

# 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.**

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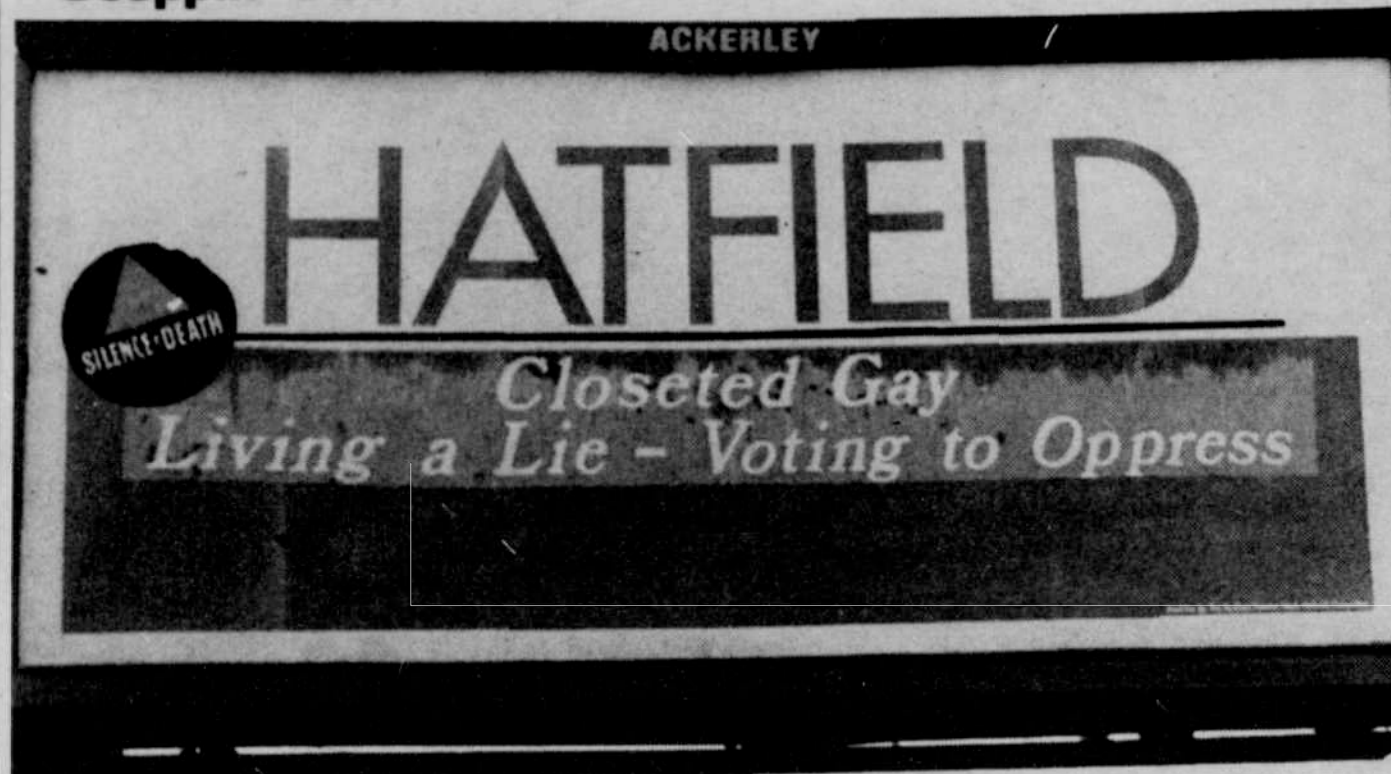
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## Steppin' Out



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## The other epidemic: Addiction in the gay and lesbian community

BY CHRISTOPHER ESKELI

**R** recently, I celebrated 11 years of living a clean and sober life. I do not claim much credit for this miracle. There were many, many people along the way who helped and supported me, particularly during those early days when it was so difficult for me to imagine that there was life after alcohol and drugs.

I lived in San Francisco during the 1970s when drug use was an accepted, unremarked-upon aspect of the gay socio-sexual scene. Psychedelics, cocaine or speed helped create that rush of ecstasy experienced on the dance floor. Some drugs — coke, poppers, marijuana — seemed to ease the anxiety of cruising and made sex more exciting and uninhibited. What dinner party was complete without a few joints or white lines? Everybody, it seemed, got high.

