



INSIDEOUT

Fall, 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

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

By Butch Arnold, President

I am pleased to announce that our 2006 convention in Jacksonville was a great success. BFLAG had 50 members attend our annual meeting and pizza party afterwards. Our programming with CCLVI was well attended and all of our convention events were streamed live over the internet via BFLAG.org. Our new board is in place and off to a good start on the year's work. .

All of us who attended the convention want to thank PFLAG Jacksonville, St. Luke's MCC, Christ Church of Peace and Club 616 for making our convention such a success. Without all of the local support there is no way we could have had such a nice convention.

Our web site continues to be a problem. We all know that BFLAG.org is our life blood and without it being functional and up to date, BFLAG will loose out on a lot of opportunities. We are attempting to secure funding for professional design and operation of it in the next 60 days. Our web site is the primary source of information about BFLAG to prospective members and contributors. Our site must be kept up to date and accurate.

It is time to put a working committee together to plan and run our 2007 Convention. As president, I would like to not have as much to do with the overall planning as I have in the past three years. I would like to see the amount of programming either increase or remain at the level it has been for the past 2 years. This will take a lot of work by a committee and will mandate local involvement with the GLBT community in Minnesota. We will have a conference call on October 15th at 5:00 pm eastern time for all who are interested in being on the committee. Please contact any board member for telephone number and information. I have heard of 2 or 3 members that are interested but, we need more members on the committee.

We will be sending a letter out to all members as part of our on going attempt to keep our directory and membership list up to dated. Please look for it and get back to us with any changes in your information.

Remember, the BFLAG board is here to serve members and we want to hear from all of our members and get as many as possible more involved with our activities. And by the way, the only way to get new members is to ask them to join. It works.

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MEMBERSHIP BASICS

By Leah Gardner

Here's the section you all look forward too in each edition of Inside Out. Here's where we ask you to think about your membership dues. Let's face it. In order to continue expanding and evolving as an affiliate, we have to ask all of you

to chip in with a little contribution. Our yearly convention activities and BFLAG suite must be financed. As a paid BFLAG member, you also automatically become a member of the American Council of the Blind. You'll receive ACB's monthly magazine which will keep you updated on all the latest legislative news affecting visually impaired individuals regionally and across the country. Paying dues also guarantees you a voice in BFLAG elections, and it gives BFLAG more leverage in the ACB electoral process. I know I sound like your local PBS and NPR outlets, but the reality is that we need all of our members to think about us once a year and help us continue to fulfill our mission.

So, some of you will breathe a sigh of relief. If you paid your dues in Jacksonville this summer, you're paid up for a year, and you can skip ahead to the next article. Those of you who did not attend the Jacksonville convention or attended and did not pay dues, here's your chance. Annual membership costs are \$12. Those of you who are students are entitled to a \$6 membership fee.

Please send checks to us at BFLAG, 4802 Holder Avenue, Baltimore, Md 21214. And please feel free to e-mail me with any membership questions you may have at lgard@together.net, or you can reach me at 510 290-6340.

If you are receiving this newsletter and are not a member, please think about it. We absolutely need your support and participation to keep this affiliate moving ahead. We began with just over 35 members in 2000, and we steadily raise those numbers as time progresses. We want to keep that momentum and forge ahead each year. As our member base grows, it gives us the flexibility to stretch beyond convention planning and general maintenance to making our voices heard in other arenas. The higher our numbers, the more diverse and representative of different viewpoints and backgrounds we become. So remember the \$12 will be spent with the expectation of making BFLAG a more viable and multi-faceted organization. Thank you so much for your support. Your help is critical.

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ASK DOTTIE

Dear Dottie:

I am beginning my junior year at a small Christian college in the South. Last year, I met a woman in my History seminar with whom I have developed a close intimate relationship. It probably goes without saying that our college has a zero tolerance policy regarding homosexuality, which can be grounds for immediate expulsion.

