

Steve Shiflett Takes Office

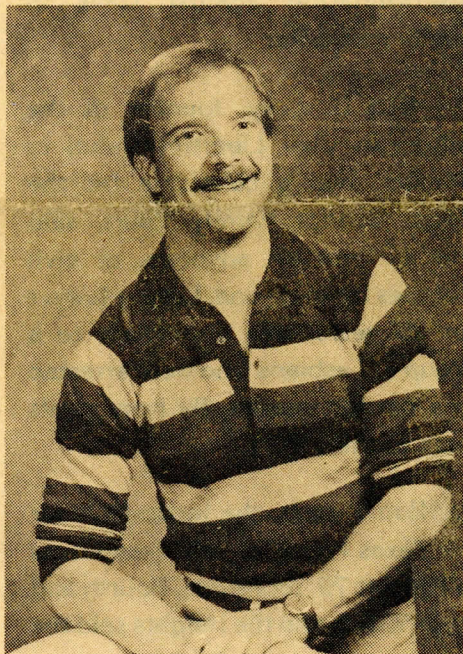
Among the qualifications listed by Steve Shiflett in his professional resume' are the following: "take action on priorities with a sense of urgency; work with a business-like approach and attitude". A dialogue with this dynamic young businessman and newly elected president of the Gay Political Caucus confirms these claims as facts rather than rhetoric. UPFRONT spoke with Shiflett on a Saturday afternoon when he was between appointments relating to GPC business; typical of his penchant for organization, already he is meeting, organizing, marshalling resources for change in the Gay Political Caucus.

Shiflett as president of the most viable and visible of the organized groups in the community typifies the kind of change and emerging leadership that characterizes the GPC today. The accomplishments of the Gay Political Caucus in the relatively short time since its inception are impressive. GPC has come a long way from its first informal meetings in a series of bar settings. Like all fledgelings, GPC has experienced growing pains and their associated problems. It seems likely now that these adolescent pains are giving way to a mature and aggressive young organization, courted as a serious political force and in the forefront of the movement for social change and legal reform for the rights of all people. This is evidenced by the appearance of at least fourteen candidates for public office at the last two meetings of GPC and the formal capitulation of the Coors company to the demands of the Gay community of Houston with regard to their policies of employment and advertising. Clearly, GPC has turned a corner.

The new president of GPC likens the organization to a business that has gone through its period of product gestation and is moving into a time of marketing and growth. Shiflett plans to organize the official levels of GPC in a business-like way with coordinators which he compares to

department heads. He is most familiar with this level of the organization through his association with the Media Monitoring Committee, one of the most vital organs of the GPC to date.

He feels that communication within the group has long been a problem, one which he hopes to eliminate by articulating the responsibilities of each coordinator in a "job description". He plans to institute a buddy system whereby each person in authority will have another person who will assist him in his duties so that there will always be a new group



of people within the organization who will be aware of the structure of the group and the community, ready to move smoothly into any position and who will assure continuity of the GPC. Shiflett sees this as the time to "package a product, tell people who we are, what we're doing, and why we're worthy of support".

A native of Kingsville, Texas, and long time resident of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Shiflett took a B.S. in Marketing with a minor in International Trade and Finance from LSU in 1975. Active in a social fraternity, a professional fraternity, and numerous other campus activities, he still found time and energy to earn half of his educational expenses. At 26, Shiflett has accrued impressive professional experience culminating in his present position

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Business and Professional Group Forms

The organizations of Gay business and professional people in New York City and in San Francisco have for some time been an important and integral part of the Gay communities of those cities. Now such a group has formed in Houston.

Although a firm commitment has not yet been made to a name for the organization, bylaws have been formulated and accepted by the more than fifty charter members of

the corporation at a meeting held on the 21st of March. Occupations and professions represented run the gamut from architects to attorneys to antique dealers, to the owners of construction and real estate firms, and many more.

Stated purposes of the group include the pooling of information and resources to solve problems common to small business. A directory of Gay and pro-Gay businesses and professionals is planned. The group hopes to make itself useful to Gays coming into the community and looking for work as well as providing a referral service for current residents in need of a product or service.