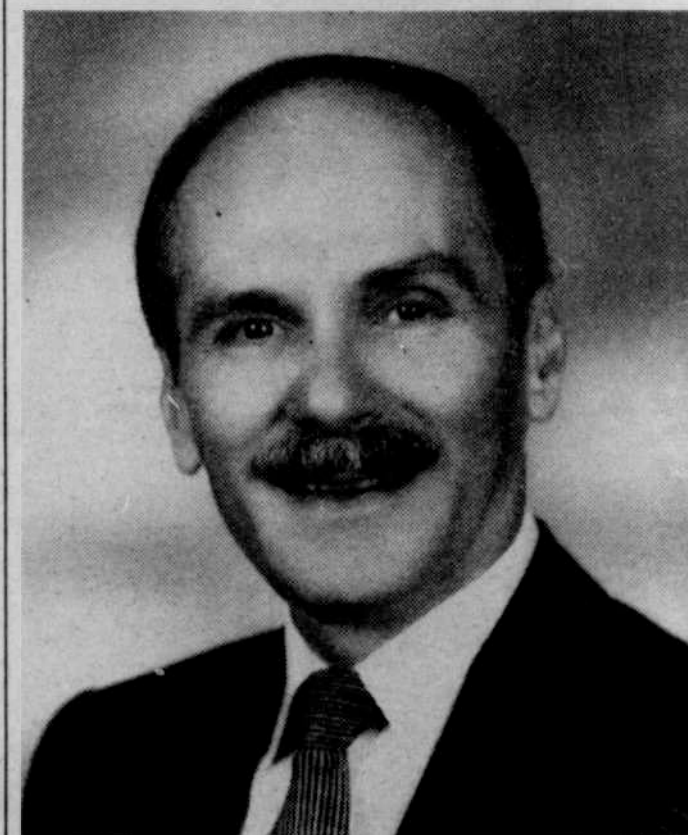
Did that attitude obscure the damage being done by drugs in the gay community? By seeing in drugs possibilities for liberating hedonism, did we overlook the potential for wretched excess? According to many in the health care field, drug dependency has become a major problem for gay men and lesbians. Research in the gay/lesbian communities of Los Angeles and New York have shown that 30 percent are addicted to alcohol (exclusive of dugs) as compared to about 10 percent of the general population. The emerging focus on chemical abuse in the gay community is part of our increased attention to health issues in general.

Besides being a recovering alcoholic and addict, I have also worked in the chemical dependency and mental health fields for 20 years. I am much less comfortable with the idea of recreational drug use than I used to be. There is a continuum in which use progresses to abuse. Drugs are used to medicate a constellation of intolerable feelings: fear and anxiety about sex and AIDS, guilt and anger over one's inability to accept life and intimacy; the grief, depression and stress that many of us feel who see our friends dying around us.

Gay people often internalize societal oppression and because of it suffer from low self-esteem. We often believe, consciously or otherwise, those negative judgments of ourselves. We don't get to integrate sex and romance into our total lives like heterosexuals do. Our interpersonal activities are often concentrated into certain times and places: at night, and in bars or at parties where alcohol and other drugs are consumed.

For me, it was often easier to be gay while I was on drugs or alcohol. After I got off drugs, I went through a painful process of trying to figure out what my sexuality meant to me. I looked for gay men who were clean and sober who serve as role models. What a revelation to discover that in sobriety I could create my own role model, one that was totally unique to who I was as a man, a gay man, a recovering man.

Alcoholism and drug addiction is a disease. The focus of recovery should be to get off drugs and alcohol. Once the chemicals



Christopher Eskeli

are out of our lives we can begin working on the underlying reasons, and that is where the guidance of qualified, sensitive professionals and self help groups come in.

We gay people are struggling to establish identity, to secure our personal integrity. There is nothing that robs us of these opportunities more than an addiction to chemicals.

We, as individuals and as a community, are proclaiming to the world at large, "I am gay. . . I am proud." How wonderful to be able to add, "And I am clean and sober." ▼

*Christopher Eskeli is coordinator of an alcohol and chemical dependency program at St. Vincent Hospital and Medical Center. He served as administrator in the first two gay/lesbian treatment programs in the world. He is also in private practice in Portland.*