Anastasia and I are contemplating being roommates in the dormitory this year. She recently expressed an interest in our joining, in my opinion, a rather radical group of lesbians who engage in on campus underground activities such

as, leafleting buildings, posting “we’re queer and we’re here” stickers throughout the campus etc. I do not want to be involved or connected with this group at all, as I don’t want to run the risk of being expelled and thereby being disrespectful to my parents, who are financing my education. I also don’t want to damage my relationship with Anastasia either.

Please help! In a Dither in Dixie.

Dear dear Dither:

Dottie is at a complete and utter loss to understand why anyone would actually pay to attend such a back woods knuckle-dragging bastion of regressive thought. I hope the campus is, at least, beautifully landscaped. I do so love Magnolia trees.

In the overly simplistic and marginally relevant words of a former First Lady, “just say no.”

Let Miss Anastasia know that you are not willing to run the risk of jeopardizing your education and potentially hurting your parents for her thrill of joining the underground Suffragettes of Sigma Ky. If she finds it difficult to wrap herself around this piece of information, Dottie suggests ditching the idea of being roommates. On the other hand, if she supports your decision, then it’s all-good! In short my sweetums, either way it goes, you will learn volumes about your dearest Anastasia.

Dear Dottie:

I thought I’d met Mr. Perfect. As we’ve dated over the past three months, I’ve noticed that his drinking seems to be increasing, especially before and during our being sexual. Frankly, it has gotten to the point where the alcohol prevents his ability to perform, if you get my drift. Aside from this little problem, Dillon is excellent boyfriend material.

Am I over reacting? Should I be concerned?
Puzzled in Portland

Dearest Puzzled:

Derlin, Dottie hardly knows how to deliver this news flash other than to say, Mr. Perfect has issues.

Don’t get me wrong. Dottie is not by any stretch a teetotaler as I’ve managed to develop a liking toward those little kamikazes. Do they have a kick or what? Anyway, a moderate amount of imbibing can lower inhibitions and enhance love making, if you get my drift. Too much imbibing can have the opposite affect; Dottie doesn’t have to tell you that now does she?

Derlin, I’ll leave you with a truth first uttered by a Hungarian philosopher back in the 1600’s. “He whose head is stuck in the sand increases the odds of being kicked in the butt.” I believe this philosopher also commented on denial and a river in Egypt and something about all that glitters...

Encourage Mr. Wonderful to get some help.

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DC COMMICS RESURRECTS BATOMAN AS LESBIAN

By Larry McShane, Associated Press Writer, May 31, 2006
(reprinted with permission)

Years after she first emerged from the Batcave, Batwoman is coming out of the closet. DC Comics is resurrecting the classic comic book character as a lesbian, unveiling the new Batwoman in July as part of an ongoing weekly series that began this year.

The 5-foot-10 superhero comes with flowing red hair, knee-high red boots with spiked heels, and a form-fitting black outfit.

"We decided to give her a different point of view," explained Dan DiDio, vice president and executive editor at DC. "We wanted to make her a more unique personality than others in the Bat-family. That's one of the reasons we went in this direction."

The original Batwoman was started in 1956, and killed off in 1979. The new character will share the same name as her original alter ego, Kathy Kane. And the new Batwoman arrives with ties to others in the Gotham City world.

"She's a socialite from Gotham high society," DiDio said. "She has some past connection with Bruce Wayne. And she's also had a past love affair with one of our lead characters, Renee Montoya."

Montoya, in the "52" comic book series, is a former police detective. Wayne, of course, is Batman's true identity — but he has disappeared, along with Superman and Wonder Woman, leaving Gotham a more dangerous place.

The "52" series is a collaboration of four acclaimed writers, with one episode per week for one year. The comics will introduce other diverse characters as the story plays out.

"This is not just about having a gay character," DiDio said. "We're trying for overall diversity in the DC universe. We have strong African-American, Hispanic and Asian characters. We're trying to get a better cross-section of our readership and the world."

The outing of Batwoman created a furor of opinions on Web sites devoted to DC Comics. Opinions ranged from outrage to approval. Others took a more tongue-in-cheek approach to the announcement.

