

THE TEXAS TRIANGLE

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Your Gay News Source

January 30, 1997

**OUT
IN** Houston

The **Human Rights Campaign Valentine's Ball** is scheduled for Friday, February 14, from 8 p.m. to midnight. This not-to-be-missed **Red Tie Ball** will be held at the Paraiso Maravilla, 5714 Fairdale Lane. Tickets are \$100, which is about half the going rate for events of this magnitude; contact **Harold Shultz** at 713/216-6740...

The **Corporation Network Group** is dedicated to helping Houston-based corporations establish or develop their non-discrimination policies and to "promote equality in corporate business America regardless of sexual orientation, gender identification, race, or religion." Those interested in helping, either as an individual or as a representative of their business, may join them at their monthly meeting, scheduled for Saturday, February 8. For further details and location of the meeting, please call **Kerry Gosler** at 281/496-0210...

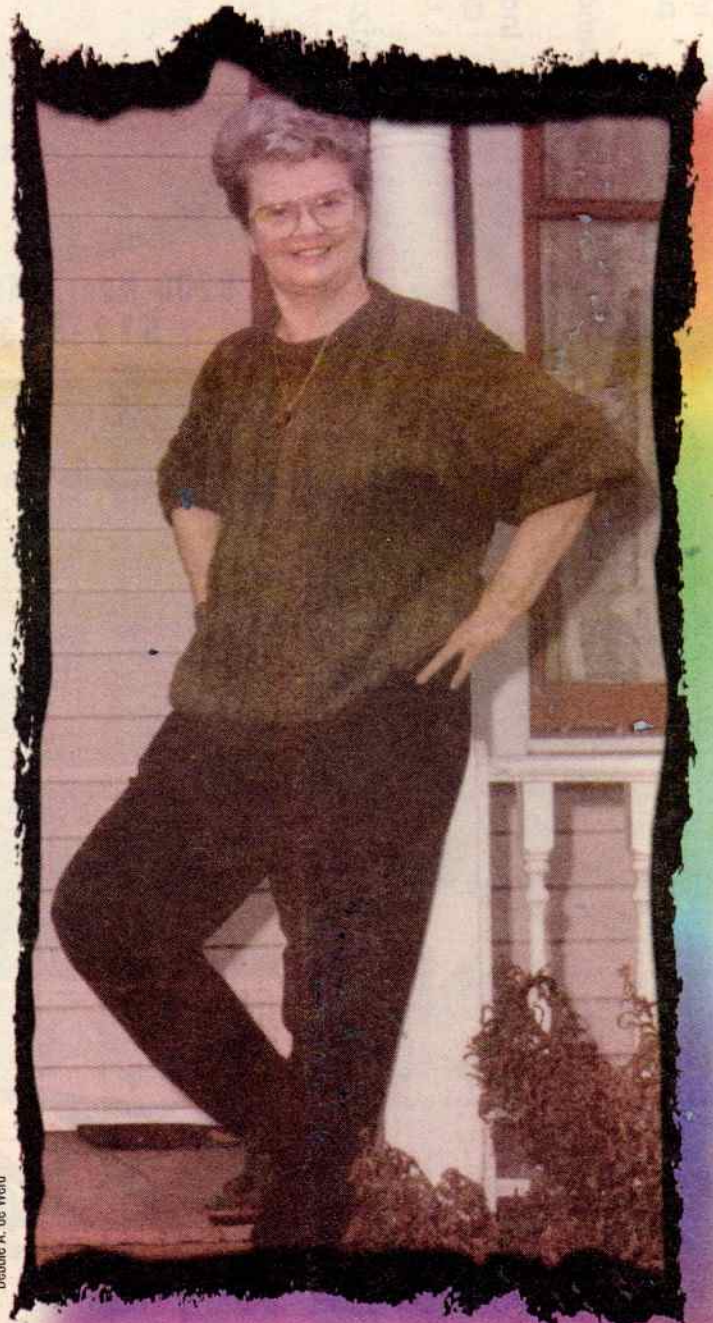
If you thought **Super Bowl XXXI** was exciting, you haven't seen anything yet. The **Houston Women's Flag Football League** will be holding its semi-finals and championship Saturday, February 1, at 9:00 a.m. at the **Wilson Elementary School** grounds on Fairview between Mandell and Yupon. With eight teams vying for the top spot, this is one local sports event you won't want to miss...

