

by Inga Sorensen

all it the queer version of Super Bowl Sunday.

After all, each of the critical components is there: weeks of media hype preceding the Big Moment, hoopla over advertising and gazillions of planned house parties and public bashes where one—in this particular instance—can suck down \$1 “Absolut Ellen” drinks, partake in “Autographed Ellen Memorabilia” drawings, and view the main event on looming big-screen TVs.

You know what we’re talking about: the seemingly unending coming out of television character Ellen Morgan, not to mention her real-life incarnation, Ellen DeGeneres, who actually unveiled her lesbianism in a recent issue of *Time* magazine.

For those of you who’ve been locked in the basement for the past three months, April 30 marks the date when Ellen Morgan, the title character in the ABC sitcom *Ellen*, comes clean on the sexuality question.

When that happens, the show will make television history. Though she won’t be the first queer character in a network television series, Ellen Morgan will be the first leading—and most popular—out lesbian or gay character to date.

Not surprisingly, gay men and lesbians (and their friends) from coast to coast will be celebrating big time come April’s end.

The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, a media watchdog group, is sponsoring a potpourri of events in several cities including Los Angeles, where GLAAD’s entertainment media director Chastity Bono, *Ellen*’s Patrick Bristow and Dave Higgins, and other celebrities will mingle at the West Hollywood haunt Love Lounge. In Kansas City folks will come out for a slightly less-celebritized GLAAD party at Cabaret on Main Street. In San Francisco they’ll be hanging at Club Skirts, and in the Big Apple revelers will be on hand at the Irving Plaza Ballroom at East 15th and Irving Plaza.

GLAAD has also launched the official “Come Out with Ellen” World Wide Web site (located at [www.glaad.org](http://www.glaad.org)), and generated a “Come Out with Ellen” kit for fans interested in throwing “Come Out with Ellen” house parties.

More than 1,400 Human Rights Campaign *Ellen* house parties are also scheduled nationwide.

Like GLAAD, HRC has created its own house party kits “to make it easy and fun for people interested in holding the events.”

“The *Ellen* coming out episode provides a rare opportunity to raise the visibility and awareness of lesbian and gay people,” says Elizabeth Birch, executive director of the Washington, D.C.-based group.

HRC’s house party kits include a color “Ellen Coming Out Day” poster, party invitations and planning tips, an *Ellen* trivia game, and of course, HRC membership information.

“We received 24,000 hits on our Web page in just one day because of *Ellen*,” says Donna Red Wing, formerly with the Portland-based Lesbian Community Project and national GLAAD, who now serves as HRC’s national field director. “It’s a pretty amazing phenomenon.”

Members of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays are also busy planning *Ellen* screening parties.

“Coming out can be a difficult process for anyone,” says national PFLAG president Nancy McDonald, whose daughter came out to her 10 years ago. “To have a major television celebrity [come out] on the cover of a mainstream weekly news magazine is amazing. Her courage is an inspiration for thousands of youth who are coming to terms with their sexuality.”

As for the coming out of Ellen Morgan, McDonald says PFLAG members are looking forward to finally having their families represented during prime time, and hope to use the “popular culture event” as an opportunity to reach out to straight Americans.

“Too often our society is too quick to stereotype gay people,” she says. “This is not surprising, since most of us have no access to accurate information about homosexuality. Now, however, we can sit down with our neighbors and talk about a television character whose clever wit and hysterical antics we have all grown to love. And we can discuss what it means when this character many of us adopt into our families once a week comes out as a lesbian. This is an incredible opportunity for PFLAG members to broach a sensitive topic in a way that can make others feel comfortable.”

The hype and media frenzy around *Ellen*—and *Ellen*—abounds, with everyone getting into the act.

PlanetOut, an on-line queer network, is running a “Countdown to Ellen Contest,” where participants can become eligible to win a free RSVP cruise to EuroPride ’97.

“Think of a clever name for the new lesbian-themed sitcom and win cool prizes,” urges PlanetOut, while providing its own playful suggestions like “Tales from the Dykeside,” “Leave It to Beaver” and “Suddenly Sapphic.”

Newspapers and magazines worldwide have reported on the *Ellen* happenings. Among them is *Newsweek*, which recently ran a related article entitled “Hollywood Lesbians,” where showbiz execs say things like, “It’s a great time to be a gay woman.”

We are now living in a time, writes author Corie Brown, when “lesbians are openly feasting at Hollywood’s power-lunch tables. They even have a name for themselves: the Girl World. Their mentors are called the Girl Titans, the pioneer lesbians in top jobs at studios, networks, agencies....”

She adds that Hollywood is now “teeming with role models: independent producers like Christine Vachon, agents such as Jane Berliner...production executives such as TriStar’s Lauren Lloyd and Fox 2000’s Carla Hacken, and activist Chastity Bono, the daughter of Rep. Sonny Bono and Cher, who is a director of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation.”

Some of us may think this is all pretty peachy, but as we well know, one person’s reason to celebrate is another’s cause for alarm.

Dr. Jerry Falwell, speaking last month before 1,100 delegates of New Yorkers for Constitutional Freedoms, urged members to implore advertisers to immediately halt advertising on the Walt Disney-owned ABC television series.

“Walt Disney must be turning over in his grave,” he told delegates at the March 25 gathering in Albany. “Enough is enough. We as parents

Continued on page 19



PHOTO BY TIMOTHY WHITE

# OUT WITH ELLEN

On April 30 TV's closet door will open wide. All over The country queers will gather To celebrate, while detractors wield signs and send hate mail That reads:  
Burn In Hell