

FEATURES

360 Party Bus keeps the good times rolling

by Rachel Wright
Staff Reporter



PHOTO COURTESY STEVE WICKER

Customers of the 360 Party Bus enjoy a night out on the town without having to worry about getting around safely. The bus even offers a DVD player and patrons can bring their favorite beverage aboard.

"I looked at other buses, and basically I eliminated what I didn't like about their buses. Some of them kept the original seating that are all facing forward. Some of them just looked really cheesy and broken up," said Wicker.

Wicker purchased his bus, designed in the classic, yellow remembrance of elementary school days.

"This bus was actually bought by the city of Asheville in 1969, along with about 35 others," said Wicker.

"In the mid-80s they made them into school buses. So, when I bought the bus it was painted like a school bus. It had the cheap seats with a bluish, greenish ceiling, and no tinted windows."

Wicker repainted the bus black, and handmade the interior design. Vinyl encases the backsides of the seats, along with the ceiling, generator, and air conditioning. Handrails decorate the ceiling, with a sliver of mirror running through them. Seats, similar to a giant couch, hug the walls, leaving enough space for people to cozy up



PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE WICKER

The Party Bus can accommodate up to 20 passengers and travel within a 200 mile radius.

while they dance. Or, one can recuperate and watch a DVD.

"People around here, they don't know what a party bus is," said Wicker. "It's just something they are not accustomed to. They're expecting a cheap, school bus-looking deal. They're not expecting a nice one, like this."

The Party Bus will soon travel within a 200 mile radius, from shows in Charlotte, to the casinos in Cherokee, to Hot Springs, to bars in Greenville, according to Wicker who's in the process of receiving licenses to cross state lines.

Due to the newness of this type of business, Wicker researched

North Carolina's Alcohol and Beverage Commission and Alcohol Law Enforcement laws on the internet. He found, that with the size and height of his vehicle, laws pertaining to alcohol consumption fell on his side.

"When I originally called the board, and asked if I could have a

vehicle people could drink on they said 'No,' said Wicker. "A lot of people were misinformed about what you could and could not do. So I had to go and inform myself, then get back with them and point out exactly 'Yeah, I can do this. Are you going to let me do it?' They couldn't refute it after that."

Two people operate the party bus: the driver and the "wing-man." The "wing-man" caters to the customers' needs, like changing the music or cleaning up a mess, while the driver focuses solely on operating the vehicle and reaching destinations. The majority of the 360 Party Bus' business comes from women in their mid-twenties, according to Wicker.

"We have girls calling us up to go to bachelorette parties," said Wicker. "Girls calling us for going away parties. Wives calling to do birthday parties for their husbands. I haven't had any husbands call for their wives' birthdays, yet."

Besides the typical parties, Wicker caters to kids. Prices run during the week from \$75 to \$100 an hour. On the weekend, from \$100 to \$125. But, the longer one rents the bus, the less Wicker charges.

As a form of advertisement, the 360 Party Bus involves itself in charities. For instance, the Grape Escape auctioned it off for a few hours, in which proceeds went to breast cancer research, said Wicker.

Recently, Wicker works on setting up a type of shuttle bus for UNCA students, at a reduced rate, to Shotzy's downtown.

"UNCA would benefit from it, because they wouldn't have a lot of kids sitting around dorm rooms, without cars, just kinda hanging out," said Wicker. "It gives them a good outlet to get out and go and do something."

As a double benefit, both the club and the Party Bus would have business on slow nights.

"It gives people a place to go and hang out," said Haslam. "I remember when I was 18, we didn't have anywhere to go after 9 p.m."

profile

Subwoofers pound out the bass of 80s pop, rattling windows as people get down under a mixture of black, neon and lava lamp lighting. A disco ball twirls, while patterns of red-laser lights dance across the floor. The party does not occur at your favorite club, but inside of Steve Wicker's 360 Entertainment Party Bus.

"It's amazing," said Wicker. "People get on this thing, and they just go nuts. They start dancing, especially the adults, when they start drinking."

"They just start dancing and drinking, and hooting and hollering. They don't want to go to any clubs. Sometimes it's hard to get them off of the bus. They just want to stay here and party."

The 360 Party Bus took off on New Year's this year. The bus accommodates 20 people. By law, customers can bring on their own beer, wine and champagne. Smoking is permitted at the booker's request. Likewise, by law, liquor is not allowed, nor drugs, and the owner's of the Party Bus cannot provide alcoholic beverages. They do, however, furnish ice, sodas and snacks, said Wicker.