Membership in the group is open in three categories. A regular member is any business owner, licensed professional, executive or commercial property owner operating within the Houston Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. Such people can become members of the corporation upon recommendation of one member and approval of the membership committee.

Associate members have non-voting status and are defined as an individual or organization which adheres to the purpose of the corporation. The same membership application procedure applies as for regular members. Another non-voting category is for supporters including businesses which make financial contributions to the organization of \$250.00 or more. Such members must also be approved by the three person membership committee.

Recognizing the talent and energy already present in this young group leads to speculation about the potential impact on the non-Gay population. Hopefully this banding together as a public statement will lead to increased recognition of Gays by non-Gays as a vital and affluent force in the city. Anyone interested in more information should contact Bill Ramsey, acting chairperson, at J. Ross Realty or Jim Flock, acting secretary, at Bullet Enterprises.

Candidates Speak To GPC

Spring brings a renewed interest in courting and in Houston it also brings the primary elections and this year a new form of courting has appeared with the wooing of the Gay vote by many of the candidates for local office. Five of the candidates running in the May 6th primary spoke at the GPC meeting on March 15th.

Mr. Shawn Casey was the first speaker. Casey, a lawyer, is a democratic candidate for county judge. Casey said of all the organizations screening candidates he felt that GPC had the fairest screening process. He said that county government suffers from poor planning and a lack of leadership. He replied positively to a question as to whether or not he would work to eliminate discrimination against Gays.

A second contender for county judge, Mr. Joseph Pentony, opened his remarks by expressing his appreciation for the opportunity to be screened by the GPC. Pentony, currently chairperson of the Department of Psychology at the University of St. Thomas, was a state legislator from 1973 to 1975. He

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Shiflett

with 3M. He expresses some doubt about his job security when his new position becomes known, but obviously believes what he says about telling people who we are. It is apparent that he feels good about his Gayness and his activism. He has, he says, "no primary relationship, but a very good friend". Water skiing is his besetting theif of time and he lists his major long-term goal as to be self-employed, or to quote the man himself, "to be able to use my boat when I damned well please".

With Shiflett going at his present pace, the boat may have to wait. He is full of plans and ideas for improving the structure of GPC and raising the consciousness of both the Gay and non-Gay communities. Steve Shiflett shows himself to be one of the New Gays, if you will; one of a growing number of people who know that Gay is okay. Involving more men and women in GPC action and structuring for ease of feedback from lower to upper levels of the organization is a high priority item with the new president. He is hopeful for a community commitment to and involvement with Gay Pride Week in June.

With its changing attitude and presentation, the Gay Political Caucus is an organization with which everyone can become involved and active to whatever degree their personal commitment can extend. Come to GPC; meet Steve Shiflett and all the other new faces in the group; most importantly, become involved.

McConn's Attitude Towards Police Civilian Review Board Criticized

At the March 15th meeting of the GPC, Steve Shiflett, president of the GPC, read a letter sent to Mayor McConn criticizing his recent public statement against a civilian police review board. It was also announced at the meeting that a letter has been sent to the Houston Tribune protesting the anti-Gay editorial policy of that publication. In other business the elections of Jeff Stevenson and Bob Lockett to the Board of Trustees of GPC and the appointment of Patty O'Cain and Bill Thomas as representatives of the GPC to the Coordinating Council of Gay Organizations were also announced.

National Notes

Representative Don Edwards (D-California) has become the latest co-sponsor of the Koch Gay civil rights bill, H.R. 2998 and H.R. 7775. Edwards' co-sponsorship of the Gay rights bill is important because he is the chair of the subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights of the House Judiciary Committee, which is one of the subcommittees to which the bill has been referred. Edwards agreed to become a sponsor of the bill in response to pressure from his Gay constituents in San Jose, California.

Senator George McGovern (D-SD) said recently to the Los Angeles New Alliance for Gay Equality: "I had to accept this invitation because of the basic principles you and I stand for in all the struggles against discrimination. I don't think anyone needs to be told this is a controversial area, but I don't think there's any need for controversy over someone's freedom to personal privacy and against prejudice". McGovern is said to be considering Senate sponsorship of a Gay rights bill.

