

# Q Notes

The Carolinas' Most Comprehensive Gay & Lesbian Newspaper

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AMBA RISING \$1.00

## Intruders murder local female impersonator in her apartment

by David Stout  
Q-Notes Staff

CHARLOTTE—Christopher (Todd) Cloninger, 28, a popular female impersonator who performed under the name Victoria Sinclair, was murdered around 11:00pm on April 12 when an undetermined number of assailants knocked down the back door of his apartment at 3101 Girard Court No. 2 and opened fire on those inside.

Cloninger died at the scene and Sharif Marche, 21, died at Carolinas Medical Center. Ahmad Johnson, 21, and Latawn Collins, 18, were hospitalized at Carolinas Medical Center and later released. A fifth resident was not home at the time of the shootings.

Cloninger's death sent shockwaves through local female impersonation circles because he was an accomplished performer who had amassed numerous titles. During his career, he had won such coveted pageants as Miss Mecklenburg County-America; Miss Capital City-America; Miss Asheville-America and been crowned Miss Scorpio and Miss Legends.

Local drag maven Miss Della said, "Victoria developed very quickly. Within her first two years she had already begun to win titles. I think it was because of her great self-confidence; she was known for that."

According to sources, the root of the Easter Sunday home invasion was a drug-related robbery that transpired earlier in the weekend. Allegedly, one of the residents had broken into Apartment No. 3 on Friday and stolen a large amount of marijuana. The shootings were apparently in retaliation for the theft.

"From what I understand," an anonymous source told *Q-Notes*, "one of them [residing in Apartment No. 2] noticed that the apartment next door was empty except for two or three

times a month and the windows were covered with aluminum foil. Well, the person knew something was up, so he broke in. The place was a way station for drugs. I heard that he stole about 100 pounds of marijuana."

The source continued, "On Saturday, a moving van pulled up to that apartment [No. 3] and some men packed it up. They knew that somebody was on to them." Then came the end. "On Sunday night, Vickie [Cloninger] heard something and walked toward the back door. Right then they busted it down and started shooting."

In an interview with *Q-Notes*, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Investigator Chuck Connor acknowledged the likelihood of this scenario. "We suspect it's a good possibility that this could be what caused the whole incident."

Investigator Connor said there was physical evidence to support that there had been drugs in Apartment No. 3, but added that "it had been cleaned up very well. It was obvious that they knew what they were doing. They had something in mind."

After the shootings, witnesses saw the killers flee down Sharon Amity Road in a hatchback car. Unfortunately, their accounts are only making things less clear. According to Investigator Connor, one witness says that there were five intruders, another says two and a third is asserting just one. Connor stated that the discrepancies might be intentional. "Someone might be telling us this for a reason," he said. "They might want to throw us off or be protecting somebody. I don't see how people in the same apartment can see different things."

The lurid circumstances surrounding Cloninger's death make his passing even more distressing for friends. "I want Todd to be remembered for his life, not his death," said



Victoria Sinclair

Marquita Cardia, a female impersonator and "very close" friend of the victim. "He was a good person with a good heart. If you asked any female impersonator who knew him, they would say the same thing."

Kasey King, the show director at Oleen's, where Cloninger performed as a member of the club's housecast, agreed with Cardia's assessment. "She was a great friend. Everybody loved Vickie; she was a high-energy person who always had a smile on her face." After pausing a moment, she added, "She just got mixed up with the wrong people."

Connor told *Q-Notes* that the police "are developing a number of good leads" and hope to have the attackers in custody soon. ▼

## NationsBank offers domestic partner benefits

by Dan Van Mourik  
Q-Notes Staff

CHARLOTTE—NationsBank, headquartered in Charlotte, and BankAmerica, headquartered in San Francisco, have agreed to a \$66.6 billion merger, the largest bank merger in US history. The new banking giant will be named BankAmerica Corp. and will be headquartered in Charlotte with Hugh McColl Jr. as chairman and chief executive, the same position he currently holds at NationsBank.

And with the merger comes a huge benefit for the bank's gay employees. Once the merger is finalized, domestic partner benefits will be offered. BankAmerica has offered health insurance to partners of gay workers since January 1997 under a policy that also covers live-in adult family members. NationsBank, with about 100,000 employees, will become one of the largest Carolinas companies with such a policy.

When asked if same-sex benefits would be extended to NationsBank employees, McColl simply answered "Yes."

"It's an historic merger and the new corporation will offer these benefits," said Shelly Schoenfeld, a NationsBank assistant vice president. "I appreciate Mr. McColl's stance on this

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## Ban on needle exchange stays in place despite scientific evidence

by Dan Van Mourik  
Q-Notes Staff

WASHINGTON, DC—On Monday, April 20, the Clinton Administration announced that it will continue to block federal funds to needle exchange programs in spite of their acknowledgement that the programs do save lives.

Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Donna Shalala announced that, after an exhaustive review of the scientific evidence, she has concluded that needle exchange programs prevent the transmission of HIV and do not encourage the use of illegal drugs. Under federal law, Shalala has the authority to allow federal funds for needle exchange since she has now determined that the programs prevent HIV transmission and do not encourage drug use. However, HHS stated that "the act's restriction on federal funding...has not been lifted."

"We are extremely dismayed by today's announcement," said Winnie Stachelberg, Human Rights Campaign (HRC) political director. "It is unconscionable that the administration can acknowledge that needle exchange programs save lives and then deny federal funds to implement them."

The leaders of seven national HIV and AIDS organizations condemned the failure to lift the restrictions on needle exchange programs. In a letter to President Clinton, the organizations referred to his stated goal of reducing the number of new HIV infections to zero. "To accomplish this goal, your administration must follow the science and make an immediate determination on needle exchange," they wrote. "We expect that federal support for these life saving programs will be made available this fiscal year and incorporated into a comprehensive, fully funded plan to address the twin epidemics of HIV and substance abuse in the United States."

The administration carried out the first step of this call to action by issuing a determination on the science. "We hope that this certification of the science by the nation's chief public health official will help state and local health departments in their efforts to include needle exchange in their local HIV prevention plan," said Seth Kilbourn, HRC senior health policy advocate.

However, Stachelberg added, HRC remains gravely concerned that, despite the wealth of scientific evidence which has now been certified by the secretary, the administration has chosen the politically easy path and will not actually make federal funds available. "It is clear that politics triumphed over public health in the end," she said. "The administration today validated the politics of the Family Research Council which wishes to play politics with people's lives."

The administration's action followed a unanimous vote of no confidence from the President's Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS. The council's resolution questioned the administration's commitment and willingness to achieve Clinton's stated goal of "reducing the number of new infections annually until there are no new infections."

"The Clinton Administration's action is illogical, irrational and irresponsible. Indeed, the administration agrees the science is in: the Earth is not flat, the moon is not made of cheese and needle exchange does not make drug addicts. But today's action is like acknowledging the Earth is not flat but refusing to fund Columbus' voyage," said Daniel Zingale, executive director of AIDS Action.

Dr. Mathilde Krim, Chairman of the Board of the American Foundation for AIDS Research (AmFAR), applauded Shalala's science-based determination on needle exchange, but urged

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## Q-Notes web site ready for action

by Brian M. Myer  
Q-Notes Staff

CHARLOTTE—The Carolinas' Most Comprehensive Gay and Lesbian Newspaper is now online!

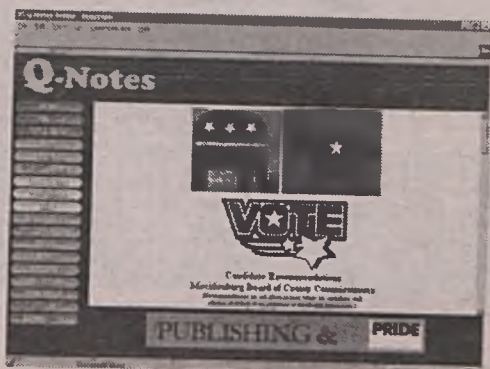
After four months in the planning and beta stages, *Q-Notes* has launched its new online news source (<http://www.q-notes.com>) in conjunction with this issue of the newspaper.

"*Q-Notes* Online offers much the same information and entertainment our readers have come to expect, as well as some interesting additions," said newspaper editor David Stout. "Not only will we give readers access to both regional and national news affecting the GLBT community, but we'll also provide a message board for online discussion, polls and surveys, trivia, classifieds, personals and, perhaps most interesting, live chat."

Everyone's favorite columns (like "Q-Culture Recommends," "Lesbian Notions" and "The Drag Rag") will appear, as well as a new opinions page that features editorials, letters to the editor and a section for surfers to share complaints or observations about any topic.

The web site will make it easier than ever to communicate with *Q-Notes*. Subscriptions and advertising (for both print and online) can be ordered from any personal computer and comments or editorials can be submitted with a click of the mouse.

The site will also be a way of bringing the region's GLBT community closer together.



Q-Notes Online debuts with the release of this issue of the paper.

"Because our readership is made up of people from two states, sometimes it's difficult to build a true sense of community. *Q-Notes* Online will drastically shrink the distance between us, allowing everyone to gather in the same 'neighborhood.' The Information Age has opened opportunities for our community to meet, share ideas and support one another to an extent only dreamed of in the past," commented Stout. "That's one of the primary goals of the web site."

Of course, there's nothing wrong with plain, old-fashioned fun. The creators of *Q-Notes* Online hope to provide entertainment as well as information in an interactive community that's safe, educational and enjoyable.

Stout noted, "In the coming weeks, it would be great to see a number of people frequenting the site, hanging out in the chat room or posting discussion topics. We think *Q-Notes* Online will evolve into one of the busiest online GLBT meeting places in the Carolinas. It's a great feeling to be able to offer this resource." ▼