



## Blind LGBT Pride The “Inside Out” Newsletter

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The Newsletter of Blind LGBT Pride International is published in March, June, September, and December. Material to be published of interest to the membership is welcome. All material for inclusion must be received prior to the first of the month of publication. Items for publication should be sent to: Connie Torrisi, [LavenderQ@comcast.net](mailto:LavenderQ@comcast.net)

Blind Pride is a Special Interest affiliate of 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.blind-lgbt-pride.org](http://www.blind-lgbt-pride.org)

### EDITOR'S NOTE:

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## **## From The Presidents Desk**

**By Don Brown**

As I sit writing this column on the eastern coast of the San Francisco bay in early March, between a series of violent and seemingly endless rain and wind storms, I'm mildly comforted by the fact that Spring is nearly in our grasp. I completely understand for those of you in the snow hit parts of the country, that the proximity of Spring hardly seems near. Henry Van Dyke once reminded us, "The first day of spring is one thing, and the first spring day is another. The difference between them is sometimes as great as a month." In any event, I predict that warm sunshine and an opportunity to participate in nature's rebirth is in your not too distant future.

I'm sure by now most of you know that Blind LGBT Pride International will hold its 10<sup>th</sup> annual convention in conjunction with the American Council of the Blind's 49<sup>th</sup> annual conference and Convention on July 9<sup>th</sup> through the 17<sup>th</sup> at the Downtown Sheraton Hotel in Phoenix Arizona. You can read more specifics about Blind Pride's convention plans in the pages of this newsletter and at [www.blind-lgbt-pride.org](http://www.blind-lgbt-pride.org).

In addition to the many informational workshops, social and networking opportunities, and tours and events, this organization will hold its annual membership/business meeting, during which elections for seats on Blind Pride's Board of Directors will be held (see the Nominating Committee report in this newsletter for board seats to be filled. )

Between now and the July elections, I will repeatedly and strongly encourage anyone, who is interested in being on a team, which will lead this organization into its second decade, to run for one of the open board seats.

I have decided to not seek a second term as President. My decision to not run again is based on having achieved the goals I set out to accomplish as President coupled with my belief that this organization has a wealth of members with the leadership skills necessary to take Blind Pride to its next level.

As President I set out to accomplish the following:

#### **MAKE ALL MEETINGS AND MEETING MINUTES AVAILABLE TO MEMBERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC**

For the past year, all monthly board meetings are now open to members and the general public. Additionally, all board minutes are posted on Blind Pride's "announce" list serve.

#### **REDUCE CONVENTION COSTS**

I was concerned that the costs associated with attending a Blind Pride convention have frankly become far too expensive. I pledged to work with the board to plan conventions more aligned with our members' ability to pay. The costs for our convention in Orlando were significantly less than the proceeding one in Minneapolis. I am please to report that this year's convention will cost members even less, hopefully resulting in more of you choosing to attend.

#### **MODIFICATION OF BLIND PRIDE'S TAX REPORTING STATUS**

Our many interactions with the IRS have resulted in Blind Pride's tax status being modified from a "Private Foundation" to a "Public Charity". As a result, we are no longer required to annually submit a voluminous tax return requiring the costly services of an attorney or a certified public accountant. As a "public Charity" we are only require to submit a simplified on-line postcard. Our having taken this action will save this organization a significant amount of money and effort moving forward.

#### **ACCESS THROUGH INFORMATION PROGRAM**

In January of this year, Blind Pride launched its Access through Information Program. This is an effort on Blind Pride's part to work with businesses and LGBT Community Centers across the country to assist them with ensuring their programs and services are accessible to and usable by individuals who are blind and vision impaired specifically and people with other disabilities in general. Blind Pride has produced a toolbox of resources LGBT Centers and businesses can use for program accessibility evaluation, staff training and web site design. Materials can be downloaded from our home page at no cost.

