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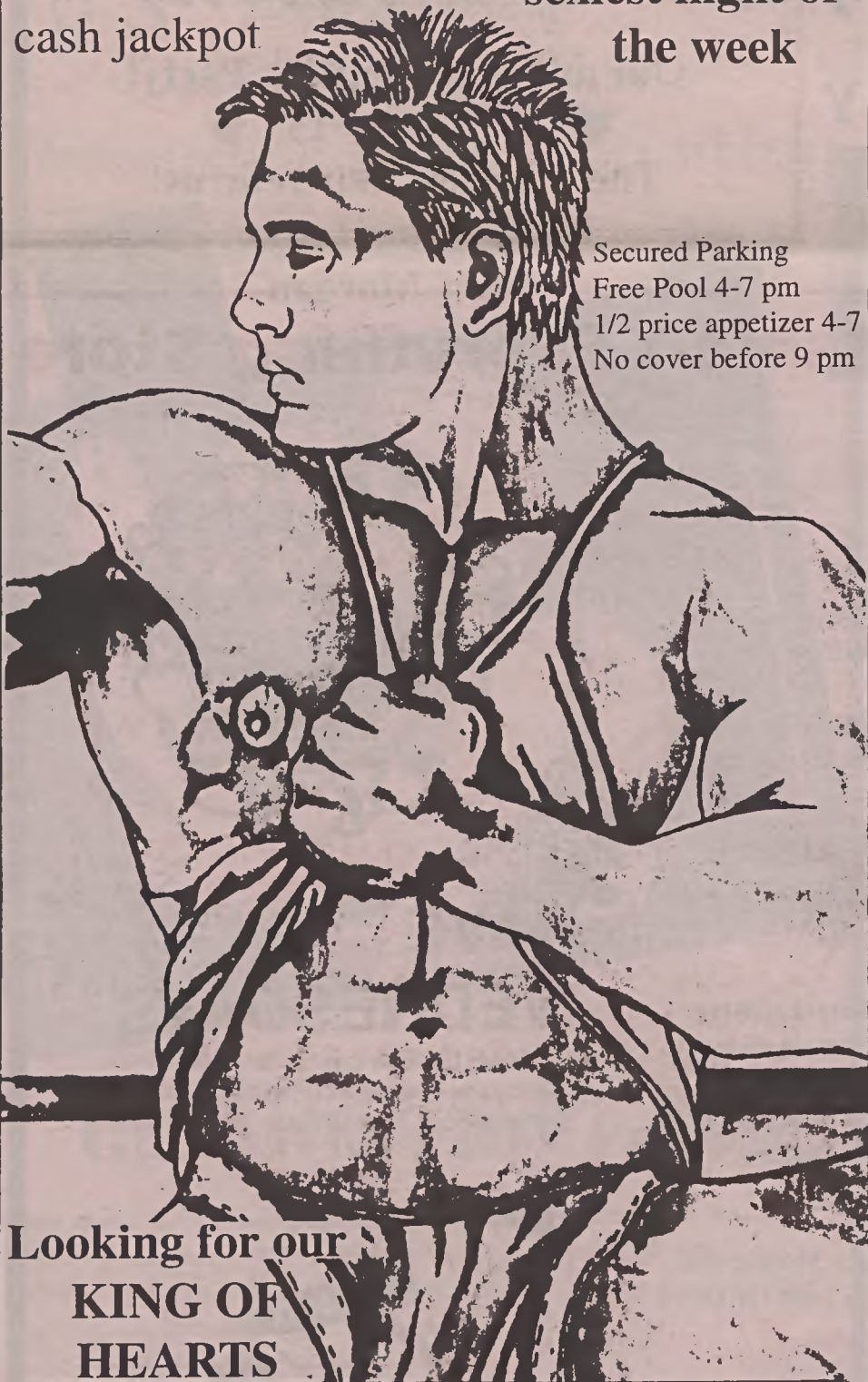
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CHASERS

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Unity in the mix

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gay activism back in the 80s. So what else was stopping me? In the past, when people would ask why I wasn't active in the gay community, my reply was, "as a black woman, I can't get involved with the gay community until I become active in my own community." So, up until recently, when it came to driving the road of fighting for social justice and equality, I'm sad to admit I've been a back seat driver. You know the type, "Do as I say, not as I do."

I'm sure by now you're wondering if I gave the interview to *Pride*. YES! I did indeed; I needed to; I wanted to. For two reasons: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who believed dealing with the individual was the first step to dealing with a group, and, most importantly, my spiritual quest. What the spirit has bestowed within me, no human can ever deny me. It would be hypocritical of me to request from my brothers and sisters something I wouldn't do myself.

My quest led me on a journey of self-realization and spiritual enlightenment. What I discovered were answers of which only my God and I could discuss. My sexual orientation had nothing to do with my being less equal a person. It had everything to do with who I am. I love not only women, but all people. I love people, not because of the color of their skin or their political persuasion or even who they date, but because love is the main reason for my existence.

Some will call this article a coming out story, but it's actually a *coming to grips* story of how, for so long, we, as people, have tolerated those who act superior and have allowed them to chip away at our personal worth. The days of living among fear and ignorance should be long buried. Unity, my people, is a very special word. We all say it; we all know it; we all long for it. So let's all start with the individual spirit to achieve it.

Finding the right ending to this piece was also a dilemma, but only for about ten seconds. Then I realized it was very simple. For February 1994, Black History Month, I declare my independence as a human being with the right to be proud of who I am. Be it Woman, Black or Gay, I know as long as I stay true to the spirit within me, I shall tolerate nothing less than respect.

Community Center remains open

COLUMBIA—Despite reports that the SC Gay and Lesbian Community Center in Columbia had closed due to cancellation of insurance coverage, the Center remains open. State Farm Fire and Casualty cancelled coverage effective December 25, 1993 due to the Center being deemed a "high profile" civic organization "which may be politically active on a national scale."

In searching for a new insurance provider, the SC Gay and Lesbian Pride Movement (GLPM) learned that gay and lesbian organizations fall into a higher risk group subject to more expensive premiums. The original policy premium was \$250 per year. The new coverage carries an annual premium of \$991, a severe strain on the Center's budget.

GLPM is requesting that concerned citizens send their comments to Mr. Ron Payne, CPCU, CLU, Operations Superintendent, State Farm Fire and Casualty, PO Box 45061, Jacksonville, FL 32232-5061. GLPM would appreciate a copy of any correspondence submitted to State Farm.

To help offset their increased insurance costs, donations should be sent to GLPM, PO Box 12648, Columbia, SC 29211.

MCSP/Switchboard

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wasn't as quick to dismiss those things, saying, "People felt like we weren't involved and were afraid to say who we are. We are trying to deal with that with the name change."

Whatever the cause, these situations forced the organization to take a long, hard look at itself and rethink some of its goals, Simpson said. "We realized we had to focus back on the Switchboard. The other things we were doing were being done better by other groups anyway." One fact seems to bear evidence of this new focus: of the organization's eight board positions, six are now occupied by first-time members.

In assessing the future, Simpson stated, "We have one of the best Switchboards in the country, and we're going through some reorganizing and we're making some changes, but we are not going under."

The Switchboard is staffed from 6:30 pm - 10:30 pm every night of the week and can be reached at (704) 535-6277.

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