



## INSIDEOUT

SPRING 2006

### **The Newsletter of Blind Friends of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (BFLAG)**

BFLAG is affiliated with the American Council of the Blind and is dedicated to facilitating the free exchange of ideas, opinions and information relative to matters of concern to blind people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

Visit us at [www.BFLAG.org](http://www.BFLAG.org)

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## *FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK*

Being President this year has been a challenge to say the least. Starting out as Vice President and being thrust into the office of President one month after the convention caused an abrupt change in duties. Putting together the first in person meeting of the Board outside of an annual convention was done in less than a month and without the full cooperation of every board member it would have never happened. The weekend was full from early morning to late night. I thought we had developed a lot of momentum, but, I was mistaken. At the November board meeting we didn't have enough board members present to conduct business. We still haven't heard from one member. Fortunately, the board members do email and talk on the phone quite often. We got back on track in December and then another board member got very sick and spent over two months in a nursing home where he couldn't have the access to participate regularly. On top of these problems, my trip to Jacksonville was put off twice and when I was finally ready to leave my transportation arrangements fell apart. I was able to make a lot of last minute plans and thankfully drafted a friend to drive the twelve hours each way so I could work on the convention and also attend the ACB Presidents' Meeting. Now that that is done it is time to work full time on the convention and getting the necessary public relations work out on time.

Being president has definitely been a team effort. I owe our past presidents a lot of the credit for what has happened so far this year. With Connie having health problems and such she has still been there for phone conversations on a weekly basis and has loaned her talents to assist me with many tasks that I just could not do. She has been in the background and very much appreciated. Rob is still on the board and we talk by phone almost every week. Rob took a nasty fall while at the board meeting and I was so afraid he would have long lasting effects from it. He is a trooper and was back at work at 8:00 am even after spending the entire night at a local hospital. I can only pray that I can assist my successor as much as these two past presidents have assisted me.

It's not over yet. Every place I go and every person I meet as a representative of BFLAG has brought me to the conclusion that almost everyone out there wants to help and make our world a better place. Since I got involved with our conventions in Pittsburgh, each year and new city has introduced me to a lot of wonderful people and several new members have joined because of the host city's support. Being president, I don't have the time to chair one of the committees for BFLAG. I don't have the pleasure of bringing things to the board from the floor and having another person chairing the meeting. I have passed the chair to Jason and this gave me an opportunity to speak from the floor. Jason has been sick and this has been a challenge for me. I have not met all of my goals for the year. Our web site is our most important tool and the entire board has worked very hard to get it moved to a server that can handle our needs. It will happen by April 1<sup>st</sup>. BFLAG will have a net radio show soon and we are in hopes of doing it at least monthly. This also will happen by April 1<sup>st</sup> and there will be linking instructions on our welcome page at [BFLAG.org](http://BFLAG.org). I have a lot of work left to do to make my year as

president a success and with the help of our board and others like Connie, Dennis, Byron and Auggie we all should be able to say it was a success year come July.

BFLAG is growing and together, we will all make it grow even larger and provide a service to many people, some of whom we will never know. Ask your friends to join us. That's the way I have brought new members in.

I look forward to seeing lots of new and old BFLAG members in Jacksonville. And yes, WE WILL HAVE FUN.

## *GAY PRIDE EVENTS*

Gay Pride Month and Pride Days will soon be upon us. This year, the BFLAG board would like to have a BFLAG presence in as many "Pride Parades" as possible. The BFLAG banner can be loaned out in order for BFLAG members and friends to show it proudly in local "Pride Parades". It would be nice to have BFLAG in 10 parades rather than just 1 this year.

March with us in Washington DC's "Pride Parade" on Saturday, June 10<sup>th</sup>. We will be making plans to meet up and walk/ride in the DC Parade.

March with us in Baltimore's "Pride Parade" on Saturday, June 17<sup>th</sup>. We will walk/ride in Baltimore's parade and then have a party at "The Drinkery" on Read Street.

These two events are scheduled now and we hope we can get 8 more. If you would like to join us either in Baltimore or Washington, contact [ButchArnold@BFLAG.org](mailto:ButchArnold@BFLAG.org) or call 410-254-1972. Come and bring your friends.

## *BFLAG UNVLEILS ENDOWMENT FUND*

The BFLAG Board is happy to announce that we have set up an Endowment Fund. This fund is supported by "Life Memberships" and other Donations. It is with pleasure that we announce that BFLAG now has two "Life Members". Our "Life Members" are:

- 1 Mr. Terry Wilsey, from Las Vegas, NV
- 2 Mr. Brad Greenspan, From NY, NY

The proceeds from Life Memberships have been put in a special savings account and only the interest can be spent. This account will be the start of an endowment for BFLAG to assist with the operating costs in the future. BFLAG will only use the interest that this account earns and will not use any of the principle put in the account. This account will also be funded by donations specifically designated for the perpetual funding of BFLAG.