The Michigan Education Association has adopted a resolution calling for the elimination of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. At its state convention in Lansing, the 92,000 member teacher union called for the achievement of a "totally integrated society". This summer the National Education Association (NEA) called for complete civil rights for Gay people.

In California a law has been passed which would allow school boards to dismiss any teacher who is **believed** to be a homosexual and in Washington a law has been passed banning discrimination against homosexuals in employment, housing, insurance and licensing.

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Candidates

supported the Equal Rights Amendment and also stopped a move in the state legislature to rescind the prior vote of approval of ERA. He stated that he thought questions about sexual orientation were inappropriate in job interviews. When asked if he would vote for repeal of the sodomy law (2106) he replied that he didn't think anyone who came out publicly against this law could win a county election. When asked if he would use his influence to prevent anyone from being fired from county posts for being Gay, he replied that he was opposed to any form of discrimination. He gave the same reply when asked if he would support a gay teacher's right to teach. He was asked how many committees concerned with Lesbian rights he had served on as a state legislator and he replied, "None". He said the only place he could exert influence as a county judge would be in county government in response to a question of what he would do about discrimination against Gays in public education.

Mr. Ben G. Levy, founder of the American Civil Liberties Union in Houston and a candidate for the 247th District Family Court, said that he was an advocate of civil liberties for everyone. Levy, a lawyer for 25 years, was an advisor to a group of Lesbians who were arrested in a bar for wearing fly front pants back in the 1950's.

Mr. Ron Waters, the incumbent for the Texas House of Representatives in District 79, Montrose, Fourth and Sixth Wards and the Heights said the reason so many candidates were appearing before GPC was that the support of Gays is being highly sought after. Waters said that back in 1970 he publicly stood up and said that it was improper to discriminate against anyone because of whom they loved or with whom they slept. He said that because he stood up then politicians now are seeking the votes of Gays. He believes it is possible to win an election even though he publicly supports Gay rights. He said he would like to win this time without having to go into a runoff. Someone asked if he might have limited influence in Austin because he was associated with crackpots in the minds of many. He replied that he had never had any qualms about representing kooks and crackpots. He said that he has caught the attention of the establishment and stated,

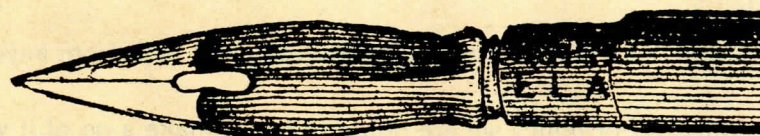
"Our brand of politics is here to stay" and Gays are now being recognized as an important political force. He expects that this will continue to grow. Waters has authored bills to give the right to vote to 18 year olds, to have Driver's License Bureaus open in the evenings, to regulate tow truck operators and to allow the Houston Independent School District to use their buses to transport elderly people. A bill which he authored giving the right to vote to convicted felons was vetoed by the Governor. Waters was questioned about whether or not he had enough seniority in the House to be an effective representative. He said that although he had limited seniority, at the age of 28 he is in the top third in seniority rank in the House.

Mr. Mike Noblet, an opponent of Waters, was the last candidate to address the meeting. He said he felt he could only ask for the GPC's endorsement, not tell it to give it to him. Noblet criticized Waters for not being on the floor of the House when a resolution to table debate on the repeal of 2106 was passed. He said that Water's office was not visible enough. He also criticized Waters for not being the Chairperson of the Child Pornography Committee since this committee was being used against Gays. He said a state representative should have credibility with the mayor, the police and city council when Gays are being harassed. He feels that on other issues such as taxes, education and city development the people needed a representative who could speak for everyone. He felt GPC was more than a one issue organization. When he was asked what value his prior experience had for the position of state representative and what he had done so far for Gay rights he replied that a representative from such a diverse district as the 79th had to be able to talk to everyone. Noblet has been an aide to County Commissioner Tom Bass, has worked for the Parks and Recreation Department of the City of Houston and as an assistant to the air control officer of the Texas Air Control Board.