"Wouldn't ugly people as heroes be more groundbreaking?" asked one poster. "You know, 200-pound woman, man with horseshoe hair loss pattern, people with cold sores, etc.?"

DiDio asked that people wait until the new Batwoman's appearance in the series before they pass judgment.

"You know what? Judge us by the story and character we create," he said. "We are confident that we are telling a great story with a strong, complex character."

DiDio spent most of the morning fielding phone calls from media intrigued by the Batwoman reinvention.

"It's kind of weird," he said. "We had a feeling it would attract some attention, but we're a little surprised it did this much."

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BFLAG IN THE NEWS

It Ain't Easy Being Green

By Josh Aterovis (reprinted from GayLinkContent.com)

It ain't easy being green. The plaintive lament of Kermit the Frog became this year's theme at the annual meeting of Blind Friends of Lesbian, Gay, Transgender and Bisexual People, BFLAG for short. The message was one of self-acceptance, but the group is also fighting for another kind of acceptance: inclusion in the gay community. Many people with disabilities feel isolated from society, but gay people with disabilities often face further challenges.

"The LGBT community is not really inclusive when it comes to the disabled," says Ken, a 41-year-old blind gay man. "While that's not a problem exclusive to the gay community, it is made worse with their fixation on beauty and perfection. A disability, no matter what it is, makes you imperfect."

BFLAG started out as an informal support group for people who are gay and blind. They first met in 1996 at the national convention of the American Council of the Blind (ACB). It was the first of several annual meetings, with attendance continuing to grow year by year. The group became an official affiliate of the ACB

in 2000. They've grown from a handful of attendees to about 150 active members.

Today, BFLAG states on their website that their purpose is to provide for the betterment of the lives of those who are visually impaired and who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Specifically, they're working to help blind gay people integrate into society.

"LGBT disabled individuals have the same problems as straight disabled individuals," reports BFLAG president Butch Arnold. "Sometimes we're totally accepted but, more often than not, we're assumed to be different and are not accepted on an even playing field. With the closet factor added to the mix, disabled people, especially those who are visually impaired or blind, have major problems fitting in or simply being accepted by other LGBT individuals. This makes socializing difficult under many normal LGBT circumstances."

Jason Perry, vice president of BFLAG and a law student at Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, agrees that handicapped people are often excluded from gay culture. "There's a fear, number one, of just 'Goodness, what do we do?'" Perry explained. "The task looks so monumental. The second issue is just logistical. A lot of gay bars aren't handicapped accessible."

So how do we work together to change that?

The first step, everyone agrees, is education. "Once a visually impaired or blind individual gets to be known, most barriers tend to disappear," Arnold asserted. "Educating the general public helps immensely with the acceptance of all disabled people."

Perry advocates integration. "I'm a firm believer in getting blind gay people out in the community, in both the gay and straight community, because if you put a human face on what the problems are, you help connect the discussion. The issue becomes tangible now. It's something people can relate to."

"Disabled individuals don't bite and our disabilities are not contagious," stressed Arnold. "People need to get to know us. As a visually impaired individual, I'm often perceived to be a snob when I don't see someone wave or make eye contact with me. If I don't know a person is attempting to communicate with me, I can't respond. I have lost several potential friends because of this. We all must learn to communicate better and simply do more communicating."

Perry reiterated the importance of eye contact and body language, especially in American gay culture. He reported that he found it easier to meet people in other countries because it seemed they valued conversation over the complex system of eye contact and flirting used in the US.

"Everyone must realize that visually impaired and blind people simply can't communicate with body language and such," Arnold pointed out. "We still say and feel the same things, but many of us simply can't communicate in a visual manner."

Another unique challenge is transportation. "Mobility seems to be of paramount importance," Perry said. "My friends like to go places and I don't drive, of course."

Then there's the common stereotype that, as Ken put it, "disabled people are not thought to be sexual." Perry added, "Whenever I hang out at a gay bar, particularly if I've never been there before and people don't know me, a lot of times people look at me as a casual friend, but not much else."