We owe an apology to **Carolyn Roberts**. In last week's issue, we stated she had "flown the coop" from the **Houston Voice**. In truth, **Roberts** is no longer working in **Voice** offices, but she will continue to write her column as a paid staff member. I suspect we'll get a little roasting from her "Rodent Droppings" column about that in this week's issue... —Tristan MacAvery

Pat Gandy: Standing Strong for Gay Rights

*"Leadership is
doing the right thing
at the right time,
without regard
to the nit-picking
of political
pygmies."*

—Pat Gandy
page 8



Debbie A. de Werd

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Houston's Pat Gandy:

An Outspoken Leader in the Fight for Gay Rights

By **Tristan MacAvery**
TRIANGLE Staff

HOUSTON—at Gandy has been so intimately involved with gay politics in the last decade that some people think she invented it. Recent past president of the Houston Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus (HGLPC), Gandy has been a Democratic precinct chair, a state Democratic executive committeewoman, a spokesperson, a media maven and a leader—a position that has sometimes gotten her in trouble.

"Leadership is doing the right thing at the right time, without regard to the nit-picking of political pygmies," she says—with all the deceptive calm of the

eye of a hurricane. "I took some criticism when I got out in front, early last spring, for President Clinton as the person that the gay community should support. I went to the media and to the community with that message. The pygmy population picked their nits, saying that I should be more neutral."

Gandy, wearing an expression of exasperation that defies description, shifts from calm to Storm Force 10. "How in hell can I be neutral in promoting gay and lesbian rights?" she demands. "And how in hell was I supposed to be 'balanced' in a decision between Clinton and Dole? It seemed that people felt Clinton had shafted us, because he didn't give us every single thing he promised, so we're supposed to stomp on him, to throw the baby out with the bath. That is political stupidity, pure and simple."

Gandy, known by many as a colorful and outspoken leader in the gay and lesbian community, is no stranger to politics, nor to the effects of stupidity on politics and on people. Her most devastating brush with

the latter came in 1947, when she first went off to college. "I knew I was homosexual even then," Gandy recalls. "But I lived in my head. Unlike some people, who let their experiences tell them about life, I went to the library and read up on homosexuality. I learned that homosexuals were perverts, that they were sick, and I said, 'Oh, God, not me! I'm normal!'"

It's funny now, but it took long years to get over that shock. "I remember a friend of my mother's had referred to me at one time as a 'typical all-American girl.' Little did they know that this compliment was being bestowed upon a raging lesbian."

"I've lived in the Houston area since 1951, and before I came out in 1986, I lived with a man, trying to be a good heterosexual, like society told me to be," says Gandy, smiling with deep affection. "He liked all the things that I liked—politics, traveling—and he was very supportive of me. I've wondered if he weren't a repressed queer, too; he was really too nice to be a totally straight man!"

