Fall 2006

Fusion Fall 2006

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A battle of secret sexuality in the armed forces
According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, “fusion is a merging of diverse, distinct, or separate elements into a unified whole.” The founding editors believe that the university community is composed of people with varying sexual identities who are constantly interacting in classrooms, dorms and other settings. Fusion magazine addresses sexual minority issues within the general university population.

Fusion magazine’s editors subscribe to the premises of social media and advocate content promoting social justice, democracy and a civil society. The magazine strives to unify people of different backgrounds through education and awareness.

Fusion magazine is produced by students at Kent State University twice per academic year. No part of Fusion may be reprinted without permission.
KENT STATE’S BATTLE
With the future of domestic partner benefits hanging in the balance at Kent State and the rest of Ohio, the argument has turned to issues of legality.

JUSTICE FOR ALL
The first lesbian Massachusetts state senator shares her story of coming out and the relationship between the LGBT community and political affairs.

THE PATRIOT
One Kent 19-year-old speaks out about the struggle of secret sexuality in the armed forces.

POWERFUL PROFILES
Two current professors and one former professor share their stories of being gay at Kent State University.

A NOT-SO-HAPPY BIRTHDAY
Twenty-five — that’s how old the AIDS epidemic in the United States turned this year. See how it has affected Kent and where perceptions of the disease are headed.
It was not until 1973 that the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its official list of mental disorders.

That was only 33 years ago. We’ve come a long way.

The gay rights movement has reached an all-time high, and many people, including myself, feel that more change and ultimate justice is quickly approaching.

However, overcoming the struggle for equality goes beyond statistics, dates and facts. It is the people who are working to remove these hurdles for themselves, for their counterparts and for future generations.

This issue of Fusion and our Web edition are about the pain of reaching for progress and the bliss of blowing stereotypes out of the water.

This semester we’ve used Fusion’s mission to bring messages of advocacy that reach out to Kent State lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender and allies with stories of struggle, stories of strength and stories of change.

Our cover story, The Patriot, shares a tale of heartbreak and joyful self-acceptance as one Ravenna native shares her experiences battling between loyalty to her country and loyalty to her sexuality bringing light to an often overlooked issue.

In memoriam of the 25th anniversary of AIDS, Not-so-Happy Birthday examines the changing ways the United States and Kent have provided awareness about the virus and how far we still need to go.

But beauty can always be found in collapse — especially during the siege of injustice.

We show you this with upbeat stories and portraits of prominent members of Kent State who are LGBT and through your opinions about how far the university’s diversity has come.

For a more interactive look at Fusion, visit our revamped Web site — fusion.kent.edu.

Our job is to entertain and inform. Through our print and Web editions, I hope we have brought you new information and interesting stories.

Most of all, I hope this issue of Fusion encourages you to accept happiness and speak out against discrimination.
Current reports indicate that there are more than 38 million people in the world living with HIV or AIDS. At the end of 2004, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that more than 415,000 people in the United States are living with AIDS. More than 7,000 are living in Ohio.

Since its first appearance in 1981, progressions in health care have allowed people who have HIV or AIDS to live longer, but this doesn’t lessen the seriousness of the disease.

I had the opportunity to put together a short documentary this semester on the Community AIDS Network in Akron, a non-profit organization that assists people in the area who are HIV positive. I realized I wanted to find out more about the disease when I thought about the changing perceptions. During the past decade, I felt AIDS had sort of slipped from the medical spotlight. When I brought this issue up to the workers at CAN, they agreed and said the reason for this was that AIDS is no longer the “newest” disease, and, therefore, it lost attention. As a result, people have become less frightened or even less aware of the existence of the disease.

Through working on this story, I came to know two very incredible and uplifting people. By hearing their thoughts and experiences, I was able to, though in a very small way, put a face to the disease. Too often, whether in relation to crime, drug abuse, poverty or disease, our society becomes focused more on the numbers rather than the people. Each one of those 38 million people in the world is one individual with a story to tell, and they’re just like anyone we might encounter on a day-to-day basis.