Blind Pride provides businesses and centers assistance with the review of their materials and web sites for accessibility and assists them with offering their information in alternate formats, as core services.

Here are a couple of reactions following the program's launch.

“This is a wonderful resource. Great work!!!!”

*Terry Stone, Director*

“This is an incredible resource, and I will be sure to get it out to the Centers!”

*Guido A. Sanchez, MPH*

By providing these services to the larger LGBT community of centers and businesses, we are seen as an organization providing a unique set of needed awareness and access services, while at the same time taking an active role in enhancing the availability and accessibility of information and services to our members and potential members across the country.

I was able to achieve my goals for this organization by having the support of board members who have consistently demonstrated their dedication to Blind Pride's continued growth.

In other news: Our newsletter has a new Editor. After five years, I have handed off the editor's pen to Connie Torrisi. This is Connie's very first edition. It goes without saying that your articles, suggestions and ideas for InsideOut are always welcomed by the editor. Connie's contact information can be found below. This newsletter will now be published quarterly. Look for your InsideOut every March, June, September, and December.

In closing, I hope you enjoy this edition of InsideOut

## **## Convention/Conference 2010 in Phoenix**

The Downtown Phoenix Sheraton Hotel will be the place to be during July 9th through the 17th 2010. In conjunction with the American Council of the Blind's 49th annual conference and Convention, Blind LGBT Pride International will celebrate its tenth year as an ACB Special Interest Affiliate.

Our Convention Coordinating Committee are at the initial planning stages and are interested in your suggestions for workshops, social events and side trips.

You can help with the planning by becoming a member of the Convention Coordinating Committee and /or by forwarding your interest in joining the committee and any suggestions to [convention@blind-lgbt-pride.org](mailto:convention@blind-lgbt-pride.org)

MAKE YOUR RESERVATIONS NOW!

The home for Blind-LGBT-Pride International from July 9th through the 17th is the Phoenix Downtown Sheraton. Room rates are \$89 plus tax. Make reservations by calling 1-800-325-3535. Be sure to say you are with the American Council of the Blind.

## **## Board of Directors Positions Open**

Attention All Blind LGBT Pride Members:

At this year's convention in Phoenix, we will be electing new officers. The positions up for election are: President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and one Board Member at Large. The president and treasurer and Board Member-at-Large will be elected for a 2-year term. The Vice President and Secretary will, just this one time, be elected for a 1-year term. The reason for this is to insure an easy transition between administrations. This system was in place until recently when for one reason or another, positions were vacated mid term and had to be reassigned.

The executive office and the board meet once a month via teleconference. Duties such as Fund-raising, Outreach, Marketing, etc. are distributed and handled by appointed individual board members.

If you would like to be considered for any of these positions please provide your name, phone number, email address, state where you reside, position you would like to be nominated for and why you would like to be considered for the position (include any previous experience). Your bio will appear in InsideOut and on our web site. The nominating committee will review the nominees and make its recommendation to the board.

Please note that Nominations will close on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010. We are looking forward to hearing from anyone who wishes to be considered by the nominating committee for any of the afore mentioned positions. Women are especially encouraged to apply. Please contact us by email at [membership@blind-LGBT-pride.org](mailto:membership@blind-LGBT-pride.org) and put Blind Pride Nominations in the subject line, or alternately, by phone at 918-743-5032.

We ask that you please share this announcement with Blind LGBT Pride members who do not have email. This is an excellent opportunity to get involved and help shape the future of Blind LGBT Pride.

Respectfully,  
George Ashiotis  
Rob Hill  
Connie Torrisi  
the Nominating Committee

## **## Celebrity Spotlight**

Recently out actress Meredith Baxter is preparing her story of three unsuccessful marriages and years of lesbian rumors for publication, the *New York Post* reported Dec. 3<sup>rd</sup>.

The "Family Ties" star revealed her sexual orientation during a Dec. 2 interview with Matt Lauer on the "Today Show."

