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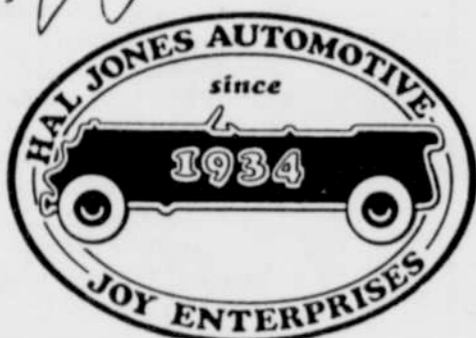
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national news

PFLAG gets tough

The national organization is marketing some controversial TV spots that expose the consequences of anti-gay rhetoric

by Inga Sorensen

Members of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays are taking the gloves off in their fight for the lives of their gay, lesbian and bisexual family members and friends.

PFLAG, which has affiliates in 380 cities nationwide and 12 countries, has launched a hard-hitting and emotionally compelling television advertisement campaign known as Project Open Mind, which focuses on the deadly consequences that may stem from anti-gay rhetoric espoused by the likes of Moral Majority founder Jerry Falwell, Christian Coalition leader Pat Robertson, and ultraconservative U.S. Sen. Jesse Helms.

PFLAG kicked off Project Open Mind on Nov. 8 at a press conference at the nation's capital. During the briefing, the group unveiled two 30-second television ads which were set to air that week in Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Tulsa and Houston.

The first spot, entitled "Bashing," shows video clips of Robertson equating homosexuality with an

handful of Tulsa outlets are doing so. As we went to press, no television station in Atlanta, Washington, D.C., Houston or Tulsa has yet agreed to run "Innocent."

"We're going to keep working on them. This is too important," says Steele, adding that those cities were selected because they have strong PFLAG chapters, affordable advertising rates, and the potential to reach many viewers. She says other cities, including Seattle or Portland, may be in the next round of targeted cities.

"I would like to see these ads airing here," says Portland PFLAG President Anne Bliss.

When we spoke with Bliss she hadn't yet seen the spots, but agreed that it was important that people be compelled to look at the problem of violence against sexual minorities.

"This is a family values campaign," she says. "We are standing up for our gay, lesbian and bisexual children and saying we love them, and it's not alright to hurt them. My gay son is entitled to the same rights to safety as my straight son."

In 1994, the National Gay and Lesbian Task

Force tracked anti-gay bias incidents in nine cities nationwide, documenting 2,064 hate crimes—mostly violent attacks—against gay men and lesbians. (It is widely believed that many attacks go unreported because there are few legal protections for gay men and lesbians.)

In Oregon, reports of anti-gay violence tend to rise with each election cycle as anti-gay initiatives are considered by voters. In 1992, an out gay man and lesbian were killed when a Molotov cocktail was thrown through the window of their Salem home. Many attributed their deaths to the contentious climate that was created by Ballot Measure 9.

Though he hadn't yet viewed the spots, Thom Kincheloe, program coordinator for the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation national field office in Portland, applauded PFLAG's efforts.

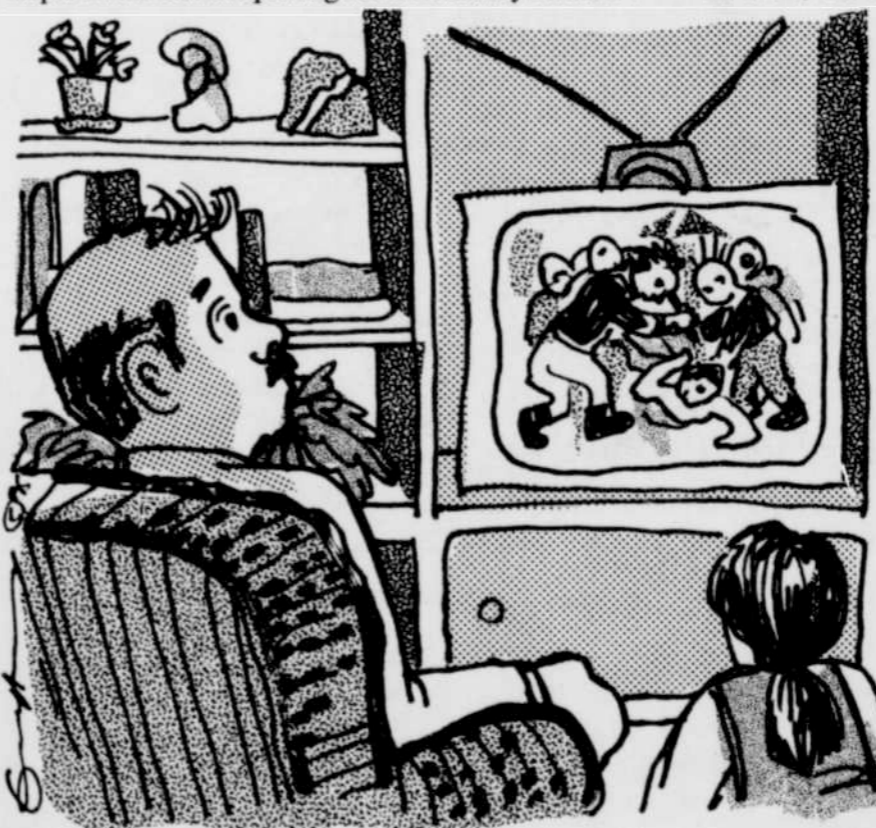
"PFLAG is putting out our story rather than allowing the right wing to do that," says Kincheloe. "Hopefully this will make people who haven't really thought about this stand up and take notice. It gives them a chance to see just how dangerous it can be for gay men and lesbians, especially when right-wing rhetoric is inflammatory."

"Dr. Martin Luther King said, 'We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people,'" says national PFLAG Executive Director Sandra Gillis. "The purpose of this ad campaign is to shock the good people of America out of their silence, so that they join with us in the condemning of anti-gay bigotry."

In addition to the advertising campaign, Project Open Mind includes a program of local community outreach to educate the public about the harsh realities of anti-gay rhetoric and attacks.

For more information about Project Open Mind, please contact PFLAG, 1101 14th St. NW, Suite 1030, Washington, D.C. 20005; (202) 638-4200.

Contributions benefiting the campaign are appreciated.



"abomination," "pathology," "Satanists" and even "Adolf Hitler."

While Robertson is making those remarks, the viewer witnesses Skinheads beating up a young gay man. At the end of the spot, Atlanta resident Nancy Rodriguez tells viewers: "My son Paul was brutally murdered. The FBI said it was a gay-bashing."

The second spot, "Innocent," includes anti-gay comments from Helms and Robertson, as well as a clip of Falwell saying: "God hates homosexuality." As they are speaking, the viewer sees a teenage girl in tears entering her parents' bedroom, getting a gun and considering suicide. The spot finishes with a voice saying: "It is estimated that 30 percent of teenage suicide victims are gay or lesbian."

"We've done a batch of focus groups which told us that warm and fuzzy ads about nice gays and lesbians did not convince middle-of-the-road Americans that there was anti-gay violence and discrimination," says Candace Steele, PFLAG's Northwest regional director. "We concluded that the ads needed to pack a punch. They need to shock people into reality and into action."

According to Steele, some of the media outlets in the targeted cities have been so shocked by the spots that they have decided not to air them. She says that at this point only the cable television station in Houston is airing "Bashing," while a