All such endeavors take time to develop and the true benefit usually will take at least 5 years to show a real funding benefit. It is our hope that BFLAG can build this fund to a point where its interest income will cover all of our modest administrative costs which one day might include our web site and convention costs such as meeting space and literature. At this time BFLAG is very limited due to the lack of funding available to us. It is also our hope to recognize contributors to this fund each year during our annual meeting at our conventions.

Each Life membership costs \$300.00 and all donations to this account are welcomed and appreciated. Please remember that BFLAG is a 501[c][3] designated organization and thus any donations to this fund are totally tax deductible.

Anyone wanting to honor someone with a "Life Membership" or get one for them self may contact any board member or check the web site for an application. Anyone wanting to simply make a donation to the fund may simply send a check to the Treasurer with instructions to place the funds in the endowment fund.

## *BFLAG JOINS WITH PFLAG TO MAKE THINGS BETTER*

During the BFLAG October board meeting representatives from PFLAG's National Office were present to discuss the two organizations working together. Both organizations will be working on education projects as well as encouraging social activities between their members. PFLAG will be making it's vast amount of literature available in accessible formats for all who need it. It is hoped that BFLAG members will get involved with local PFLAG chapters and share information and experiences. PFLAG has worked with BFLAG and the ACB in the past at our Pittsburgh Convention in 2003 and PFLAG Jacksonville will be working with us at this year's convention.

PFLAG is in hopes of having their web site, PFLAG.org totally accessible very soon. PFLAG is in the process of updating its literature and it will become accessible as it is produced and updated.

The BFLAG board encourages all members to look up their local PFLAG chapter and get involved. Walking with each other in PRIDE EVENTS is a good way to get to know each other. Please give it a try, make a phone call and if nothing else, introduce yourself to some PFLAG members.

## *PEELING AN ONION*

Coming out as gay and blind is like peeling an onion. There are many layers, some of which must be peeled away (like stigma and stereotypes), others that must merely be accepted.

For 35 years of my life, I lived inside the onion. I was in denial about both my status as low vision and homosexual. Homosexual, blind? Oh my God, so my thoughts went, what am I some kind of thing, some kind of freak of nature? I didn't get much help from the typical supports either. According to mom and Dad, I was broken as a blind person; according to pastor Rick I was doomed as a homosexual; and in aunt Martha's eyes I was an object of pity because I'd never thought of liking a person of the opposite sex.

I went through high school without a single date. Yes, I even missed prom because I was too afraid and too ashamed to go. Word gets around quickly in a small town. Fortunately, things got better when I entered college. The campus congregation was a progressive bunch. Through them, I came to realize that blindness and homosexuality were not curses, but merely characteristics in life's grand scheme. I've since become a more, well-rounded person. Being low vision and homosexual are merely two aspects of me, and I like who I am.

Deciding if, where and when to come out, is a difficult decision. In my view the sooner the better. If somebody thinks you're closeted, they have great manipulative power over you. Today my friends and coworkers all know of my homosexuality and low vision, and I am just one of the gang.

NOTE: Author requested he not be identified..

## *BFLAG ELECTIONS ARE UPON US*

This year, BFLAG will elect its president, vice president, treasurer and at least one member at large to the board. These positions are not simply titles but

each officer and board member is expected to work diligently for BFLAG and its members. Each member of the board chairs a committee and is expected to work on other committees as needed. The board meets at least once a month by conference call and this year met in person in October. Between meetings, there is plenty of work to be done and each board member must give a report on their work at every board meeting. In the past, it has been very common for board members to resign because they did not understand the obligations they accepted when they joined the board. Since BFLAG is a recognized 501(c)(3) organization, there are legal obligations that mandate commitment to the organization.

This year the board has taken on two non-voting assistants. Dennis Ober has worked with Bonnie Pugh, our secretary, on communications and membership related issues such as our directory. Byron Lee has been working on our web site in hopes of getting and keeping it up to date and fully accessible. Both have been attending most board meetings and both have been very active in board discussions.

For the first time, this year we have a nominations committee and the committee is talking to individuals and attempting to get some new energetic board members. There is always a job that any member or friend can do to assist. This year, we have fallen short on public relations and fundraising. We have also failed to get local groups organized. Last year we had a fantastic newsletter editor in Don Brown and this year we miss the outstanding quality product he put together.