BFLAG is working hard to educate the LGBT community. This year alone, four cities saw a BFLAG contingent march in their pride parade: Baltimore, MD; Tulsa, OK; Houston, TX; and Washington, D.C. BFLAG helped organize a gay pride event in Columbus, OH, and they've also been active in Katrina relief efforts doing everything from providing housing to collecting food and supplies.

BFLAG is also reaching out to visually impaired LGBT people. They are currently working on organizing affiliate chapters in Baltimore, Houston, and Columbus. Arnold hopes that there will be even more groups formed in the next couple years. They're also hoping to expand the website (www.bflag.org) and produce a radio web show.

It's not just up to BFLAG, however. LGBT organizations and individuals need to be more proactive in reaching out to our disabled brothers and sisters. More bars and clubs need to be handicapped accessible. If you see a blind person at a bar, start a conversation with them. If you know a blind person, invite him or her along the next time you're going out.

Most importantly, let's not forget that blind men and woman have the same feelings, needs, and desires as anyone else. "We're just people," Ken insists. "I can accept it if I'm not liked for my personality, but it ticks me off when someone won't talk to me just because I'm blind."

It ain't easy being green. Or blind. Or gay. Let's work together to make it a little easier on all of us.

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PIONEER OF THE BISEXYAL MOVEMENT DIES

San Francisco chronicle, june 1, 2006 (reprinted with permission)

Dr. Fritz Klein, a pioneer of the bisexual movement who founded several major bisexual organizations and created a groundbreaking model for understanding human sexuality, has died.

Dr. Klein, who was 73, suffered a heart attack at his San Diego home May 24.

"He's one of the giants. He led the way," said Maggi Rubenstein, who organized meetings that launched San Francisco's bisexual movement in 1972.

His most important contribution to the movement was his creation of the "Klein Grid," an expansion of the 0 to 6 Kinsey Scale that measures human sexuality. Dr. Klein added sexual attraction, fantasies, emotional and social attraction, lifestyle and self-identification, and he argued that an individual's sexual orientation cannot fit in a simple category.

Rubenstein, who co-founded the Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality in San Francisco, said the institute used Kinsey's scale, "but I felt (Dr. Klein's) was more accurate," she said.

At his death Dr. Klein was the chairman of the American Institute of Bisexuality, which he founded, and editor of the Journal of Bisexuality, which he also created.

Born in Vienna, Dr. Klein received his M.D. from Bern University in Switzerland and a master's in business administration from Columbia University in New York, where his family moved when he was a child. When Dr. Klein couldn't find information on bisexuality at the New York City Public Library, he placed an ad in the Village Voice in 1974 asking bisexuals in the city to meet and talk about their experiences.

"We met weekly for discussion and it very quickly also turned into a support group," Dr. Klein told biMagazine in an interview published this year.

The group became known as the Bisexual Forum.

"It was a culmination of talking to hundreds of bisexuals in the Bisexual Forum in New York where the question of sexual orientation and bisexuality kept coming up," Dr. Klein told the magazine. "It became obvious after a while that sexual orientation is more complicated than Kinsey's scale."

The Klein Grid, first published in 1978, does not accommodate transgender people, however.

"I don't know how to do it so I leave it to the next generation to figure ... out how to fit it on there," Dr. Klein told the magazine.

The grid gave a scientific basis for bisexuality, which is often marginalized in the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender movement, said Sheeri Kritzer a former member of the board of directors of the Bisexual Resource Center in Boston.

Dr. Klein is survived by his partner, Tom Reise of San Diego, and his brothers George Klein and Seymour Klein of New York City. According to Dr. Klein's wishes, his body was donated to science. Memorial services are not yet planned.

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WOMYNS'S BRAILLE PRESS COLLECTION STILL AVAILABLE

WOMYNS'S BRAILLE PRESS COLLECTION STILL AVAILABLE

You can now browse through WBP's last catalog of over 800 feminist and lesbian titles on the Web. Through the efforts of Jennifer Dunnam, WBP's catalog is now up on the Web site of Triangle Braille Services (www.trianglebraille.org). Go to the site and look under "other sources" to learn about WBP and to find out what books the organization produced. These titles are housed at the Bureau of Braille and Talking Book Services in Daytona Beach, Florida and can be ordered through regional libraries of the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped by anyone registered with this service.

