

Features

Gays flock to Houston looking for 'mecca'

United Press International
HOUSTON — More and more homosexuals, looking for promising jobs, nice homes and a potential "gay mecca" where they can live their erate lifestyles in peace, are moving to Houston, where gay spokesmen say their numbers already exceed 250,000.

The economy in Houston is thriving, and hundreds move daily to the southeast Texas location near the Gulf Coast.

But spokesmen say what is attracting the gays is their chance to have a relatively liberated life in a community which they say is more tolerant to homosexuals than its conservative, tough-police area would indicate.

"Since Houston is growing so fast, it is attracting gays from the Midwest, the North and the South; it is conceivable it could become a center for gay politics and gay living within 10 years," said Scott Anderson, news editor of The Advocate, a California-based gay news magazine.

Leaders of Houston's gay community, which is organizing itself politically and socially, say they are proud of the strides made in the past few years.

The stereotype is being broken," said Gary Ooteghem, former president of the Houston Political Caucus. He has a case pending in the U.S. Supreme Court against his former employer, Harris County, claiming he was fired for not to express his views publicly on homosexuality.

"We've not been bad citizens, we've been good citizens. Sure there's anger at being pushed around, but we have come so far in five years," he said. "And we still have a long way to go."

Van Ooteghem thinks the political climate in Houston is "perfect" for gays now because government officials are beginning to listen to homosexuals.

Starting with election precincts, Hill said homosexuals are organizing themselves into a group with political impact. Although the gay community divides itself at times over endorsements of candidates, it remains unified on the issues — equal rights for all people despite color, race or sexual preference.

Lee Harrington, president of the Gay Political Caucus, says the GPC mailing list has almost

15,000 names, and that by continuing to organize the gays in Houston will be able to swing any political election by block votes.

"The GPC endorsement card (for elections) is like the Bible for members," Harrington said.

However, political pollster Richard Ryan, a vice president with the political management agency V. Lance Tarrance and Associates, said the days of delivering the old-fashioned, lock-step block vote are over in America.

"It is organization that wins battles, and because usually a small percentage of the electorate swings an election, they would have to be very organized," he said.

Ryan said gays may vote alike because the candidate appeals to them personally as liberal, independent or progressive — but he doubts the impact of gay leadership.

"I don't think they would vote the way their leadership tells them to but the way they want to," he said.

Billie Carr, a member of the Democratic National Committee and active member of the Harris County Democrats, said the gay vote is "very important," especially in local races.

"They have formed a good political organization and candidates respect the endorsement," she said. "But sometimes those who don't get the endorsement try to use it against their opponent."

"Now, if the blacks, Chicanos and gays organized together, they certainly could swing any race," she said.

National Gay Task Force spokesman Charles Brydon in New York listed Houston among the top six progressive cities for gays, which included Seattle, Boston, Washington D.C., Los Angeles and Dallas.

Gay leader Ray Hill, manager of Pacifica radio station KPFT, said when he goes to other cities with large gay populations, he compares them to Houston and is "amazed at how much farther ahead we are than other places. We've taken quantum leaps and we did it on our own. We had no role model to follow — just got out the civic books and did it by the book."

The majority of gay social activities revolve around the Montrose community, a renovating neighborhood near downtown. Unlike San Francisco which has many gay social sections or Los

Angeles which has at least two, the Houston gays claim Montrose as theirs, although one-fifth of the area population is gay.

"Lots of (gay) people say they went to San Francisco, got burned out on the party and came to Houston to live and work," Hill said.

Annually the community celebrates its "gay pride" with a week-long festival. This year, it was expanded to 11 days of workshops, lectures, shows, activities and then the grand finale: a mile-long Gay Pride parade through Montrose, followed by a rally and speeches.

Last year, one of Gay Pride Week's highlights was a softball game between the gays and Houston police officers. Another game was scheduled for this year's June festival, but was canceled in May.

to discuss problems between the police and gays.

Police officials will not admit the homosexual community ever was a victim of special police harassment, but gays unhappily recall the days not so long ago of raids on their meeting places which they say were unnecessary and arrests they felt were unwarranted.

The gay movement in Houston started its escape from the closet in 1978 with Town Meeting, a convention of 6,000 American gays at the Astrodome, where priorities facing the community were discussed.

There was doubt about how successful the meeting would be, because Houston was miles away from any widely known, established gay community.

Veteto, who said he has watched his publication grow in five years from 16 pages to 104, said it is the advertisers who are finally coming out of the closet.

"They are seeing that we have the money and we don't spend it on kid's braces or station wagons," he said. "Our money is just as good as anyone else's."

But Veteto said the irony is many gays boycott businesses that are not gay.

"We have gay-owned stores, gay real estate people, gay title companies, gay car dealers. We call it the gay connection," he said. The network is so strong and complex, most people find no reason to deviate from it.

"I eat, sleep, live and work gay. I sometimes go weeks without seeing a heterosexual. I enjoy being gay and I know I'm not alone. We have a force in Houston that ties us together."

But there are the forces in the community which want the gays to either stay in the closet or leave.

