

Just out

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Deadline for submissions is the 15th of the month preceding publication.

Out About Town is compiled as a courtesy to our readers. Performers, clubs, individuals or groups wishing to list events in the calendar should mail notices to Just Out by the 15th of the month preceding publication. Listings will not be taken over the telephone.

Display Advertising will be accepted up to the 17th of each month.

Classified ads must be received at the office of Just Out by the 17th of each month, along with payment. Ads will not be taken over the telephone.

Editorial policies allow the rejection or the editing of an article or advertisement that is offensive, demeaning or may result in legal action. Just Out consults the Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual on editorial decisions.

Views expressed in letters to the editor, columns and features are not necessarily those of the publishers.

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Steppin' Out

GANNETT OUTDOOR



This billboard, created by the women's caucus of ACT UP/Chicago, adorns a brick wall next to a liquor store in a working-class, Hispanic neighborhood. The billboard, which shows 23 women hugging, kissing and smiling, is part of a Chicago gallery's "your message here" public art project and will be

moved to other locations in the city in the next two months.

ACT UP project coordinator Mary Patten said the "COME OUT" message was conceived "because we wanted to do something addressing lesbian issues that was fun and kind of sexy and celebratory."

—Rex Wockner

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P A G E T W O

Looney Rooney

Here's the scoop on just what happened with Andy Rooney

BY KARIN SCHWARTZ

The media storm created by Andy Rooney's suspension and subsequent reinstatement has subsided. Yet, for all the column inches devoted to the story, most people are still in the dark as to what really happened.

The story began in October of last year, when Rooney stated in his nationally syndicated column that he felt the same way about homosexuals that he feels about cigarette smokers: he "wouldn't want to spend much time in a small room with one." Then, in December, he stated on national television during a CBS special that "homosexual unions," like drugs, alcohol and cigarette smoking, lead to "premature death."

These two incidents prompted the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) to write to CBS News president David Burke requesting a meeting to discuss the broadcast, and to begin a letterwriting campaign involving GLAAD chapters nationwide. Rooney received a copy of GLAAD's letter, but chose not to respond to it; instead he sent a now legendary letter to the Advocate. The letter was supposed to be an apology, but contained statements that were more anti-gay and more incendiary than any that had preceded it. Advocate reporter Chris Bull followed up with a phone interview, in which Rooney is alleged to have made an extremely racist statement, which he denies.

Two days later, after the allegations of racism surfaced, Rooney was suspended.

Rooney was reinstated from his suspension two months early, amid public pressure to

bring him back and a rating drop at 60 Minutes. His "return statement" focused overwhelmingly on the charges of racism. He apologized — sort of — for making the life of homosexuals "a little harder."

There are a number of general principles that can be extracted from this experience.

Here are a few:

1. The media does not treat gays and lesbians as authorities on our own issues or gay and lesbian organizations as credible civil rights groups. It's as if they believe that we are too close to our own issues to be objective.

2. The media unquestioningly buys into the same stereotypes about us that many bigots do. Consider for a moment the amount of investigative journalism that went into examining Advocate reporter Chris Bull's history for evidence of prior misconduct. Why didn't we see that same effort expended delving into Rooney's past for evidence of similar homophobia and racist statements?

3. What we consider to be neutral, unbiased reporting on our issues, the media considers to be advocacy. It's as if they don't think they can be fair to us without appearing pro-gay.

Many Americans probably agree with much of what Rooney said about gays and some probably agree with Rooney's alleged statements about African Americans. But while most people know better than to admit publicly to racism, they are much less reluctant to own up to being bigoted against gays and lesbians. The public pressure to keep your homophobia to yourself just isn't there.

So, what do we do about all this? First and foremost, gays and lesbians have to come out of the closet and be counted. It is too easy for the media to cover our community only as a handful of staffers of gay and lesbian organizations.

Second, people need to support the established gay and lesbian organizations — not just with money, although that is crucial — but with letters when we initiate campaigns.

Third, we have to try to get debate going on the opinion pages of the nation's media on gay and lesbian issues. We have to contact columnists and persuade them that our issues have an impact on all of society.

Fourth, we have to work to make the newsroom a safe place for openly gay and lesbian reporters. There are no gay and lesbian anchorpeople, for example, and no openly lesbian or gay syndicated columnists.

Rooney may be back on the air, but we are not back at square one. Rooney's statement last week, and then on 60 Minutes, sent a message to the general public that people can be educated and can learn to confront their own homophobia. And now many million Americans know something they didn't know before: that there is a national gay and lesbian organization devoted to making sure that gays and lesbians are treated with dignity and respect in the nation's media. If you defame us, prepare to face the consequences.

Karin Schwartz is the Deputy Director for Public Affairs with Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation in New York City. ▼