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LAW FIRMS REACH OUT TO GLBT ATTORNEYS

(reprinted with permission Diversity Inc., July 25, 2006)

As part of a broad push from corporate America to diversify the profession, law firms are stepping up outreach to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) attorneys, a group the Minority Corporate Counsel Association (MCCA) dubs "the invisible bar."

Among the 20 law firms with the highest percentage of openly gay and lesbian attorneys in 2005, these lawyers averaged just 3.2 percent of firm staff, according to The National Law Journal's (NLJ) annual survey of the nation's 250 largest law firms.

Only five of the nation's 20 largest firms reported numbers of openly gay and lesbian attorneys. Within those firms, only 1.8 percent of lawyers were openly gay or lesbian.

A limited talent pool is another incentive to make the historically conservative profession more inclusive. Law-school enrollment dropped 4.6 percent from 2004 to 2005, according to the Law School Admission Council (LSAC).

But diversifying ranks with GLBT attorneys can be difficult because it is not always evident who considers themselves part of this community. Current litigation over marriage and adoption rights for same-sex couples may deter many GLBTs from divulging their orientation, particularly in the legal profession.

"If you're a junior associate and you work with people who aren't comfortable with your sexual orientation, none of the other stuff carries the day," Scott Eckas, a partner in the New York office of King & Spalding, told the NLJ. Eckas is the GLBT representative on the Atlanta-based firm's diversity committee.

Law firms can apply many of the practices they use to recruit attorneys of color to attract GLBTs. "As a Latino and an openly gay lawyer, I can tell you that there is tremendous overlap between how one feels as a person of color and how one feels as an openly gay lawyer," Tony Varona, former general counsel and legal director of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and former attorney with Mintz Levin, told the MCCA. "It's the old adage: no one can be free if anyone is held back."

But there are other factors to consider as well.

A lot of people have had bad experiences on a personal or family level and don't want to take the risk on the professional level," Patrick McGlone, co-chair of the Committee on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in the American Bar Association's section on Individual Rights and Responsibilities, told the MCCA. "You go into a workplace not knowing the religious or moral outlook of your coworkers. There's a real fear of not being measured on your merits."

Traditionally perceived as an exclusive workplace culture, the legal profession will have to do more than avow a desire to include gay and lesbian attorneys in order to retain them, according to an article in the NLJ.

Providing domestic-partner benefits and parental leave to GLBT attorneys and including sexual-orientation in nondiscrimination policies are two concrete ways to demonstrate commitment to inclusion. And firms' concerns about how such policies will impact client perception are losing validity.

In its annual study, "The State of the Workplace for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) Americans," HRC reported that 86 percent of Fortune 500 companies include sexual orientation in their nondiscrimination policies, and 81 percent provide gender-identity coverage, which marks a 10-fold increase in five years.

Cultivating a workplace in which GLBT attorneys feel comfortable is critical for recruitment and retention efforts. But law firms that demonstrate such a commitment relative to other traditionally underrepresented groups have an edge. Even when deciding which law school to attend, GLBT students gravitate toward campuses that are diverse, GLBT-friendly and women-friendly, according to an LSAC survey on how GLBTs perceive the law school climate. And the benefits of inclusion transcend this population. An MCCA report on the subject cites research by Carnegie Mellon University economist Richard Florida, who found that promotion of tolerance and diversity enhances knowledge-based economies.

Leadership commitment, advancement opportunities, mentoring programs, meaningful work and cultural sensitivity are part and parcel of this effort. Establishing relationships with GLBT groups such as the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund facilitates networking with this population and can assist firms in diversifying staff and expanding clientele. The National Lesbian and Gay Law Association, an official affiliate of the American Bar Association since 1992, is another avenue for such connection. Increasingly, inclusion of GLBT attorneys is imperative to sustain firms' vitality in today's multicultural market economy.