Baxter opened up further during a Dec. 2 interview with *People* magazine, saying, "I feel like I'm being honest for the first time." Baxter said that she's been dating women for the past seven years.

Since Baxter went public with her sexuality (and her relationship with longtime girlfriend Nancy Locke, a building contractor), she's received outpourings of support from Hollywood actors and gay icons -- not to mention her five children.

"I just couldn't stop smiling," Baxter's son Peter, 25, told *People*, "because she finally figured it out."

"She's one of my favorite people in the world, and I'm just thrilled that it's no longer a secret, and that's about the size of it," actor Michael Gross, who played Baxter's husband on "Ties," told *People*.

Out entertainer Rosie O'Donnell has also applauded Baxter's decision to come out as a lesbian. "I called her up and told her she was fantastic and congratulations and she did really well and that I was proud of her," O'Donnell told *OK! Magazine*.

## **## All Roads Lead to Phoenix**

ALL ROADS LEAD TO PHOENIX IN JULY 2010

Blind Pride's convention coordinating committee is busily making plans for our 10<sup>th</sup> year anniversary celebration to be held during the 49<sup>th</sup> annual conference and convention of the American Council of the Blind.

The dates are July 9<sup>th</sup> thru the 17<sup>th</sup>. The place is the Downtown Sheraton Hotel in Phoenix Arizona. Rates are \$89 per night, single/double, plus tax. Make reservations by calling 1-800-325-3535, and be sure to tell them you are with the American Council of the Blind.

Stay connected to [www.blind-lgbt-pride.org](http://www.blind-lgbt-pride.org) for the latest convention 2010 information. Meanwhile, here are some fun facts about Phoenix.

According to legend, Phoenix gets its name from Cambridge-educated pioneer Darrell Duppa, who saw the ruins and prehistoric canals of the Hohokam Indians. Duppa believed a new civilization would rise from the ashes.

Phoenix is the United States' fifth-largest city with a population of nearly 1.5 million. Greater Phoenix (which includes, among others, the cities of Chandler, Glendale, Scottsdale and Tempe) has a population of nearly 3.8 million and covers 2,000 square miles. Maricopa County—where Greater Phoenix is located—covers 9,127 square miles. Phoenix's elevation is 1,117 feet.

Greater Phoenix is located in the heart of the Sonoran Desert, which is widely considered the most ecologically diverse desert in the world.

Phoenix averages more than 310 sunny days per year.

Phoenix has an average annual rainfall of 7.66 inches, an average annual temperature of 72.6 degrees and an annual high temperature of 85 degrees.

Greater Phoenix is home to more than 200 golf courses.

13-15 million people visit Phoenix each year. More than 30 million people visit Arizona each year.

Sky Harbor serves more than 42 million passengers a year, ranking it among the 10 busiest airports in the nation.

Phoenix is one of only 13 U.S. cities with franchises in all four major professional sports leagues: Phoenix Suns (NBA), Arizona Diamondbacks (MLB), Arizona Cardinals (NFL) and Phoenix Coyotes (NHL).

University of Phoenix Stadium, home of the NFL's Arizona Cardinals and the site of Super Bowl XLII, is the only stadium in North America with both a retractable fabric roof and a roll-out grass field.

The FBR Open, played each February at the TPC Scottsdale, is the best-attended event on the PGA Tour, averaging more than 500,000 spectators.

Greater Phoenix is home to college football's Tostitos Fiesta Bowl and Insight Bowl. The inaugural BCS National Championship was played at University of Phoenix Stadium in 2007.

Greater Phoenix's major industries are (1) high-tech manufacturing, (2) tourism and (3) construction. Phoenix is home to the largest municipal park in the world. South Mountain Park and Preserve covers more than 16,500 acres and has more than 50 miles of hiking, biking and equestrian trails.

There are six lakes within a 75-minute drive of Phoenix.

