



Don't miss Sister Funk at Charlotte Pride 29



Marc Weigle takes to the Pride Festival stage 29

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North and South Carolina

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ONLINE Q.POLL www.q-notes.com

If you are openly gay or lesbian, do you feel safe in your neighborhood? Yes No

Q.POLL RESULTS: 19

A war rages on

How does the conflict in Iraq affect gays at home and in the Middle East?

by Donald Miller and Paul Johnson

For gays and lesbians in the Carolinas, it's time to celebrate Pride. At the end of April Charlotte holds their annual festivities. Two weeks later South Carolina Pride takes place in Columbia.

Meanwhile, it's been just a little over one year since the United States invaded Iraq. Estimates from the region indicate there are 10,000 dead Iraqi civilians. Nearly 700 American troops have died since the beginning of the war. Another 3,630 have been wounded.

How does this affect LGBT folk — those serving in the armed forces and involved in combat and their loved ones at home, as well as gay and lesbian Iraqis caught in a military, political and religious crossfire?

Exactly how many gay soldiers currently serve in the U.S. military is unknown. Aaron Belkin, director of Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military (CSSMM), says a conservative estimate is 60,000, but the number could be much higher.

For any servicemember saying goodbye to loved ones as he or she heads off to war the experience is emotional. For gays leaving partners behind it is a farewell said only in private.

The CSSMM shared the stories of these

two gay military families at the onset of the war.

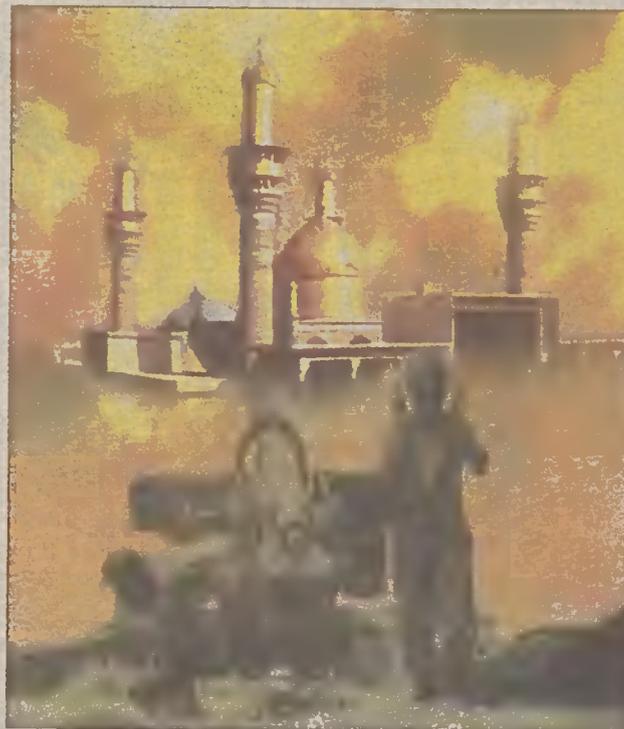
When the love of his life prepared to leave Fort Bragg for deployment to the Middle East, J.R. packed a Bible, a rosary and the St. Michaels medal, symbol of the patron saint of the warrior. "We talked for over an hour that night," J.R. recalled. "I said, if you ever get scared, you talk to the Big Man Upstairs. He'll listen and He'll take care of you."

As families from across the nation traveled to Fort Bragg, N.C. to hug and pray for their personal heroes from the 82nd Airborne, J.R., who insisted his full name not be used to protect his partner's identity, sat at home alone.

Another military spouse, W.F., whose partner was deployed to Kuwait in January from Good Fellow Air Force Base in San Angelo, Tx., was also relegated to the shadows as his partner left for war.

Their soldier partners must often carry out elaborate charades just to ensure that suspicions do not arise. "If a straight soldier gets a letter from his girlfriend," says J.R., "he can tell his buddies, pass the letter around, show them pictures. If you're gay or bi, you can't. If you get a letter or photo, you rip it up or burn it; you can't keep it."

Before W.F. saw his partner off, he was



As war continues to rage in Iraq, how do gay soldiers and gay Iraqis cope with the world around them?

told to strip his letters of any hints that the two were involved. "Writing him letters, I have to be sort of careful what I say," he explained. "I have to be reserved and act like we're just good friends." Though W.F.'s partner is out to nearly his entire platoon, letters to and from deployed soldiers are often screened, so gay soldiers face discharge if they are honest in even their most intimate

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SCEC gets a new director

Greenville area resident Johanna Haynes takes leadership reigns at South Carolina Equality Coalition

GREENVILLE, S. C. — SCEC Chair Johanna Haynes is keenly aware of the state of civil equality for LGBT folk in South Carolina. A native of North Carolina and a longtime Atlanta resident, she moved to a tiny town just outside of Greenville called Six Mile seven years ago.

"I moved here just before the first Greenville Pride March," Haynes recalls. "There was a gay couple that were our neighbors. I remember on that Friday one of these guy's boss had just given him a promotion. On Monday he got fired because someone saw him at Pride. I thought this was just unbelievable."

Haynes admits that moving from Atlanta to Six Mile, in many ways, was nothing short of culture shock.

"I was deeply saddened about the number of people that were closeted — and still have to be. Not for just losing family support, but jobs and custody battles. I was astounded.

"It was so new to me. I've been out for so long it never occurred to me that there were people that couldn't be. I was just totally ignorant."

That awareness was what prompted Haynes



Johanna Haynes: 'Our focus is on educating.'

see JOHANNA on 11

Pro-gay billboard in Greensboro

Triad Equality Alliance's effort motivated by Charleston's AFFA

by Jim Sims

Driving down I-40 through the Triad has just become more politically engaging.



The billboard seen by an estimated 50,000 daily where Business and Bypass I-40 merge just west of Greensboro.

A few months ago in the State of the Union Address, President George W. Bush declared to the nation that marriage should be "a union of a man and woman as husband and wife." Many gay and lesbian people across the state cringed, feeling that the compassionate, conservative president had just officially declared his approval of their status as second-class citizens. This declaration

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