"Gay associates and partners can build relationships with gay general counsel and gay leaders in industry," Varona told the MCCA. "If I were heading up a firm in this very diverse age of ours, I would feel the need to have the most diverse lawyer base possible so we would have connections to every sector of society."

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MEET BFLAG'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS PART 1

Leah Gardner

My name may be unfamiliar to many members at this point, so I'll say greetings to all of you who have no clue who I am and reintroduce myself to those who remember me as Vice President of BFLAG during the early days of this affiliate. I stepped away from this board for a few years to concentrate on some local projects and organizations in the Bay area, but I am back with new energy and the prospect of seeing BFLAG continue to flourish over the next year and beyond. I've observed tremendous growth in the years I have not been active on the board, and I am glad to participate again in what I believe will be a year full of accomplishments.

Things I strive for: A. I'd like to expand our membership and promote diversity among us. I want to reach out to the female members of this affiliate

over the upcoming months and see how BFLAG can serve you better. We haven't seen your presence demonstrated at the past few national conventions, so think about what you would like to see BFLAG do for you and what you can do for BFLAG in the near future to make this a more inclusive organization. And I'll be in contact with you terrific guys as well to see how we can serve you better as members. Also, be thinking of friends and acquaintances who would add to the strength and vitality of this organization. Our power is in maintaining a solid membership base of people who bring new ideas and creative energy to BFLAG, so I dare all of you to reach out and ask at least one person you know to join us.

Also, my hope is to see our website more developed over the next year with audio from past conventions available and some other surprises. So, keep visiting <http://www.bflag.org> and telling your friends about us.

ROB HILL

Here's a short note to introduce myself. I live alone in Tulsa, a city of about 400,000 in northeastern Oklahoma. I work for a social service agency that receives phone calls from those who have basic needs such as food, shelter, utility bill payments, medical care and on and on. Some callers are emotionally distressed and some are suicidal, to whom we respond with careful listening and other intervention. I enjoy choral singing of classical music and I'm a member of a community-based choral group. Oh yes, I'm in the church choir too.

I guess I'll continue to be a cane-user, at least until there's a dog guide that doesn't require food, water, exercise, training and "parking." Probably be a long wait! (Guess I don't like responsibility.)

I have an interest in advocacy for human rights. I'm a member of Soulforce that works against what we call "spiritual violence" against GLBT persons. I've been on the board of our local GLBT organization and I've done some work in advocacy for public transit for disabled persons. I guess my most interesting move in advocacy was organizing BFLAG.

Scott Marshal

Scott is a 50's something, boring lawyer and bureaucrat who resides in Silver Spring, MD just outside of Washington, DC. Early on in my career, I was an ACB staff person and also took a couple of spins in the barrel as ACB's constitution and by-laws chairman. For the most part, I've stayed clear of ACB politics thankfully, and am perfectly happy as a C-span junkie, recovering QVC addict, and constant newspaper reader and listener to Air America radio. I'm also painfully single--hey does this newsletter take personal ads (thank God you can't see my picture)?

I'm a 2006 B,F,L,A,G board member, and I'm looking forward to driving Butch crazy since I'm horrible about following directions., but I do look forward to your emails about how our organization can become even better. And finally, is it really true that Butch is into S&M? He's really a hard task master, you know!

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

I had an opportunity to attend BFLAG's business meeting, held in Jacksonville during the ACB convention.

As a member of the organization, I was asked to vote on matters having to do with the organization's direction. As a result of not having any background information of the issues discussed, I felt ill-equipped to Cast an informed vote.

So that members can better understand the issues facing BFLAG, as well as providing members a real opportunity to actively participate in the organization, I respectfully request that the minutes from the BFLAG's monthly board meetings be made readily available to the entire membership.

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This newsletter welcomes advertisements from businesses, organizations, educational programs, as well as for products, and services.

BFLAG's Board of Directors retains sole discretion to reject ads, which are considered to be offensive or inappropriate for the intended audience of the newsletter.

For more information, contact Don Brown, Editor at, dlb723@comcast.net

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For advertising information and pricing contact BFLAG@BFLAG.org

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