One fact I’ve remembered from my experiences working with CAN is that this disease can touch anyone — not just older members of the population or those in the gay community. While the stigma of AIDS may have changed since its first appearance more than two decades ago, the reality has remained the same — a reality that more and more people are facing with each passing day.
A Message from the President

Dear Students,

As we count down to the end of fall semester, I want to thank you for making my first months at Kent State as rewarding as I hoped they would be.

This is the first semester in 34 years that I have not taught a class. I miss that daily interaction with students. So I appreciate the time many of you have taken to send me e-mails, tell me about yourselves at campus events and share short-cuts as I learn to navigate our eight campuses. I have found what many of you told me to be true: our caring faculty and staff make the university feel smaller, warmer and more welcoming than its size and complexity might suggest.

I know that some of you do not feel that way. Maybe you are struggling academically. Or maybe you have not been able to forge the personal connections that lead to friendship, fun and finding your unique voice. If you are dissatisfied or drifting, I want you to know that there are hundreds of members of our community who want to change that. I am one.

A major focus of my administration is and will continue to be the success of all students. I have been working with many dedicated members of our faculty, staff and administration to find new ways to make student success “job one.” I believe that the coming months will bring changes that do just that.

I invite you to share your thoughts about how Kent State can make your college experience better. Please write to me any time at lefton@kent.edu.

In the meantime, I encourage you to give your best efforts to completing final projects, papers and exams. For those of you who have succeeded in completing a degree, I look forward to congratulating you at Winter Commencement.

Finally, I wish you a happy and healthy holiday season.

Sincerely,

Lester A. Lefton
President
Like what you see here? Get more Fusion at our Web site fusion.kent.edu. The magazine’s staff has worked to bring you Web exclusive stories, photos, polls, quizzes and more. This includes:

■ THE FORGOTTEN
AIDS has always been the poster child for health issues in the LGBT community, but there are other problems that have been around longer — and now they’re getting the attention they deserve.

■ HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES
Test your knowledge of American gay rights history.

■ FINDING GOD
Members of the LGBT community share their struggle of finding religion in an environment that can be hostile.

Liberation United Church of Christ
A mainline LGBT church with a special outreach to the LGBT students of Kent State University

Dr. Dolores Noll - Campus Minister
dlouisennoll@netzero.com
13714 Madison Avenue
Lakewood, Ohio 44107
216.521.5556
www.liberationucc.org

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Women’s Resource Center
Phone: (866) 339-3699 & (330) 672-9230
Web site: www.kent.edu/hr/wrc
Hours: 8am-5pm, M-F
Special events by appointment
“As a private institution, it would be so much easier for (KSU President Lester Lefton) to do whatever he wants. This is a government facility. There are tax dollars that make this place operate. They have to be very careful to operate within the laws of the state, obviously.”

ROSS MILTNER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT SENATE

“Not implementing these domestic partner benefits is excluding. People aren’t discriminated against by race, by religion. Two people of the same religion can get benefits. Two people of the same race can get benefits. But two people of the same sex can’t get benefits. It doesn’t make sense.”

AMANDA BOYD
PRIDE!KENT PRESIDENT

DISCRIMINATION

VS.

LEGALITY
KENT STATE’S BATTLE OVER DOMESTIC PARTNER BENEFITS

STORY | ERIN ROOF
PHOTO | JESSICA NAPLES
If Molly Merryman was straight, she wouldn’t have a problem. Kent State would treat her the same as everyone else. She would experience equal opportunities and would receive equal benefits.

As a lesbian, a justice studies professor and chair of the American Association of University Professors’ LGBT Faculty Concerns Committee, Merryman instead says she experiences discrimination. Unlike a growing number of universities and businesses in Ohio, Kent State refuses to offer lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender faculty and staff domestic partner benefits, hurting people like Merryman.

The face of Kent State is black, white, olive and brown. Students and faculty are Muslim. They are Jewish. They are rich. They are poor. They are heterosexual, and they are homosexual. Diversity is a hot catchphrase at Kent State, but equality is not.