Arizona is home to 23 reservations representing 22 different Native American tribes

## **## Don't Ask, Don't Tell**

SANTA BARBARA, CA, February 1, 2010 – The Palm Center has announced that President Obama's executive changes to the "don't ask, don't tell" policy, expected to be announced Tuesday, could significantly impact the lives of gay troops. The expected statements from

Defense Secretary Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen would protect some service members from investigations based on third-party allegations and set a new standard for what constitutes reliable sources and credible information that trigger a “don’t ask, don’t tell” investigation. It is also expected that the military brass will announce changes to the adjudication of potential discharges, whose effect could be to require a flag officer to sign off on any discharge for it to move forward.

“This ‘Obama Rule’ could provide a new standard for ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ investigations,” said Dr. Aaron Belkin, Director of the Palm Center. “Depending on how it’s implemented, the executive action taken by the President could be seismic. ‘Don’t ask, don’t tell’ has rested on the belief that the presence of openly gay service members is always bad for the military. The new Obama Rule would mean a shift in the military’s focus toward keeping gay troops, reflecting the military’s belief that they are as essential as their heterosexual peers.”

Belkin also said the effectiveness of the changes would depend on what message was sent by top civilian and uniformed leaders to the officers responsible for approving discharges. “If new discretion is being granted to two-stars, then the actual impact of the Obama rule will hinge on whether the President, the Defense Secretary, and the Service Chiefs send a clear signal that discharges are to be minimized,” Belkin said.

Recent media reports have suggested the Pentagon leadership may promote a lengthy process of implementation that would unfold over several years, a prospect that Palm Center experts found problematic. Dr. Nathaniel Frank, Senior Research Fellow at the Palm Center and author of “Unfriendly Fire: How the Gay Ban Undermines the Military and Weakens America,” said the impact of the expected announcement would depend on an operational timeline that emphasizes strong leadership and swift implementation.

“The evidence is overwhelming that a quick turnaround on policy change minimizes disruptions to unit cohesion and morale,” he said. “If this is the goal, there should be no slow-rolling of the implementation process.” Frank pointed to the 1993 Rand Corporation report on implementing gay service that stated that openly gay service was entirely workable, but that a successful new policy must be “decided upon and implemented as quickly as possible” to avoid anxiety and uncertainty in the field. It said it was crucial “to convey a new policy that ends discrimination as simply as possible and to impose the minimum of changes on personnel.” Rand then outlined a Standard of Professional Conduct to guide interpersonal behavior that emphasized a uniform code of behavior for all service members.

“I’m encouraged by the apparent movement on this issue by the President and the military,” Frank said. “I’m also hoping they’ve reviewed the research on implementation and will create a plan that reflects the President’s commitment to ending this policy in 2010.”

In 1995, President Clinton lifted a ban at the CIA, which reversed an Eisenhower policy denying security clearances to gay agents. In 1992, a court ruling in Canada allowed gays to serve openly in the military nearly immediately. And in 1999, a court ruling forced the British military to allow openly gay troops within months. That transition, according to Frank, was implemented quickly and decisively, which is consistent with what is suggested by implementation research. “The CIA and foreign militaries provide successful models for implementing a new policy to allow openly gay service,” said Frank. “Each of them provided clear conduct rules, strong leadership and change on a short, definite timeline.” A 1993 General Accounting Office (GAO) report on the “Policies and Practices of Foreign Militaries” concluded that the smooth transition was attributed “to the military leadership’s support of the new policy and the military’s ability to keep a low profile on the issue.”



Christopher Neff, Deputy Executive Director at the Palm Center, noted the distinction between the military's policy on openly gay service and the Congressional law, which remains unchanged. "The statute, 10 U.S.C. 654, remains on the books and Congress is responsible for changes to the law," Neff stated. He advised service members to consult with Service members Legal Defense Network with any questions they may have about how changes to the policy might affect them.

