

Furious, fabulous & hurting for cash

By **Todd Morman**
Contributing Writer

Want to know the real reason Procter & Gamble is sticking by its decision to not advertise on Laura Schlessinger's upcoming TV show? Forget the local paper; try reading *Advertising Age*. The headlines tell the story:

March 7: P&G stock price slides on glum earnings news.

April 26: P&G profits down 11%.

June 9: P&G shocker: CEO Jager steps down.

June 12: Media shifts likely as P&G cuts to the core.

Get the picture? The company is in the middle of quite a retreat; the new CEO plans to dramatically slow the pace of new brand rollouts and speed the migration of company ad dollars from TV to print media. The June 9 article even includes the news that P&G had created "unrealistic levels of marketing support for many brands."

Toss in the American Association of Advertising Agencies March 2 announcement that daytime network "clutter" (the amount of non-programming time) is at an all-time high of almost 21 minutes an hour — making it harder for any company's message to be heard through the noise — and P&G's decision not to advertise on Schlessinger's new daytime talk show becomes a no-brainer.

So, go ahead and thank them for their strong stand in favor of queer equality if you like (it can't hurt). Just don't kid yourself about what's really going on here.

I admit I was fascinated by "An Inconvenient Woman," the May 28 *New York Times Magazine* story about Calpernia Addams. Addams is the pre-operative transsexual partner of murdered Fort Campbell soldier Barry Winchell. The thesis of the piece, that gay rights activists forced Calpernia to present herself as a man to simplify the story for the press and make sure the murder was classified as a hate crime, was extremely compelling.

Too bad it wasn't true.

The Servicemembers Legal Defense Network is furious about the story, which claims that SLDN attorney Kathi Westcott and local Kentucky activist Rhonda White asked Addams to lie to reporters about who she was "for the sake of clarity." Before the story ran, SLDN told reporter David France, as well as a fact-checker for the magazine, that "no one ever suggested or recommended to Ms. Addams that she portray herself as a man."

Somehow, the *NYT Mag* forgot to include the denial in its story — a stunning example of journalistic misconduct. It's also true that no one "needed" Calpernia Addams to be male for Winchell's murder to be a hate crime.

SLDN co-director Michelle Benecke told me that, while France repeatedly accuses SLDN of "marginalizing" Addams and "sweeping into town" to make Winchell

into a gay martyr, he didn't bother to interview anyone at her organization. Both accusations, by the way, are completely inconsistent with the facts of SLDN's activities and statements after Winchell's death. You really should read the press release at http://www.sldn.org/scripts/sldn.ix?page=pr_06_01_00; it lists way too many problems with David France's "journalism" to go into here.

According to MSNBC, a *Times* rep stated "It is our reporter's position that Calpernia Addams may have changed her position on this." But this doesn't explain why quotes attributed to Rhonda White and Kathi Westcott weren't fact-checked, or why their before-deadline denials weren't printed.

Benecke says the *Times Mag* has refused to print a retraction or apology, and has even put off publishing SLDN's letter to the editor until it can be subjected to "a process of fact-checking" that will mean publication in July, if at all. I bet they'll fact-check the letter more carefully than they did the article. Meanwhile, the damage to SLDN's reputation continues.

"My concern is that servicemembers and their families won't trust us," Benecke told me. "We advocate for anyone who's been hurt by the Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue policy — gay, lesbian, bi, trans or straight. The whole idea that we have some interest in imposing a larger agenda is ridiculous."

New York Times Magazine deputy editor Gerry Marzorati hasn't returned repeated phone calls.

It's hard to complain about local media coverage of NC Pride, since the march came close to not happening at all, but it's worth noting that the *Durham Herald-Sun* (2 color photos and a long story on the front of its Piedmont section) did a much nicer job of covering the event than *the News & Observer* (no pictures, story buried in the middle of its Metro section). This is all the more interesting once you remember that the *H-S* used to run markedly anti-gay editorials not too many years ago.

All of the television coverage I saw was balanced, fair and positive; we looked great on TV in all our beautiful diversity. By the way, it is my considered opinion that anyone who wants to see the role of drag queens minimized at Pride events needs to get slapped upside the head; the fun and fabulousness they added was one of the highlights of the afternoon.

Did anyone else laugh at the way the 11 o'clock newscast on WRAL-5 followed its Pride coverage with a story about a "Jesus 2K" march in Raleigh? I understand their need for "balance" so as not to offend the more delicate Triangle-ites, but I still laughed. Hey, at least we got top billing.

The Queer Media Report had a great time at Pride and thinks the folks who pulled it together locally are wonderful. Send comments to queermedia@yahoo.com.

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