GET
INVOLVED



Editorials



Another Gay Publication

Perhaps your first reaction on picking up our first issue of UPFRONT was, "Oh, no - not **another** Gay publication!" It is our goal to be something other than just another Gay newspaper. We hope to be unique in the Houston Gay community and fill a need which we feel is not currently being met. Coverage of important issues and events that affect all of us has been virtually non-existent or at best sporadic in Houston. While there are a few excellent national publications they do not necessarily speak to issues that are of immediate concern to us here. Many have also acknowledged that a need exists for a paper that is open to ALL segments of our community, not just to a particular interest group. It is our intention to have a broadly based open publication of which the entire community will take advantage.

One of the primary goals is to raise the awareness and consciousness of our own community through the provision of information about issues of national, state and local concern. Many of us exist in a vacuum, unconcerned and unaware of the serious and dangerous conditions that confront us in the larger community. In such an atmosphere harmful and dangerous rumors can abound further inflaming already volatile situations. Others in our community are totally self absorbed, completely insensitive to the needs of their Gay sisters and brothers. Hundreds of us are recent arrivals, struggling with the problems of trying to establish meaningful contacts and make adjustments in a fast paced rapidly changing environment with little or no information on events or sources of help when it is needed. Many of our fine organizations are virtually unknown within our own community. We intend to provide information about the various social, political and religious groups available to us in Houston as well as at the National level and to provide information regarding their purposes, needs and problems. We hope to make members of our community more politically aware if it means just getting out to vote. Staying in a closet never overcame oppression anywhere for anyone at any time in history. We also hope to raise our own awareness by having this paper be a place in which each of us can collectively share our personal experiences of being Gay and hopefully broaden each other's perspectives.

Another of our goals is to raise the consciousness and awareness of the non-Gay community by communicating to them some of our concerns and problems. We all of us live in greater or lessor degree within the larger community and we as Gays share space and resources with many non-Gay neighbors. Frequently it is not recognized that we as neighbors may have many common concerns and objectives. We hope to educate our non-Gay neighbors about what kinds of people there are in the Gay community, many of whom patronize their places of business and give generously of their time and money in support of the arts and volunteer social services in the larger community. We hope that this publication will act as a kind of bridge between the two worlds of Gay and non-Gay.

Unless we are unified as Gay people we cannot expect to have much credibility with the non-Gay world. However, ours is an extremely diverse community espousing many different points of view and, indeed, many different life styles. It is our firm belief that unity in diversity is possible and that our very diversity is our strength. Call it hybrid vigor if you like. In line with this philosophy it will be our practice to maintain an open publication. We shall from time to time present our own points of view on issues which we hope will either be challenged or applauded. We want this paper to be an open forum and we plan to accept editorials and letters from anyone who wishes to express his or her opinion. However, we do not mean this to be limited to the political. While recognizing that political concerns are major ones to us we also realize that many other concerns are social, religious or personal. We hope those who wish to express their feelings about their own experience of being Gay will feel free to do so through poetry, short stories, graphics or in whatever format they would like to use as a form of self expression. We shall, however, reserve the right to exclude materials that overstep the bounds of responsible editorial criticism and debate or that we feel are unjustly defamatory to any individual or group. We shall

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Working Together

It is two o'clock in the morning at the Old Plantation, Houston. Saturday has slipped into Sunday; the volume of the music subtly rises, more dancers crowd the floor, reality and fantasy interchange in the flash and sparkle of the lights. It is a catharsis, a welcome escape from the life in the fast lane of the work week. Watching the dancers and watching the watchers, I am moved to remark to my roommate that people with this much energy can do anything. Channel and organize the vital force of these Gay people and there must be no limit to what can be accomplished. The place is incidental; all over this country, indeed all over the world, the Gay community is at play on Saturday night.