"People are allowed to drink as much as they can carry," said Wicker. "I've had bachelorette parties come in here and set a keg right here, and drink the entire thing in like four hours."

Wicker does not let customers carry their beverages off of the bus, because they will be cited with an open container. "It's a club on wheels," said Lacey Haslam, junior art major. "It gives Asheville something else to do, besides just bar hopping, and it encourages people not to drink and drive."

After research, Wicker discovered that Charlotte and Atlanta host their own party buses.

Gay erotica writer recalls sexual past in graphic novel

by Emily Sarkissian
Staff Reporter

Jery Tillotson, gay erotica author and North Carolina native, recently released a book of memoirs, "Nights of Fury."

Author of numerous books and stories popular in the gay world, Tillotson writes under several different pennames. One of the pennames, Jason Fury, authored "Nights of Fury."

This book reeks of over dramatized, stereotypical gay, sexual experiences in conjunction with the events of the author's life. While any autobiography will always lean towards the egotistical side, this book seemed almost sensational.

Tillotson grew up in Denton, North Carolina, and attended college at both Brevard College and East Carolina University. He talks a lot about the challenges of being an openly gay male in the South in the 1950s and 60s.

"During the 50s, no one discussed queers in polite society. Boys giggled about them in the locker rooms," said Tillotson, as Fury in the book. "Queers were so far off the radar that the guys I grew up with thought gay men were drooling monsters. So when I came along, it totally freaked people."

The book reads more like a fantasy of boundless sex with numbers of gorgeous sculpted men than a believable recount of events.

From the start, the tale of his introduction to the male anatomy at the age of four by his teenage neighbor seems exaggerated at best, hardly believable at worst. Tillotson explicitly tells how his neighbor, Dale, led him upstairs and proceeded to perform, what we would certainly today call child abuse. The way Tillotson tells it, paints a much less-functional picture, however, and in his explanation, he related how much he loved every minute.