NOTE: The Palm Center is a think tank at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Since 1998, the Center has been a leader in commissioning and disseminating research in the areas of gender, sexuality, and the military. For more information visit [www.palmcenter.ucsb.edu](http://www.palmcenter.ucsb.edu).

### **## Editor's Trivia Box**

The longest known lesbian relationship in the U.S. was that of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, who met in 1950 and became a couple. Together, they founded the Daughters of Bilitis, the first lesbian social group in America. They were legally married in San Francisco in June, 2008. At the time of Del's death in August, 2008, the couple had been together 55 years.

### **## ASK DOT**

I read in People magazine that Chastity Bono had come out as a lesbian but is now Chad, having transgendered to a man. Is this because it's better to be seen as transgendered than homosexual? (Submitted by barbieann519)

Dear barbieann519,

Being different in our society is never easy. Fear of the unknown, misunderstanding, religious doctrine, political disenfranchisement, family and social pressure all contribute to the complexity of being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered in our society. Resistance toward diversity is still quite strong in this country. Human beings tend to prefer that everyone fit within the established norms. Gays, lesbians, bisexual and transgendered people do not meet that expectation. However, it has been said that being bisexual is the next best thing to being straight because bisexuals meet the expectations of society at least some of the time.

Chad Bono reports that he has always felt he was in the wrong body. He is not going through the transgender process just because it is "better" to be transgendered than

homosexual. He is going through the process because he has realized and accepted that his true physical and psychological self is male.

In Shakespeare's play, Hamlet, the character Polonius gave this advice: "To thine own self be true." That advice still holds great value today.

## **## Rooming in Phoenix**

Hey Everybody!

As you all know, Blind LGBT Pride is celebrating its Tenth Anniversary this July in Phoenix, and we are aiming to attract as many members there as we can. Among the inducements we're offering is a Room-mate service for attendees. We know that there are members out there who would be more likely to come if they could share the expenses of a hotel room.

Blind LGBT Pride is providing a room-mate switchboard service. You let us know you're looking to share a room and we'll connect you with others who are looking to do the same. You can send a message to [membership@blind-LGBT-pride.org](mailto:membership@blind-LGBT-pride.org) and include how many days you require a room and your arrival and departure days. As requests for this services are accumulated, they will be shared by all interested parties, and it will be left up to each of you to make specific and final arrangements with a potential room-mate and the hotel. Or, if you prefer, you can post your own notice using our email list - [blindlgbtpride@acb.org](mailto:blindlgbtpride@acb.org)

As always, your suggestions, comments and feedback are both welcome and appreciated.

Help make our Tenth Anniversary the best attended convention ever. Let us gather in Phoenix and make some joyous noise

George Ashiotis  
Membership Chair  
Blind LGBT Pride International

## **## Gay Life Around the World**

China is the fourth largest country in the world with a population of 1.3 billion. There are an estimated 30 million gays and lesbians living in China.

Few 'comrades' or 'tongzhi'—slang for homosexual—live openly due to social/cultural pressures and lack of awareness.

"On the mainland, being homosexual is still very hard," one man told *China Daily*. "Under pressure from families and society, most homosexual people dare not reveal their sexual orientation and have to get married to someone of the opposite sex."

However, the producers of the new Internet TV show, "[Tongxing Xianglian](#)," or "Connecting Homosexuals," hope to change public perception of Chinese gays, according to an AP report. The show describes itself as the country's first show to focus on gay issues with the nation's first openly gay host, Didier Zheng.

The formal Chinese word for homosexual is 'tongxinglian.'

### **Gay Rights in China:**

The Chinese government's attitude and treatment of gays has steadily increased since the persecution of gays during the Cultural Revolution. [Sodomy](#) was decriminalized in 1997 and the Chinese Psychiatric Association stopped listing homosexuality as a mental illness in 2001.

### **Government Support for Gays:**

In response to record new [HIV infections in China](#), the government has launched several support and awareness campaigns. In May of 2006, a national hotline was launched in both Guangzhou and Shanghai and the "Forum for Comrades" was launched in August 2006 with little success. All media outlets are heavily censored by the Chinese government, which may contribute to the low number of citizens taking advantage of these national services.