Those who have decried the balkiness of the movement in Houston would well to bear several facts in mind. First, Houston is still in essence a 'frontier town', maybe the last one we'll see in this country. While this frontier ethic has its drawbacks (the activities of the police in relation to the Gay community being a case in point) it also presents decided advantages. Houston presents a rare opportunity for anyone who has energy and talent to contribute to be in on the ground floor of establishing a working relationship between the Gay and non-Gay communities of the city. Even now the foundation is being laid. The years of work of a few community leaders are beginning to pay big dividends and suddenly there is room - in fact, a real need - for incorporating all available people into an ongoing presentation of what we are as a community and as individuals. So much of what we perceive as prejudice and hostility is the result of a simple lack of education which we can as both individuals and a body remedy by exemplifying in our public and private lives the best of what it means to be Gay in our culture and time.

In short, the time has come to stop complaining and start participating for both our individual and collective welfare. No people in this country will continue to be oppressed when they have demonstrated themselves to be two things, namely a real force in the economic and political lives of the total community. There is no doubt that the time has come for such a demonstration by the Gays of Houston, Texas.

Another big problem which the community has always faced here is the fragmentation of its component parts. So many different interest groups comprise the whole that communication is at best difficult. This problem must be overcome before real strides can be made. Inherent in this problem is another issue: the trashing of Gays by Gays. Allowing oneself to indulge in this behavior is to reinforce the traditional attitudes with which we have all been raised. Our collective consciousness has been taught that Gay is bad; by trashing our brothers and sisters we are ourselves laying another brick in the already substantial existing structure of homophobia.

Making information - facts - available to all people has been a third problem. With increased organization, participation, and communication this problem, too, can be overcome. A persistent trouble spot has been with rumors; in future, we hope to contribute via this newspaper to the solution of this problem. Here will be made available facts of interest and importance to all liberated people in the city. This is to be your newspaper. We want to know the needs of the community and work all together to effect these vital changes that have such bearing on the quality of all our lives.

Each of us in Houston at this point in time enjoys the unique privilege of being a part of the most dynamic and vital city in the Western Hemisphere. Unlike other cities where policy and quality of life are already established, you can participate in creating the quality of life that you want for yourself in Houston. Take part now, so that when Houston matures you can point proudly to the part that you have played in making this the best place in the world to be. Enjoy your Gayness and appreciate the unique opportunities in work and play that your lifestyle affords you. Most importantly, reach out and touch your brothers and sisters. With such energy, determination and love we cannot fail to win the day.

Gene Oliver

Editorial

welcome materials responsibly written in good faith from anyone.

As a matter of policy we are going to try to make a go of it without accepting conventional commercial advertising. We feel that this will give us a greater degree of editorial freedom and flexibility. However, to accomplish this we shall have to depend very much on the support of the community. This support can be offered in the form of subscriptions or donations of both time and money. We shall need hands to help us with distribution and we shall need people of varying talents. We hope we can win that support by providing a quality publication that is not just another Gay newspaper.

Jim Lloyd

GPC Endorses Candidates For May 6 Primary

At the March 15th meeting the Gay Political Caucus voted on endorsements of candidates running in the May 6th primary election. Mickey Leeland, candidate for the 18th Congressional District and Ron Waters, incumbent for the 79th District for the State House of Representatives were both endorsed. Price Daniels Jr., running for Attorney General and Mike Driscoll, a candidate for county judge and County Clerk contender Bill Williams received endorsements. Ben Levy, was the candidate of choice for the judgeship of the 247th District. Several candidates for Precinct judgeships were also endorsed including Deborah Danburg (33), Lee Marsters (34), Rosemary Scott (38) and Teague Cavness (123). John Hill, running for Governor, and Bill Hobby, the candidate for Lieutenant Governor, were given tentative endorsements. Ann Greene was endorsed for the Chair of the Harris County Democratic Party. It was recommended that there be a "no vote" for the County Treasurer's race.

Blue Card Holders Still Able To Vote In May Primary

People holding a blue voter registration card rather than a new yellow card must reregister by April 6th to vote in the May 6th primary and by May 3rd to vote in the June 3rd election. However, if the deadline is not met voters can go to their precinct polling place on election day, present their blue card and sign an affidavit stating that they are the person whose name appears on the card and then fill out a new registration form. Following this procedure will entitle a person to cast a vote in the May 6th primary.