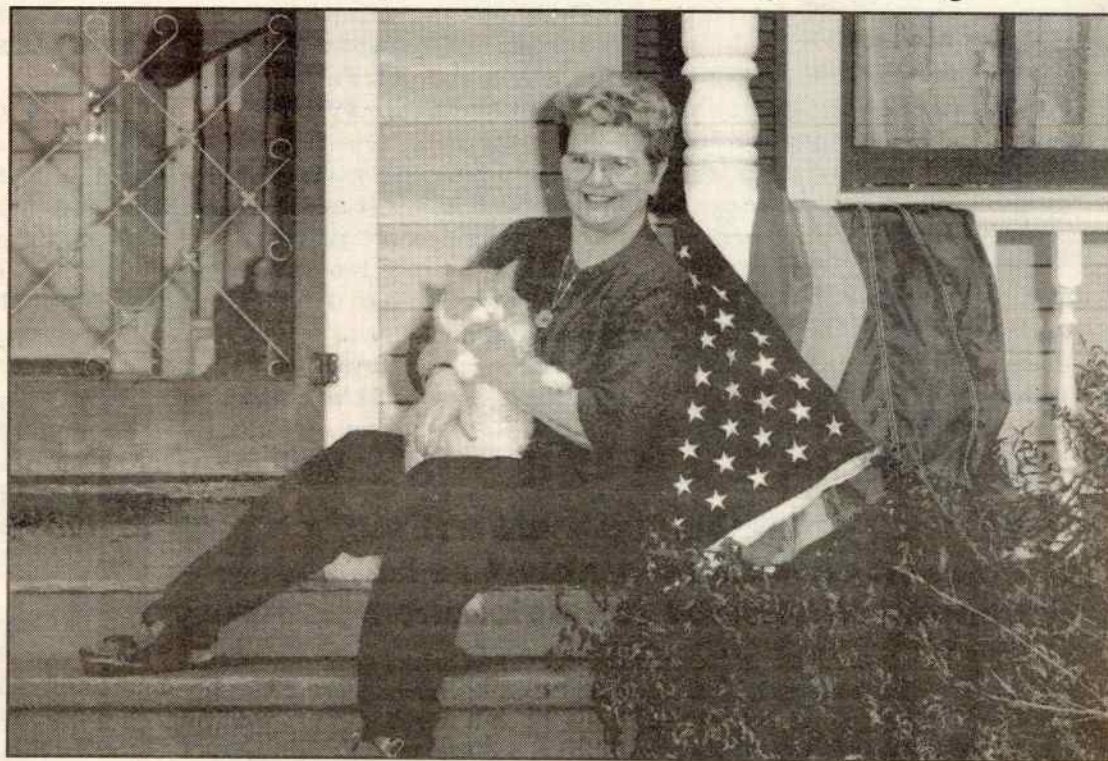
Gandy met Eleanor Hanley, her partner, over a decade ago, and she decided it was time to come out at the age of 55. "My husband never wanted a divorce, and since the laws of the state of Texas don't allow gays and lesbians to sanctify our relationships in any meaningful manner, we all agreed that I would remain married to him. He died in

September of 1995, and as he had wished, I became the primary benefactor of his estate. I could retire—which I did forthwith—and devote full time to politics."

The comment is often made that "to be homosexual is to be political." Gandy is certainly both, and she was political long before she came out. "I recently found my very first poll-tax exemption certificate, dated 1952. When you voted for the first time, you didn't have to pay the one-dollar poll tax. But that bit of nostalgia pointed something else out to me. The poll tax was in effect as late as the mid-to-late 60s, I believe. This archaic trick was originally created to try to prevent the poor—especially minorities—from voting, and it was still going strong at a time when, as most of us had been taught, minorities and women had the clear right to vote.

"This memory forced me to realize that things don't change rapidly. Slavery was abolished about 100 years before the first civil rights bill in 1964—and that bill was weak. Nothing is ever changed overnight, and we certainly cannot expect perfection. We may get a lot of civil rights, in the form of a hate crimes bill or ENDA (the Employment Non-discrimination Act), but that doesn't beam that we're going to be loved." (ENDA is a federal bill that would bar employment discrimination based on sexual orientation.)

Looking back across the years, Gandy is convinced that gay rights have come incredibly far. "There's a daylight



Debbie A. de Ward



Pat Gandy at home
with her partner,
Eleanor Hanley

Debbie A. de Ward

and dark difference between now and even 10 or 20 years ago. I can stand out on my front porch and kiss my lover good-bye when she leaves. My neighbors know that I'm a fairly prominent homosexual in Houston, and they're right proud of seeing me on television—Wow, that's someone from our neighborhood! It means a lot to me, to all of us, to have that feeling of acceptance."

Gandy's partner, Hanley, smiles fondly at her. "She's certainly done her share to help it along," Hanley observes wryly. Gandy has so many irons in the fire that, as Hanley says, "I'm the one who makes sure that, when she goes out the door in the morning, she actually has clothes on."