Offering domestic partner benefits would allow homosexual and bisexual faculty and staff to be treated the same way as heterosexuals, Merryman says.

“(Kent State) President (Lester) Lefton comes in at an unfortunate time on this issue,” Miltner says. “His hands are largely tied. He was quoted as saying he supports partner benefits, he would like to take a proposal to the Board of Trustees, but he is waiting to see what happens with the Miami court case.”

Ross Miltner, senior communications studies major and executive director of the Undergraduate Student Senate, says he doesn’t accept that reasoning. She says because people aren’t educated about the amendment, they think Kent State’s administration is correct.

“Really, I think (the administration) thinks people are stupid,” she says. “Because Issue 1 is so vague and it doesn’t really set aside specifics for what it actually means, people are just going along with it. Other universities have found a way to get around this.”

Miltner says he understands why the administration is apprehensive.

“As a private institution, it would be so much easier for (Lefton) to do whatever he wants,” he says. “This is a government facility. There are tax dollars that make this place operate. They have to be very careful to operate within the laws of the state, obviously.”

Regardless of the reason Kent State denies domestic partner benefits. Boyd says not having the benefits is keeping many quality faculty and staff from coming to Kent State.

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“People who are interested in do-
Domestic partner benefits of any sexuality are interested in going where they can seek the most benefits,” she says. “We’re at the bottom of the food chain when it comes to people seeking careers.”

Current faculty and staff are also leaving the university because of the issue, Merryman says. “All we can estimate is faculty who are out,” she says. “That alone is frighteningly high. We have lost an average of two people per year over lack of domestic partner benefits and general climate concerns.”

Boyd says it is an issue of discrimination. “Not implementing these domestic partner benefits is excluding,” she says. “People aren’t discriminated against by race, by religion. Two people of the same religion can get benefits. Two people of the same race can get benefits. But two people of the same sex can’t get benefits. It doesn’t make sense.”

Domestic partner benefits are not just for homosexuals, Boyd says. It gets pegged as an issue affecting gays and lesbians, but the benefits also apply to heterosexual couples in committed, long-term relationships. “It’s not just a gay issue,” she says. “Domestic partner benefits include heterosexual couples who aren’t married. It’s for homosexual couples who aren’t allowed to be married. It’s not for gay people. It’s for people.”
WHAT IS A DOMESTIC PARTNER?

A domestic partner is one of two people in a long-term relationship who is responsible for the financial and emotional well being of the other individual. It is not a matter of being gay or straight. Employers are usually responsible for defining a domestic partner and who is eligible for the benefits.

WHAT ARE DOMESTIC PARTNER BENEFITS?

Domestic partner benefits are perks, such as health insurance, dental care, relocation expenses, etc., often given to employees’ legal spouses and children that are extended to employees’ unmarried domestic partners.

WHAT IS THE HISTORY BEHIND DOMESTIC PARTNER BENEFITS?

The Village Voice of New York City became the first employer to offer domestic partner benefits to its lesbian and gay employees in 1982. Ten years later, Lotus Development Corp. became the first publicly traded company to offer domestic partner benefits.

HOW MUCH WOULD IT COST A COMPANY TO PROVIDE DOMESTIC PARTNER BENEFITS?

A 1997 study by the Society for Human Resource Management reported that 85 percent of employers who provided domestic partner benefits experienced no increase in cost.

The issue risks ruining Kent State’s legacy of being a liberal institution. Miltner says traditionally conservative schools are now passing Kent State in terms of diversity and equality.

“It really is interesting to me that a school in Ohio that is seen as being a more conservative school, like Miami, offers this, but the more liberal school doesn’t,” he says. “You would think if we really fit that mold, Kent State would have been one of the first to have a go at this when a lot of other schools did.”

Miltner says he is convinced if Kent State wants to remain competitive with other universities, it must offer domestic partner benefits. The school must also catch up with the nation’s changing social standards, despite Ohio’s Issue 1.

