

FIT TO PRINT

Gay press applauds NLGJA gathering as inclusive; gay and lesbian journalists' annual meeting noted for a couple of firsts by Rex Wockner

An estimated 600 gay and lesbian journalists converged upon Las Vegas Oct. 1 to 4 for the seventh annual convention of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association.

Former Navy officer Tim McVeigh, who was at the center of the military and America Online privacy scandal, took advantage of the meeting to say publicly for the first time that he is gay. This was the conference's big story, according to the mainstream media, which followed McVeigh's case closely late last year.

For the gay and lesbian press, the big news was that people who work in gay media felt truly welcomed and included in an NLGJA gathering—a clear difference from past years.

"They've been much more inclusive this year, and I think as a result the programming was a little bit more interesting, a little more diverse and, probably, a little bit more con-

ate it at any level of our society and communities, the greater risk we are to building a great America."

Jones added she fully supports legalized same-sex marriage. She is the only U.S. mayor besides San Francisco's Willie Brown to have signed a resolution in support of same-sex marriage.

60 Minutes co-host Lesley Stahl also spoke on opening night, mostly addressing the Monicagate scandal and not once mentioning gay people in her comments.

During follow-up questions, however, she discounted claims made by the so-called "gay cure" groups, which have recently garnered coverage on her program and in other mainstream media venues.

"They can't give us numbers, they can't prove their case.... You know, it's a silly argument, curing this. It's ridiculous," she said.

"The gay media nowadays is breaking stories. They are leading the pack. Most of the mainstream media wouldn't be doing the kind of journalism they're doing on gay issues if The Advocate hadn't taken the lead [and] if the other publications that are local hadn't done what they do."

—Steve Friess

tentious at times because there wasn't such a focus on the mainstream viewpoint. The gay viewpoint is different," assessed Jeff Epperly, editor of Bay Windows in Boston.

"Almost all the panels have something to offer for the gay press.... Everyone's been very, very respectful," added Chris Crain, editor and publisher of Atlanta's gay Southern Voice.

"This convention recognizes the gay press in a way that past conventions have never done," agreed Steve Friess, the host committee chair and a reporter at the daily Las Vegas Review-Journal. "We typically have not paid that much attention to the gay media. I think we had a full track of activities for gay reporters."

He added: "The gay media nowadays is breaking stories. They are leading the pack. Most of the mainstream media wouldn't be doing the kind of journalism they're doing on gay issues if The Advocate hadn't taken the lead [and] if the other publications that are local hadn't done what they do."

Jan Laverty Jones, Las Vegas mayor and Democratic gubernatorial candidate, was a big hit at the opening night plenary session.

"You hear it from the right wing all the time that somehow you are against family values, that somehow there is something unnatural in your love and affection for one another, that somehow you aren't productive members of the community," Jones said. "This kind of perception, discrimination and hate, the more we perpetu-

Other speakers included Virginia Apuzzo, a lesbian aide to President Bill Clinton, and gay comedian Bob Smith.

Media outlets with booths at the convention included USA Today, the Chicago Tribune, the Los Angeles Times, The New York Times, The Washington Post and National Public Radio.

"I am very impressed with who did turn up," said Katherine Linton, host of the PBS gay newsmagazine In the Life. "I didn't expect ABC, CBS and NBC to be having tables and talking very openly about hiring people. I didn't expect there to be so many mainstream newspapers. More people should take advantage of the fact that they're here and talk about potential jobs."

Rose Marie Arce, a producer at CBS News and the convention's co-chairwoman, added: "I felt when we started programming this time, it was time for NLGJA to grow up, to really get into the big leagues of doing a journalistic convention where you can address the needs of all your members."

"So this year we had something for the photo people, we had a cartoonist speaking, we had a video project that incorporated gay TV for the first time, we have a student project, online radio is included—it's just a much broader brush that we've painted with," she said.

Next year's conference will be in Atlanta.

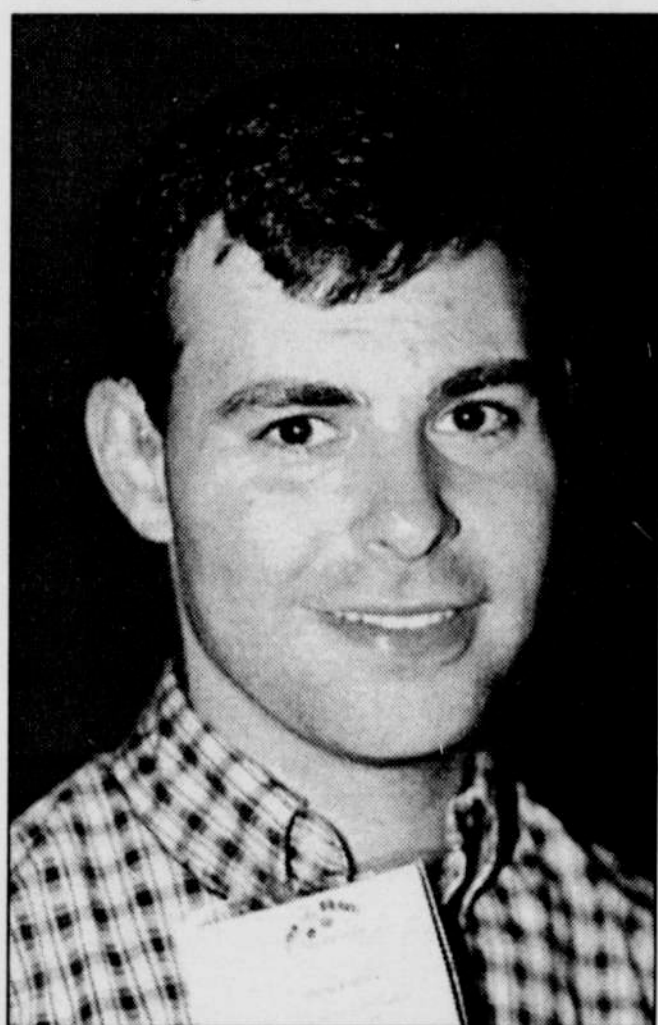


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