The doors are open so gather your thoughts and come on in. The board is here for the benefit of our members and other GLBT visually impaired and blind individual. As board members, our personal agendas must be put on a back burner. Please consider joining the board and take an active role in making BFLAG a much better organization. Anyone interested in becoming a board member or assistant can contact either Rob Hill at [rhil35@sbcglobal.net](mailto:rhil35@sbcglobal.net) or Jason Perry at [jp4654@earthlink.net](mailto:jp4654@earthlink.net).

## *2006 CONVENTION COMMITTEE UPDATE*

Make your plans to attend our Jacksonville Convention July 8-14, 2006. We all know it won't be like our convention in Las Vegas or Birmingham but are any two good conventions alike? This year's convention will have some new events and lots of interesting things to do throughout the week. Although the program has not been cast in stone as of yet, here is what we hope to offer for enjoyment.

We will have our usual welcome party on Sunday from 2 – 5. For the first time it will be sponsored by our local friends. On Monday we will have a joint program with CCLVI on self acceptance and understanding coming out both as being gay and visually impaired. There will be a panel discussion and we were asked to join in it by CCLVI's leadership. Monday night will find us all at our annual meeting, where elections will take place, as well as a bigger and better pizza party, again hosted and sponsored by our local friends in Jacksonville. On Tuesday we hope to have an informational program with PFLAG. This will let everyone know about the great strides we have made this year working with PFLAG to make their information accessible and to make each organization's members aware of each others programs, needs and abilities to work together. Tuesday and Wednesday evenings are being worked on as this article is being written. One will be a formal, not in dress, banquet with an interesting program, good inexpensive food and a comfortable environment. Again, our local friends are working hard on putting it together. The other night might be a picnic of sorts on the patio of Club 616, a local watering hole. It will be a chance to meet local people and again get some good food. It is a quiet area and I don't believe any of our four legged friends will mind attending. We will even make sure they will have their own restroom to use at the site. On Thursday we MIGHT have a pool/beach party. In the afternoon and although it sounds fun we have to work out all the details. This might take place at Jacksonville Beach which is on the Atlantic Ocean and if so we will have more than ample guides/escorts for all. On Wednesday and Thursday evenings around 10:30 or so, we will have separate support/discussion groups for guys and girls each night. We will have discussion leaders in place to facilitate these sessions. Refreshments will be served. On Friday night, we will be joining CCLVI for a "Farewell Party". We believe there will be music and drink for all to enjoy. Monday – Friday mornings, we will have coffee and pastries or such in a sponsored suite. It is not THE BFLAG SUITE. This will be free this year and a sponsor has been designated.

This year, we are making every attempt to keep the cost down for all members. We know we are getting some new members from Florida and I know of 2 from Jacksonville. Our program is diverse and every attempt is being made to make sure we don't conflict with other ACB affiliate programs that our members will want to attend. We will try to make things as flexible as possible to guarantee as much participation as possible. With such a program, we need to have as many members as possible attend. The Jacksonville community and the board are working hard to make BFLAG's trip to Jacksonville as memorable as possible.

**ROOM SHARING** can save money for all. It would be nice if those who would like to have someone to share a room with would contact me at [ButchArnold@BFLAG.org](mailto:ButchArnold@BFLAG.org) so we can get as many as possible sharing expenses. We have tried this in the past. I will simply let people know who is looking for situations and you will make contact and plans with each other.

THE COST of convention gets higher and higher each year. This year, the BFLAG convention WILL NOT add to this belief or practice. Thanks to our new sponsor program and the support of the local Jacksonville Community, we are making every attempt to make this the best and cheapest convention ever. Keep your fingers crossed and your hopes up. We would like to keep the entire cost of the BFLAG part of your trip down to \$65 plus room and ACB costs. We don't know if it will happen but that is the goal I have set. Watch for more information in April.

The Convention Committee

## *NAME CHANGE REPORT*

The "Name Change Committee" consists of Rob Hill, Scott Marshal and Don Brown. The committee met and reported the following to the board.

- 1 There is a real question whether changing the name would be good at this time.
- 2 To change the name with ACB is very simple but to change it with the IRS would take a lot of paper work and time.
- 3 The following possibilities for a name are:
  - A Council of GLBT People
  - B Council of Blind Lesbians and Gays
  - C Blind Lesbians and Gays of ACB
  - D Visually-Impaired Gays and Lesbians
  - D GLBT of ACB
  - E Rainbow of ACB
  - F Gay Blind Individuals
  - G Pride ACB
  - H BFLAG
- 4 The committee did not recommend changing the name.

The Report was given to the board and the board felt that only "BFLAG" is appropriate. This subject will be brought up at our annual meeting in Jacksonville.

**INSIDEOUT** is published in, October, March, and June. Material to be published of interest to the membership is welcome. All material to be included must be received prior to the first of the month of publication. Items for publication should be sent to [BFLAG@BFLAG.org](mailto:BFLAG@BFLAG.org)

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