"I clapped my hands when he stripped

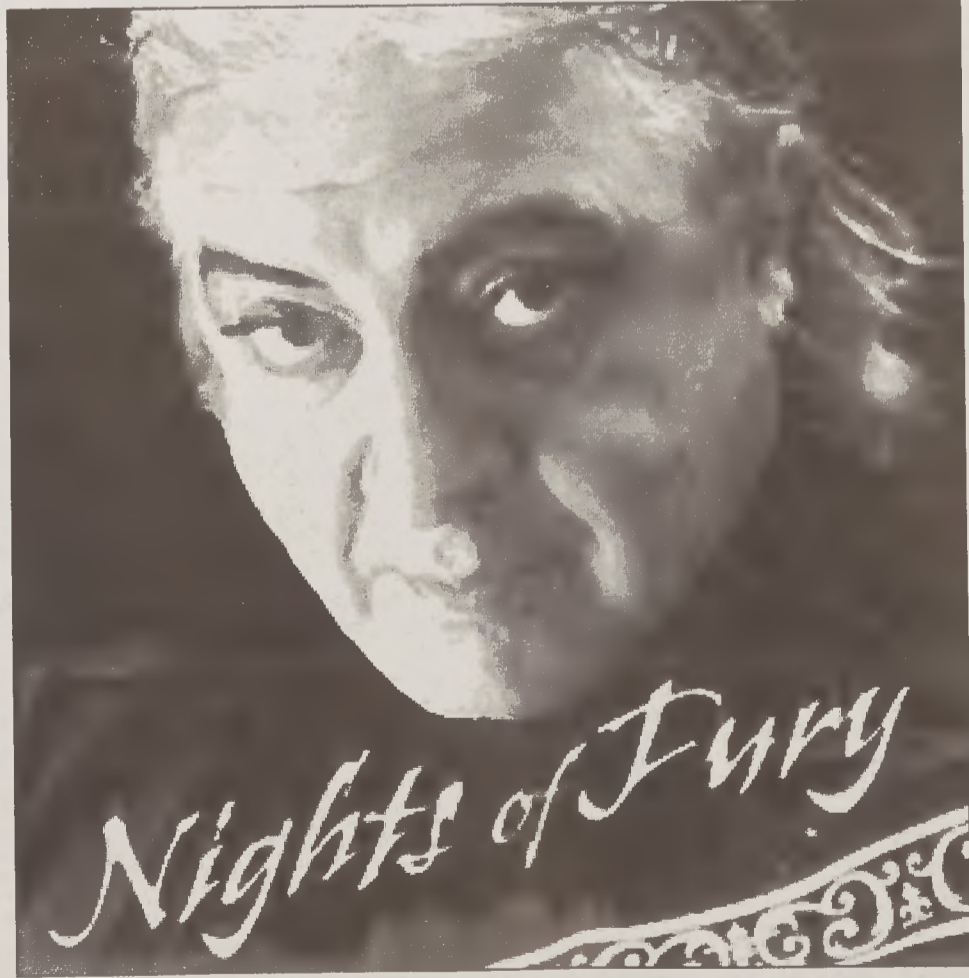


PHOTO COURTESY OF JERY TILLOTSON.COM

Tillotson, a former journalist, now writes under the pen names of Jason Fury, Andrea d'Allasandra and Kandy Kristmas.

all of his clothes off and he lay back on the bed," said Fury in the book. "I had thought and thought about our game and this time he didn't have to encourage me to make him feel good."

Enjoying sexual acts of an adult nature at that age is either a fabrication, or a symptom of some other very serious problems.

Before making his home in New York City in 1978, Tillotson wrote as a serious journal-

ist prior to becoming an author of gay fiction. He worked for the Associated Press in both Charlotte, N.C. and Fargo N.D. He also worked for *The Montgomery Advertiser* in Montgomery, Ala.

The tone he uses to describe his career at this point carries on with the sensationalistic mood of the earlier parts of the book.

"No matter how my enemies felt about

my persona, they couldn't deny that my articles brought me more writing awards than anyone who had ever worked on a Montgomery newspaper," said Fury in the book. "Medicine, mental illness, the art scene, the drama scene, the civil rights arena, I had brought prominence to all these fields. My contacts ranged in the hundreds."

When Tillotson moved to New York City, he wrote stories in gay magazines for a while, as he adjusted to life in the big city, during the days of disco. Throughout this part of the book, he does not restrict the retelling of multitudes of sexual experiences in the gay theaters and movie houses. In New York in the 1970s, the gay life abounded.

"Having been 'locked' away in closets for decades, the key had finally turned," said Fury. "Prisoners were released and now they had to make up for lost time."

I had discovered a whole universe of throbbing men who were like me. We lived for the moments we could merge into the darkness of theaters like *The Gaiety Burlesque* and become voyeurs."

The book has a convoluted tone of desiring equality for gay and straight folks, and specifically authors.

Tillotson seems to aim to refute this notion, which he claims still exists today, but he fails miserably.

While he mentions some personal relationships that do go beyond mere sex, most of his encounters typify the stereotype of gay men being sex-obsessed. At one of his book signings' he described how he met one of his boyfriends.

"I smiled and pulled an earlier favorite (book) from my briefcase," said Fury. "I always carry extra copies of my work-in-hopes it might convert someone handsome into someone closer than a friend."

These stories of the authors' life, as described in this book, seem ludicrous and melodramatic. The writing comes across as mostly unbelievable, often disgusting, and, at times, laughable.

Sky

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the cause or person responsible for the catastrophes occurring in and out of the city. The occasional sarcastic remark from Polly or Joe keeps the viewer awake during times of talk, but the story line becomes all too familiar and thus predictable to the very end.

Adventures to different parts of the world help to add to the visual element of the movie, but still take away from the character dialogue and storyline. However, toward the end, we see a new face that adds liveliness to the whole film named Capt. Francesca 'Frankie' Cook played by Angelina Jolie.

Her wit and authority displayed in the first ten seconds of meeting Joe and Polly makes up for dry conversation in earlier scenes.

The actors give noteworthy performances considering their situation and surroundings. They are instructed to play archetypes of old movie characters, which they do well. Audience members will likely divide into two camps on this one. Some who strongly dislike the heavy CGI feel of "Sky Captain" will argue that this is a bad thing, that withholding sets and props from the actors leads to soulless, overly technical performances.

Then there are those who will recognize that style alone isn't enough to make a movie good, but it can add an atmosphere of fun and imagination.

"Sky Captain" does not compare to the Indiana Jones films, and CGI-phobes may hate it. It becomes almost deranged in its imaginative scope and overwhelmingly lovely to look at, tends to appeal to the 12-year-old boy inside.

review