### **Gay Marriage in China:**

Previous proposals to legalize gay unions have been unsuccessfully submitted to the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), China's political advisory board. This implies that same-sex marriage is not legal in China. However, unlike gay adoption, the Chinese government does not explicitly state whether same-sex marriage is legal or not.

## **## Special Airfare Discounts for Convention**

Special Airfare Discount for the ACB Conference & Convention is available.

Don Wilson, Secretary of Blind LGBT Pride, has secured a special discount on airfare with AirTran Airways. Don has been an employee with AirTran Airways for over three years and was able to work with his manager to receive a special twenty percent discount off the lowest available airfare on AirTran Airways flights to the ACB Conference & Convention. This special twenty percent discount starts July 6th, three days before the event begins and ends July 20th, three days after the event is finished. This special twenty percent discount is through the AirTran Airways Event Saver program. To receive the special twenty percent discount reservations must be made through the AirTran Airways Event Savers desk. To make reservations or find out more information about the special discount call the AirTran Airways Event Savers desk at 1-866-683-8368 Monday - Friday 08:00am - 9:00pm. When calling, provide the event code of PHX070910 and the event name of ACB 49th Annual Conference & Convention.

## **## In Review**

**Holy Terror: Lies the Christian Right Tells Us to Deny Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Equality**

A new book by Reverend Mel White

Publication Date: April, 2010

The best-selling author of *Stranger at the Gate* and former fundamentalist who ghost-wrote books for Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and Billy Graham, the Reverend Mel White provides an insider's exposé of the Christian Right's agenda—and a clarion call to resist it.

A deeply religious man who sees fundamentalism as “evangelical Christian orthodoxy gone cultic,” Mel White believes that it is not a stretch to say that the true goals of today's fundamentalists are to break down the wall that separates church and state, superimpose their “moral values” on the US Constitution, replace democracy with theocratic rule, and ultimately create a new “Christian America” in their image. As he writes, “These are not just Neocons dressed in religious drag. These men see themselves as gurus called by God to rescue America from unrighteousness. They believe this is a Christian nation that must be returned forcibly to its Christian roots.”

White is also a gay man who made news when he came out more than fourteen years ago. He has gained a unique understanding of the fundamentalist agenda because, since the fall of “godless Communism,” homosexuality and abortion have become the primary targets through which fundamentalists have created fear, raised money, and mobilized recruits. Originally published in hardcover three years ago under the title *Religion Gone Bad*, *Holy Terror* documents the thirty-year war that fundamentalist Christians have waged against gays and lesbians and offers dramatic, heartbreaking evidence that fundamentalist leaders are waging nothing less than a “holy war” against sexual minorities.

**Reader's Note:** Mel White is the president and co-founder of Soulforce, an organization committed to ending religious-based bigotry against gay men and lesbians in America. He is the recipient of the ACLU's National Civil Liberties Award. He lives in Lynchburg, Virginia.

## **## Around the World in Brief**

**Time** - USA:

[In France Trans-sexuals Celebrate a Small Victory](#) By Gaëlle Faure in Paris. Several decades have passed since the West stopped considering homosexuality a mental illness. But for transsexuals, that kind of milestone has been elusive — until now. Last month, France became the first country in the world to remove transsexualism from its official list of mental disorders — a major victory when it comes to acceptance of this oft misunderstood condition.

### **##A Call for Submissions**

We are always looking for articles of interest to our LGBT community. If you find articles that you think might be of interest, please forward them to the newsletter editor. Please include the source of each article you forward. Or, you may write an article and submit it for consideration. Please limit articles to 500 words maximum. Send articles to [LavenderQ@comcast.net](mailto:LavenderQ@comcast.net).

### **## Board of Directors**

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

Blind Pride’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.

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