Gandy pleads "no contest." "My memory loss due to various distractions of personal and political offices is legendary. Eleanor keeps me together in a lot of ways; she's a strong right arm, a left

"A friend of my mother's had referred to me at one time as a 'typical all-American girl.' Little did they know that this compliment was being bestowed upon a raging lesbian."

arm, and the head and shoulders, too. She runs the house, gives me support, makes phone calls for me—and sees to it that I'm dressed." They share a brief kiss, proving that behind every great woman is another great woman.

Although Gandy is no longer HGLPC president, she still has her eye on the political future—both hers and that of the gay and lesbian community in general.

"The political future is an interesting

question," Gandy explains, "in that we're going to have to remember what politics is really about. The first fact is, we're a pressure group—and we should be—but as a pressure group, we have to realize that it's not a politician's job to drape the gay flag around themselves and yell 'Hooray for our side.' Their job is to represent everyone and to listen to what we say. We should influence them, push them in directions, but we can't make them into our cheerleaders. We have to be our own cheerleaders."

"The second point is that we can't be so damned impatient. It's like the Clinton/Dole question. If everything that we want implemented in law were represented by the number 100, Clinton might score in the 60s or even the low 70s, whereas Dole would be in the single digits. Take the compromise in the military situation as an example: We didn't get everything we wanted, but we got something—and what's more important, the issue of rights for and recognition of gays and lesbians was talked about all over the United States for a long time. The discussions created more awareness, more tolerance, even actual acceptance. It's two steps forward and one back, two forward and one back—that's just the name of the game."

Gandy isn't about to give up on her goals. She plans, for example, to run for Harris County Democratic party chairperson in 1998, and she will rely on her experience, political acumen and contacts in her race.

I don't intend to be a 'gay candidate,'" she says. "I intend to be an openly gay person, a lesbian, who is running for office, but the things I'm going to be saying about what I believe should be done with the job, people are going to be so interested that they're going to forget all about my being a

lesbian!"

With a full year to prepare, Gandy is already getting people together to design the campaign. "I'm going to get a campaign committee together now to start raising money. I'm going to be saying controversial things. And I'm going to win." The set of the jaw and the sharp gleam in the eye leaves no room for argument. If she had a podium, she'd pound it. ♡

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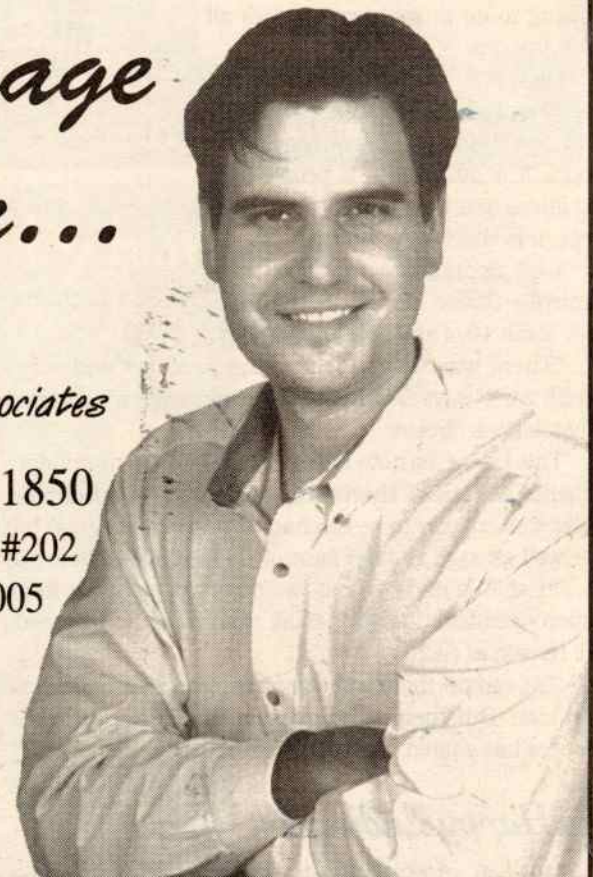
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