“I think a lot of people in this day and age are open minded enough that they understand this isn’t 1960 anymore. It’s 2006,” he says. “It’s time for people to come to terms with the social situation of the country. Racism and bigotry — that might have been our parent’s world, it was certainly our grandparent’s world, but it’s not the world that you live in, like it or not.”

Earlier this semester, the Undergraduate Student Senate joined the Faculty Senate and the Graduate Student Senate in passing a resolution favoring domestic partner benefits. Miltner says there is a rift in the attitude toward the issue, with Kent State faculty, staff and students on one side and the administration on the other.

“It’s out of our hands,” he says. “The voices of the faculty and all of the students have supported this. The only people who have not supported this are the administration and they know this. The administration is on the hot seat, not us.”

Even with the support of much of Kent State’s faculty, staff and students, Miltner says the administration will likely wait until the end of the Miami court case before it hands down a decision. The wait could be years.

Merryman says she is trying to stay positive. She says she thinks Kent State having a new president may mean the university may finally move forward with the issue.

“I’m hopeful enough to remain involved,” she says. “I’m cynical enough to see Kent State has already demonstrated it is behind the curve on this one. It has been a major struggle to extend equality.”

Erin Roof
senior magazine journalism major
eroof@kent.edu

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Any college student is well acquainted with the term GPA. A student’s grade point average has been a source of distress and joy to students for centuries. But GPA has earned a new acronym thanks to The Advocate’s 389-page book “The Advocate College Guide for LGBT Students.” The book (which hit shelves in August 2006) outlines the country’s most gay-friendly schools — using its Gay Point Average.

The national LGBT newsmagazine chose the schools based on the best discrimination protection, most friendly climate and most extensive campus services for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students. The author, Shane L. Windmeyer, used 20 factors when determining the school’s GPA.

HERE’S A QUICK WRAP UP:

- Penn State and the University of Southern California were the only universities to score a perfect 20.
- Sixteen of the 100 schools are in New England. Six were in Massachusetts.
- Oberlin College and Ohio State were the two Ohio colleges to make the top 20 list.
- Kent State did not make the book.

SIMILAR STUDIES?

- Since 1992, the Princeton Review has provided a list of the most gay-friendly colleges in the United States.
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<th>The Daily Kent Stater</th>
<th>Uhuru</th>
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<td>The award-winning Daily Kent Stater is a student-run, independent voice on campus providing a dynamic, up-to-date package of news, information and advertising.</td>
<td>Uhuru is the well-established publication of Black United Students that has grown not only in page count, but also in quality of content and design.</td>
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<th>The Burr</th>
<th>Artemis</th>
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<td>Four-time winner of Best Overall College Magazine in the Country by the Society of Professional Journalists, this popular general interest magazine is published twice during the academic year.</td>
<td>A relatively new publication, Artemis explores women’s concerns, experiences and issues in opinion, personal narrative, poetry, humor and research pieces.</td>
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<th>Fusion</th>
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<td>Fusion addresses sexual minority issues within the general university population. The magazine will strive to unify people of different backgrounds through education and awareness.</td>
<td>Kent’s literary publication is a blend of poetry, prose, photography and illustration.</td>
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<th>TV-2</th>
<th>Black Squirrel Radio</th>
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<td>This student-run television station is produced solely by students and features a live 5:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. newscast Monday through Friday. Other student-created shows include Sportscorner, a music video show, talk shows and more.</td>
<td>Always on the cutting edge of college radio, this unique station features music college students love most.</td>
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| Seeds of Change | |
|-----------------| Seeds of Change strives to bring together those involved in campus activism, and those who are concerned about the world around them and wish to get more involved. |
JUSTICE FOR ALL

A look into the life of the first openly gay Massachusetts state senator and the effects of politics on the LGBT community

STORY | JENNIFER STEER
PHOTO | GAVIN JACKSON
Making a public address to an entire state may not be the ideal way to open up about a person’s sexuality, but one state senator reached a point where she needed to announce it to her state and her constituency.