Watchdog

In this space we will run what we hope will be a regular feature. Our own version of the popular question and answer format of other local newspapers, to be called **Watchdog**, will be aimed at delivering responsible answers from persons of authority to any questions a reader may have. If you require information about products or services to be found within our community, are concerned about rumors you may have heard, or have some specific problem to which you can't seem to find the answer, let us know and we'll do our best to come up with an answer for you. Letters should be addressed to: Watchdog, UPFRONT, P.O. Box 66844, Houston, Texas 77006

CCGO Gets Off Ground

In the wake of an escalation by the Houston Police Department in their harassment of Gay Citizens, a meeting of the leaders of all Gay organizations in Houston was called in January by Ray Hill, Mort Schwab, Gary van Ooteghem and others.

In hope of establishing a line of realistic communication with the mayor and the chief of police, the first act of the Coordinating Council of Gay Organizations was to appoint a delegation of three to meet with the mayor to discuss the current problems of the Gay community. The incidence of Gay arrests had reached an average of 200 per month by January; the average bond per incident was some \$300.00, according to reliable sources within the CCGO, amounting to 60,000 Gay bucks per month. Community leaders found it necessary to come together to express their dismay and concern and to attempt to viably bridge the obvious gap between the Gay community and City Hall.

Now having met three times, the

GPC Votes To End Coors Boycott

Mr. Bob Russo, chief of communications from the Coors Brewery in Colorado spoke to the GPC at its meeting on March 15th. Ray Hill introduced Russo after reading a letter from the Coors Company in which it was stated that Coors had publicly announced that it will not discriminate against anyone in hiring on the basis of sexual orientation and that it will no longer place advertising in publications which consistently espouse an anti-Gay position. Mr. Russo said that in his annual talk to the employees of Coors, Mr. Coors spoke on Gay awareness and stated that the Gay personnel at Coors were good employees and that Coors was proud of them. Someone asked Mr. Russo if the boycott against Coors had ended in California and he stated that it had not because he had not yet presented the Coors statement to people in California. He said he had made a prior commitment to Ray Hill to hand deliver the statement here first. After Mr. Russo's discussion the GPC voted to support ending the boycott against Coors.

Cuddles Bar Responds To Charges Of Discriminating Against Women

In response to complaints that Cuddles Bar was discriminating against women, Steve Shiflett, president of GPC, met with manager Paul Lewis. Mr. Lewis stated that Cuddles does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of sex or race, and the new manager has developed an entrance policy which will be posted at the door in the near future. The basic door policy of the bar is that women should present themselves as women and men as men. Mr. Lewis also stated that if an individual's behavior does not comply with the rules and regulations of the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, the management reserves the right to deny admission or service to such a person.

Gays And The Law

The U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia has "dismissed the complaint of Ensign Vernon E. Berg, a naval officer who was cashiered from service for engaging in homosexual acts while in the Navy". A major factor in Berg's defeat was an earlier Supreme Court decision that homosexual activity is unprotected by the constitutional right to privacy. The Navy held that Berg would be less effective as an officer because he would be ridiculed by enlisted personnel.

For the third time in its current session, the Supreme Court refused to hear a case involving the civil rights of homosexuals indicating that the court is not willing to get involved in Gay civil rights issues at this time.

In another case the Supreme Court upheld the decision of the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals supporting the right of a Gay Liberation group to meet at the University of Missouri. The University of Missouri had denied the Gay group the right to assemble on campus contending that to allow such a meeting would "incite imminent violation of the state's anti-sodomy laws". The Appeals court upheld the organization's right to assemble and this decision was supported by Judge William H. Webster who is now Director of the F.B.I.

Council conceives itself to be a pool of resources of the organized community as well as a forum for discussion of problems and issues of common concern. Art Martin has been installed as coordinator of the group. The traditional offices have been dispensed with; recording the meetings is a duty that rotates in a team system among the representatives of the organizations involved.

Fifteen Gay groups were represented at the last Council meeting held on March 16th. With the increased potential for rapid and articulate communication within the community that is offered by the Council, it is hoped that facts about incidents and activities can be more rapidly and accurately disseminated to a greater number of people.

Collectively representing the largest number of Gays of any group in the city, the Council may be instrumental in bringing the problem of harassment by the police department more into the public eye.