia, State Sen. Rodney Ellis, and U.S. Rep. Craig Washington. He also presented the list demands of the march/rally. Two echoed those of the 1991 demonstration: penalty enhancement provisions for perpetrators of hate crimes, and recruitment of openly gay and lesbian police officers. A third demand was that HPD reinstate and expand the two-week, nationally publicized undercover operation (nicknamed "Vice Versa") they undertook last year to discourage anti-gay and lesbian violence.

▼ ▼ ▼ DATELINE: AUSTIN

Austin Police Department invites gay group, media to observe "sting"

By RICK ANTOINE

The New Voice/Austin

Acting as gay-bashing decoys, undercover Austin Police Department officers last weekend pronounced one downtown entertainment district much safer than last summer and immediately shifted their efforts toward another area where anti-gay assaults most recently have been reported.

The two male APD officers who "hung out" at the corner of 4th and Colorado streets in the Warehouse District Saturday night dressed and acted like two typical gay "boys"—one pudgy looking, the other preppie—But both wore microphones and constantly were being videotaped by fellow undercover officers nearby, and both are degreed, martial arts experts.

A little further away, the undercover operation itself was under surveillance by APD command, local news media and the Austin Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Coalition (GLAVCO).

"If anybody jumps these guys, they're really going to get a surprise," APD Tactical Services Division Lt. Gerald Raines said. "One of the prerequisites for selecting the nine or so officers who have agreed to this hazardous duty was

that they could protect themselves. I don't want any of these officers getting hurt like they did in Houston."

Raines said he invited the media to observe this particular operation because APD, which has been awaiting selection of a new police chief since mid-May, wanted to remind possible perpetrators of gay/lesbian hate crimes that the decoy detail will continue to be deployed periodically.

"They could be anywhere, anytime," Raines said. The Warehouse District—where Nexus, Ollecan Harry's and The 404 all cater to lesbian, gay and gay-friendly club goers—drew public attention to the hate-crimes issue in Austin last year because of the number of incidents being reported there.

GLAVCO Police Liaison Michael Bourgeois, who observed Saturday's "sting" operation, said seven of the 23 reported hate crimes in Austin last year occurred in or near the Warehouse District, went of Congress Avenue and north of 3rd Street. This year, only one hate crime has been reported in the Warehouse District, Bourgeois said. The last two incidents of which GLAVCO has learned, Bourgeois said, happened in the vicinity of 7th and Red River streets.

A Juvenile curfew/open container ordinance that took effect in April appears to have lessened criminal activity in the Warehouse District, hate crimes included, Raines said. District merchants and tenants also have gotten more involved in crime prevention and reporting efforts in the area, he said.

Waiting until after news media left, undercover officers regrouped and spent the early morning hours in the 7th and Red River area, where transients and "straight" Sixth Street-goers cross paths with gay/lesbian patrons of Auntie Mame's, Chances, Ms. Video and the Crossing.

"It was a lot more lively," Raines said, "a whole lot of verbal harassment, to the point where they thought sure the guys were going to circle back and ever engage in a confrontation. No one ever did, though."

GLAVCO Courts Liaison David Russell, who did not observe the decoy operation, said he only recently received reports of the two incidents at 7th and Red River streets and could not yet comment in detail but that both involved physical assaults near that intersection.

The last apparent gay-bashing in the Warehouse District, Russell said, oc-

curred in January. No other bashings at 7th and Red River had been reported this year before theme last two, but several occurred in 1992, Russell said.

However, only three of the seven 1992 hate crimes now being prosecuted were reported to GLAVCO by the victims Russell said. The others were reported by police, service providers or CLAVCO members.

"Obviously we're not getting our message out that you need to call us when you hear about these things," Russell said.

"We're working with police and prosecutors to make sure these cases don't get compromised. And we're getting their cooperation because they think the publicity is a good deterrent."

GLAVCO'S Hate Crime Hotline, (512) 345-2020, currently is staffed only from 6:00-8:00 p.m. Wednesdays, intake volunteer Clay Little said, but callers are urged to leave as detailed a message as needed on the answering machine at any other hours. Lt. Raines also urged gays and lesbians not to hesitate to report derogatory behavior to police, especially if it feels threatening. "We can't do anything about it if we don't know about it," Raines said. "That's what 911 is for."