“After I came out, I was a much better legislator,” says former Massachusetts Sen. Cheryl Jacques. “Because you’re not trying to get all your life fulfillment out of a job, I could have balance. I was a whole person emotionally.”

In a mostly conservative district, Jacques was elected to the state Senate at the age of 29. But at this time she was still hiding a big part of her life.

“I wasn’t out in my early years in the Senate,” Jacques says. “I was the type of kid, and this describes a lot of gay people, that knew they would be punished for coming out. I just suppressed it and put my energy into my studies and into my career so I didn’t have to deal with an unsettled part of my life.”

**THE PERSONAL POWER OF POLITICS**

While in the state Senate, Jacques represented 160,000 people. She helped pass one of the toughest gun control laws in the country and authored and spearheaded more than 40 pieces of approved legislation.

Jacques now jokes she spent most of her time changing the subject among her co-workers so she never had to talk about her personal life and cover up her sexuality, making her an unofficial expert on other peoples’ families.

The moment to come out finally came while Jacques was fighting for a safe school program that would keep funding gay alliances in schools. While her opponents were arguing these types of programs teach kids to be gay, Jacques wanted to be a champion for young members of the LGBT community.

While the legislation passed, Jacques still felt empty.

“I knew if kids knew I was gay, I could be a role model,” Jacques says. “I knew I could impact parents if they knew someone they respected was gay.”

In an unlikely move, Jacques wrote a column for the editorial page of *The Boston Globe* to come clean on her sexuality. Jacques knew she was putting her career on the line and feared her conservative constituency would leave her. However, she said the response she received was unexpected.

Many kids and parents sent her letters, praising her for opening up a dialogue in their homes. Jacques said one woman read her article to her two sons at the kitchen table, telling them “This is leadership. This is courage.” But Jacques knows that not everyone has the experience she had when she came out.

“I wish for all gays and lesbians that their story could be like mine, and I know it’s not. They are beat up; they are killed, like Matthew Shepard,” Jacques says.
The heat of politics, however, did patronize her sexuality.

When Jacques ran for re-election, her opponent took fire at her sexuality. With the campaign slogan “She’s not the girl next door.” Jacques laughs now, saying she still doesn’t know what that means.

Now, Jacques tours the nation speaking about gay rights and politics and is still active in politics after leaving the Senate with 12 years of service. The current political climate, she says, puts LGBT people in the thick of the debates. Jacques believes many politicians want to make gay marriage an issue because “it’s easier than finding real solutions to real problems,” as they put gay marriage on the morality forefront, rather than discussing solutions for the Iraq War and the shifting economy.

“That groups are building campaigns on the backs of gay bashing, and winning elections,” Jacques says. “This trend will go on for several more cycles, and it’s to divide and distract voters.”

**LEGALIZATION BATTLE GROUNDS**

The 2004 election was a devastating blow to the gay rights movement across the country.

Eleven states, including Ohio, passed same-sex marriage bans. And as recent political debates have shown, gay marriage will continue to be an easy way to motivate voters.

“Our opponents will continue to use this issue, and fundamentalists understand that gay marriage is a great way to rev up the voters,” says Jacques’ wife Jennifer Chrisler, executive director of The Family Pride Coalition.

Chrisler organizes Family Pride’s strategy to ensure full equality for gay parents and their families. This year, the organization worked to defeat anti-LGBT legislation. Advocates for the organization engage with other parents to prove that all good parents care about the same things.

“The biggest stigma that gay parents and gay people face is, somehow, we are really different in a lot of minds,” Chrisler says. “But we go to work, we pay our taxes and we raise our children. If you understand much more about us, that we’re the same, it brings a lot of these barriers down.”

Chrisler says since more and more people know people who are gay and in committed relationships, the image of the LGBT community will improve and be a powerful step toward equality.

In the November 2006 election, Family Pride worked in states such as South Dakota, Wisconsin and California. In Minnesota, the group was able to knock an anti-LGBT issue off the ballot.

