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# national news

## A human face

*History Month events aim to acquaint the populace with the contributions made by lesbians, gay men and bisexuals*

by Steve Chrysler

**A** national organization of teachers and celebrities that fight homophobia in schools is organizing the second Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual History Month this October. International tennis star Martina Navratilova, award-winning actress Susan Sarandon and Olympic champion Greg Louganis are a few of the many backing the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Teachers Network, creators of the event.

"The assaults of the radical right are based on defaming us as monsters and molesters," explains the group's director Kevin Jennings. "Our ability to put a human face on that bogeyman is our strongest defense."

In 1994, a small network of teachers and community members across the country began working to create a specific time when attention could be focused on the contributions of lesbian, gay and bisexual people to the development of the United States. Organizations like the Human Rights Campaign Fund and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force endorsed them, and political leaders such as governors William Weld (Mass.) and Lowell Weicker (Conn.) and mayors Richard Daley (Chicago) and Thomas Menino (Boston) issued proclamations to celebrate the inaugural event on Oct. 1, 1994.

October was chosen to build on existing traditions like National Coming Out Day (Oct. 11), and to honor the first two marches on Washington, D.C., organized by gay, lesbian and bisexual activists in October 1979 and October 1987. Local coordinating councils in areas as diverse as Boston, Chicago, San Antonio, San Francisco and St. Louis staged myriad events, and numerous media outlets covered the story, raising the public's awareness of this history to a higher level throughout the nation. Activists in St. Louis created a gay and lesbian history film festival, and others in Jacksonville, Fla., hosted a "birthday party" reception for Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, who gave the first public speech on behalf of gay rights, in Germany in 1867. In Boston, 200 community members, teachers and students attended a conference featuring over a dozen workshops. The Gerber/Hart Gay and Lesbian Library and Archives in Chicago sponsored a slide show on local gay and lesbian history.

Jennings, a former high school teacher, explained why his group exists: "Twenty-eight percent of gay youth drop out of schools, which is almost three times the national dropout rate of 11 percent. One out of every three gay youth attempts suicide. Gay youth are at much greater risk for being physically attacked, for developing alcohol and

substance abuse problems. I really think a major factor in that is the hostile climate that goes on in schools." He continued, "There is no school in America where [using derogatory ethnic terms] would be tolerated anymore. Yet "faggot" is said regularly in virtually every hallway in virtually every American high school. The conditions in schools right now are such that it's literally unsafe for many gay and lesbian youths to go to school. That's wrong, and it needs to stop."

The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Teachers Network's other projects include regional conferences focused on creating change in schools; retreats which offer support to gay, lesbian and bisexual educators who are developing curricula and training resources; on-site workshops for schools; and advocacy for youth, educators and families. GLSTN developed the "Gay-Straight Alliance" student support program and helped establish such groups in schools in 13 states across the nation. In 1993, the group helped make Massachusetts the first state to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation against public school students.

This October, the winning entries of two national student competitions in art and essay writing will be placed in mainstream and lesbian and gay publications around the country. The Visual Arts Competition determines the official logo of the second Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual History Month celebration, which will be sold on T-shirts and posters to help fund activities. On Oct. 14, a 400-person conference will be held in Oakland, Calif., to commemorate the month and its goals. The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Teachers Network provides resources, support and ideas to local activists so that they can be more effective organizers in their communities. The bulk of the work for History Month is done on a local level.

Jennings said, "As confident as I am about our eventual victory, I have some serious short-term concerns about the coming months and elections. Our opponents are well organized, well funded, and absolutely determined to fight this fight on an all-out basis. As rapidly as we have grown, I know that we must move even further and faster than we have if we are to match their commitment. Now is the time to make our greatest commitment ever to saving the next generation from the bigotry with which we were all raised."

*The National Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual History Month Project is asking for donations of time and money. For more information, call (212) 727-0135.*

**The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Teachers Network is asking local organizations to:**

- Arrange book displays at local bookstores and public libraries.
- Write columns and letters to the editor in local newspapers recognizing the month and educating the public about contributions made by local lesbian, gay and bisexual figures.
- Publicize the work of local lesbian, gay and bisexual people who made a significant contribution to the community as a way of raising media and public awareness of this history.
- Advocate with your state and local school boards for inclusive curricular policies, so that full, fair and factual information about lesbian, gay and bisexual history is included in textbooks. GLSTN also asks local activists to make sure schools know that October is Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual History Month and to help them plan appropriate activities similar to those that many schools sponsor for Black and Women's History Months.
- Establish bulletin boards or post flyers to educate the community about lesbian, gay and bisexual history.
- Invite scholars to give lectures on their work to students.
- Arrange for older lesbian, gay and bisexual members of the local community to come to share their experiences in classes or public forums.
- Ask college presidents or school principals to officially endorse the month and to make plans for redressing the current lack of information on lesbian, gay and bisexual history in their libraries or curricula.

LESBIANS

*We are everywhere.*



**THE LESBIAN COMMUNITY PROJECT**

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

Friday, Sept. 15, 7 pm  
LCP & CEP present:  
**Pride Bingo!**  
NW Service Center, NW 18th & Everett  
Free Childcare! Doors at 6:30 pm  
FFI: 223-0071

Tuesday, Sept. 19, 7-9 pm  
The Lesbian Forum presents:  
**"Young Lesbians in the '90s"**  
Westminster Church, NE 16th & Hancock  
Free Childcare! FFI: Grace: 503-864-4446

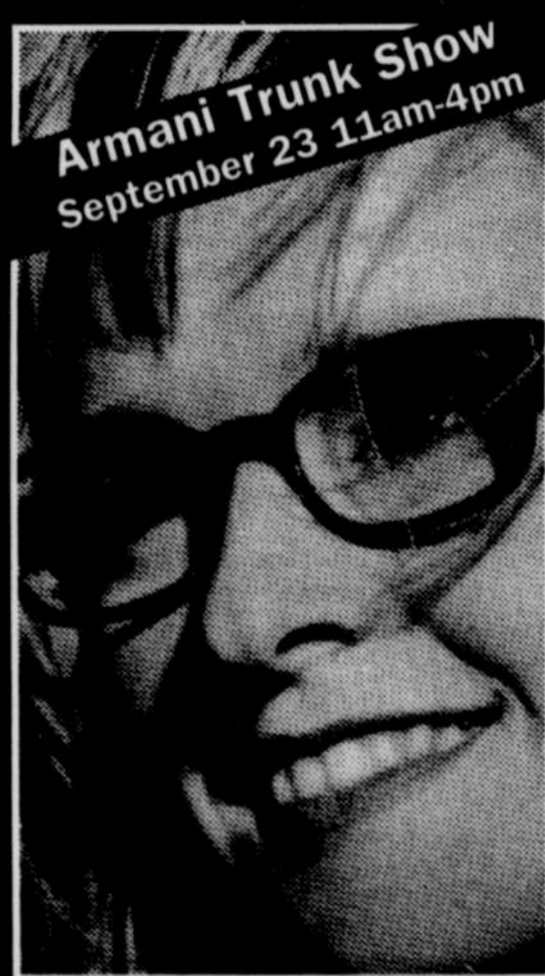
Saturday, Sept. 23  
**American Dragon's Summer Team in Dragon Boat Races**  
Vancouver Lake, Wash. FFI: JoEllen 287-4877

*Races all day long!*  
Friday, Sept. 29, 7 pm  
**Over 35 Dines Out**  
Der Rheinlander, 5035 NE Sandy  
RSVP-ASAP, Jane: 252-4762

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