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A year later, has Matthew Shepard's death had a lasting affect on GLBT civil rights?

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Angel Action stands against anti-gay protestors at McKinney's trial

Second Shepard trial marks first anniversary of slaying

Phelps clan clashes with angels

by Dan Van Mourik
Q-Notes Staff

LARAMIE, WY—On Monday, October 11, National Coming Out Day, jury selection began in the second Matthew Shepard murder trial. Accused slayer Aaron McKinney, 22, faces first-degree murder charges, as well as kidnapping and aggravated robbery, in Shepard's death. The prosecution is seeking the death penalty. Russell Henderson, McKinney's friend, pled guilty to felony murder during his trial in April and is serving two life sentences. Henderson accused McKinney of Shepard's death and may be called as a witness.

Matthew Shepard, a 21-year-old gay student at the University of Wyoming, survived in a Fort Collins, CO hospital for five days without regaining consciousness after

McKinney and Henderson hit him 18 times in the head with a handgun and left him tied to a split-rail fence outside Laramie. Prosecutors argue that the pair lured Shepard out of a bar by pretending to be gay to rob him.

The protest

Outside the Albany County Courthouse, 17 "angels" spread their wings in protest as the Rev. Fred Phelps spewed his anti-gay message. Phelps and five members of his Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, KS returned to Laramie to rail against homosexuals. "The everlasting word of God says what they [homosexuals] do is filthy," Phelps said. To protest Phelps, a group of people called Angel Action stood nearby, wearing angel costumes made from white sheets. The sheets were stretched across plastic pipes which served as frames for enormous wings.

Romaine Patterson, 21, a friend of Shepard, organized the angels. The group in-

See TRIAL on page 29

Eyewitness account:

by Jeffrey Montgomery
Special to Q-Notes

Have just returned from a stunning event. Took part in the very last leg of the Hike for Hope. Jerry Switzer and Jeremy Atencio walked over 70 miles from Ft. Collins, CO to Laramie, WY. Here's the lead from a story in today's *Denver Post*: "[Switzer & Atencio] trekked the last 20 miles to Laramie along US 287 on Monday. Surrounded by wind-swept prairie and buffeted by gusts from passing tractor-trailer rigs, they thought about their friend Matthew Shepard, who died one year ago today."

Switzer and Atencio organized the hike to raise awareness and to encourage people to think and talk about gay rights and the broader issue of tolerance for all.

To that end, they hooked up with the BEAR (Bringing Equality and Respect) Project which accounted for the fact that hundreds of teddy bears accompanied them on the walk. Each bear has been created by someone to memorialize a victim of hate violence, and bears have arrived from around the world.

This was a beautiful memorial; one that should be outstanding among all of those remembrance events that are taking place

Hike for Hope



Jerry Switzer walks for change

throughout the country over these last and next few days. Jerry and Jeremy are heroes who have demonstrated the real human level of the effect of loss through violence, while making a meaningful and deeply personal memorial to their good friend.

It was an honor and privilege to be with them as their hike ended and to accompany

See HIKE on page 10

Hate crime bill fails despite rise of violence motivated by bigotry

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

WASHINGTON, DC—Republican leaders allowed the Hate Crimes Prevention Act (HCPA) to be removed from the Commerce, State, Justice appropriations bill on October 18 —squashing hopes that federal hate crimes legislation would be enacted this year.

If approved, HCPA would have extended current federal hate crimes protection — which currently covers race, religion, color and national origin — to include gender, sexual orientation and disability. HCPA would have helped law enforcement by allowing federal assistance, when necessary, in the investigation and prosecution of hate crimes.

The head of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the nation's largest GLBT advocacy organization, charged that the GOP's inaction on this key legislation, at a time when hate crimes are on the rise, sends a message of legislative indifference toward hate crime victims and their families.

"Apparently, the GOP leadership learned nothing from the recent wave of hate crimes that have rocked our nation," said HRC Executive Director Elizabeth Birch. "This unconscionable action is a cynical betrayal of the American people who demand a safer society where

they are not menaced by violent haters."

The GOP's thwarting of this legislation came just one day after the FBI released new statistics showing a rise in hate crimes against gay and lesbian Americans. According to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports for 1998 — the latest year for available statistics — hate crimes based on sexual orientation increased 12.5 percent from 1997 to 1998.

Hate crimes based on sexual orientation have nearly tripled since the FBI began collecting statistics in 1991, comprising 16 percent of all hate crimes for 1998 at 1260 incidents. This is particularly disturbing since the number of reporting agencies for 1998 decreased from 11,211 to 10,461, and two fewer states reported, as well. Hate crimes based on sexual orientation continue to make up the third highest category of those reported to the FBI after race and religion.

In July, the Senate passed the Hate Crimes Prevention Act for the first time as part of the Commerce, State, Justice appropriations bill. The House version of the bill did not include HCPA. The GOP leadership omitted the HCPA legislation in conference, where a compromise between the House and Senate versions of the Commerce, State, Justice bill was crafted.

See BILL on page 29



Bill Bradley:
"This is an outrage."

US Air Force takes impressive measures to stem discharges

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

SAN ANTONIO, TX—In response to the controversy that erupted earlier this year over the disproportionately high number of gay discharges at the Air Force's basic training center at Lackland Air Force Base, the service has made a landmark change in the way it handles such cases.

Under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue," recruits who publicly declare themselves to be gay must leave the service. Under the new Lackland procedures, recruits are being given a few days to recant their statements and stop further investigation.

According to military brass, the impact has been significant. "Almost no one is being discharged for being gay at Lackland," said Jim Wolffe, special assistant to Air Force Secretary F. Whitten Peters.

The problems at Lackland, which houses 30,000 recruits, first came to light when Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN), a gay military watchdog organization, released its annual report last spring documenting the number of gay discharges in each service branch.

Although the figures for all branches have been flat or declining since 1994, the Air Force's numbers spiked in 1998 to a record 414 expulsions. The shocking statistic was that 65 percent of the discharges were at Lackland alone.

After an intensive evaluation, SLDN attributed the situation to four primary concerns: 1) a general lack of understanding about "Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue" implementation; 2) harassment and speculation among enlistees; 3) inadequate procedures to safely resolve

problems or conflicts; and 4) a misguided process resulting in virtually automatic discharges.

"Many of the people with whom we spoke at Lackland said they had no means to clear up confusion or address problems arising under the policy," said Dixon Osburn, SLDN co-executive director. He added that "gay, lesbian and bisexual trainees did not know where to turn for help or to ask questions about the policy without potentially jeopardizing their careers."

With the new policy, however, this problem appears to have been corrected. Recruits are now allowed to explore the details of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue" with Air Force lawyers in confidential discussions that cannot be used against them.

Judging by the numbers, these changes are making things a little easier for gay and lesbian enlistees. Comparing the same periods from this year and last, the number of gay discharges among Lackland recruits has plummeted from 195 to 31.

Despite the improvements, Wolffe emphasized that the changes do not reflect a tolerance for openly gay recruits. "There's no intention of having openly gay people serve at Lackland or anywhere in the Air Force."

He explained that recruits are only allowed to recant when they have made statements in private to individual instructors or officers, not in cases where they have made public declarations or displays — such as holding hands with a member of the same sex.

Whatever their shortcomings, SLDN praised the modifications in a letter to Secretary Peters. "This process appears to be a genuine effort to reduce the number of gay discharges." ▼