Geneva Kirk Brooks, who says she's been called Houston's answer to Anita Bryant, admits the gays have strong political clout, but said they are law breakers. Texas law prohibits sex between two persons of the same sex. That law is being challenged in federal court in Dallas.

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"I got tired of the hassle, officer Jim Hudson said. "The Moral Majority kept bothering me about it and I didn't feel like putting up with the hassle."

Hudson said he received phone calls at work from people who said that because the police played softball with the gay team, they were endorsing their lifestyle. Hudson said last year several police became annoyed when several gay men started kissing each other in the stands during the game.

This year, the police team voted against playing, but the firefighters have arranged to play.

Besides the softball game, police officials are trying to open lines of communication with members of the community. An assistant chief was assigned three years ago to meet with gay leaders

The gays considered it a vast success. It attracted thousands from all over, including many gays who have remained in Houston.

Harrington said he moved from Michigan to Houston the week of Town Meeting, and now has made it his home.

"The maturity and stability of the community in Houston is becoming more and more evident," he said. "People who are listening to us see we're interested in mass transit and potholes as well as gay rights."

"We are professional people, and just like everyone else, we need jobs and we want money. There's no difference there between gays and straights," said Jim Veteto, a sales manager of This Week In Texas (TWT), a regional gay magazine.

"Just because they violate the law and do perverted things doesn't give them special rights," Mrs. Brooks said. "I would like any lawbreaker to leave town, there would be much less crime in the city then."

She blames the gay community for part of Houston's pornography, prostitution, murder and robbery.

Moreover, police officials say they are not against the gays as citizens, but would not want to see them on the police force.

"They should not be allowed on the police department because they could be assigned to the jail or juvenile," said Houston Police Officers Association president Dave Collier. "They shouldn't be in those sensitive positions. The possibility of temptation is great. It would be asking for trouble."

Students invent coffee cup with temperature controls

United Press International
CORCHED lips, tongues and guldues to gulping red hot coffee are on the minds of engineering students at the University of California, Berkeley.

So they invented a new coffee cup.

The cup cools the coffee down quickly to drinking temperature and holds it there for 20 minutes more," said Shawn Buckley, professor at the helm of the "inventing" class.

Mechanical engineering students dub it "The Hot One."

"No more coffee-burned lips, mouths," Buckley said. "That's their goal."

The teacher, an inventor himself and the son and grandson of inventors, got his start at the University of Pittsburgh.

He said it takes tons of tenacity to make it in inventing — a point stresses to students in the "invention and entrepreneurship" of MTM P's.

The new coffee cup was developed by Steve Franzaszek, Karl Ber, Scott Roth and Ken Wil as part of their senior project. They studied coffee cooling in ceramic cups which don't hold long enough.

Their design incorporates a uni-heat-absorbing layer sandwiched between an insulating cover and a coffee-holding liner.

Buckley said the layer quickly cools the coffee down to drinking temperature, and keeps it there a long time. The inventing students estimate one version of the will cost pennies in production, making it suitable for commuters and take-out restaurants

Projects developed by other groups in the course include:

- a self-actuating fire extinguisher to automatically put out stove-top fires
- a constant-heat barbecue with a raising grill to keep steaks from scorching
- a kit which converts a conventional oven into a convection oven to cook meals 30 percent faster
- a portable electrode cleaner for welders and a computer control kit for an astronomical telescope.

Buckley said the course is part of a trend to teaching the business aspects of innovation to inventors, rather than inventing to business students.

He said similar courses are offered at the University of Utah by Prof. Steve Jacobsen and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology by Prof. Woodie Flowers.

Buckley taught at MIT for seven years before moving west.

He numbers among his inventions a solar panel (rights bought by an oil company) and an aerodynamic device that keeps cornering race cars on the road, permitting faster speeds.

"It sucks the car down onto the road," he said, "and is used in about all the Indianapolis and European formula one cars."

Buckley said he sold Lotus, the car maker, on backing development of the system to permit racers' faster speeds. That brainstorm

was the inventor-engineer's project for his doctorate degree.

His latest invention is a robot that inspects things on an assembly line. How does the robot get rid of a bad product?

"That's no big deal," Buckley said. "An air jet would blow it off probably."

Buckley said he and a student invented an aluminum bicycle frame. It is being manufactured. "It is the most expensive bike, \$4,000," he said. "But it is very light and very strong."

He said it looks as though the student inventors of the novel coffee cup have a clearshot at a patent.

At the start of the "inventing" class, Buckley said each of the 25 students submits a project. Then the class decides on a few to work on by splitting into teams.

Among the projects rejected this year:

- an automatic device to water plants when a person's on vacation
- a pocket combination tool to scrape skis and use as a screwdriver
- a plastic cleat to help walk up hill on downhill skis. Keep it in backpack, lay it down and step on it to transform the ski. To restore ski for downhill, just remove cleat. The world may need these things as much as it needs the proverbial better mousetrap, Buckley allowed.

But ground rules in the course say only a few of the projects can be worked on.

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