Chrisler realizes that fighting for gay rights in the United States is an uphill battle, but she has faith in the American people. She hopes one day there won’t be a need for organizations to promote civil rights.

But the key word is time.

“No civil rights movement advances linearly, and no civil rights movement goes without setbacks,” Chrisler says. “We have the knowledge to know that things will improve with time.”

Jennifer Steer
junior broadcast journalism major
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**WEB EXCLUSIVE**

**JUSTICE FOR ALL**

Check out fusion.kent.edu for links to openly gay politicians’ Web sites and for more information about good, bad and in-the-works legislation that involve LGBT.

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jsteer@kent.edu.
Rep. Tammy Baldwin, of Wisconsin, was the first lesbian elected to Congress.

Mayor Ron Oden, of Palm Springs, California, was the first openly gay African American to be elected mayor in a U.S. city.

Massachusetts Rep. Barney Frank was the first U.S. Congressman to come out and win an election.

In 2005, Cuyahoga County elected three gay candidates, making it the first time any openly gay politician had won a seat in that county.
Kent State University’s most diverse magazine takes an award-winning approach to cover KSU’s most hard-hitting and controversial topics.

Winner of Society of Professional Journalists Mark of Excellence Region Four Awards:

2003
- **Honorable Mention**: Best Student Magazine
  Published once a year
- **Third Place**: Feature Photography, Pat Jarrett, “My (Gay) Fraternity Life”
- **Second Place**: Best Online Magazine
  http://fusion.kent.edu
- **First Place**: Photo Illustration, Scott R. Galvin, “Silent Shadows” (Cover Story)

2005
- **First Place**: Best Student Magazine (published more than once a year)

2006
- **First Place**: Best All-Around Online Student Magazine
- **First Place**: Photo Illustration, Pat Jarrett, “It Was All a Blur”
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find out what’s going on.

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Sundays
9pm till 2:30am
Airman 1st Class Ashley Hamrick was officially discharged from the U. S. Air Force for knee injuries. But the 19-year-old Ravenna native isn’t buying that for a minute. She insists her higher-ups intentionally sought out an excuse to have her discharged, because they suspected she was a lesbian.

Whatever the reason for her discharge, Hamrick is one of many who have felt the strain of living by 1993’s ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ clause. She is eager to tell the story of how she is working to reconcile the sexuality she is so proud of with the strict laws of the Air Force she loved so much.

A petite brunette with a grave voice and maroon streaks in her hair, Hamrick is a bit reserved at first; when she starts talking about the Air Force, though, she lights up. The product of a family of servicemen — her aunt, uncle and grandfather were all in the military — she says she knew when she was six years old that she wanted to serve her country.

“It just seemed like the thing to do,” she says as she sits quietly in the KSU Student Center.
But why the Air Force?
“It’s the best branch,” Hamrick says matter-of-factly. “In the army, you’re a grunt. In the marines, you’re a jarhead. In the navy, you’re on a ship for six months out of the year. (The Air Force) is the best branch because it’s more of the quiet reserve.”

IDENTITY DENIAL

Hamrick says she never had a life-altering revelation about her sexuality. She always knew she was gay, and when she came out to friends at age 13, they weren’t surprised.

As a lesbian signing up for the military, though, she braced herself for the hardships she would inevitably face along the way.

“It kind of pissed me off when I had to sign that clause, the ‘Don’t ask, Don’t tell’ clause,” she says of the day she enlisted.

Hamrick says she has friends who wanted to enlist but couldn’t bring themselves to sign the clause and deny they’ve ever had homosexual feelings. And although she cried when she signed it, Hamrick says her desire to serve her country won out over the tears.

“You have to be a stronger person to sign it,” she says. “It’s like saying, ‘I’m going to be gay and let a million people die,’ or saying, ‘I’m gay, and I’m going to be brave enough to sign up and possibly save someone’s life.’

Letting her guard down

It wasn’t the other women that Hamrick worried would find out about her sexuality. Unwilling to keep it a complete secret, she divulged to her three closest friends at boot camp that she was a lesbian.

“They didn’t really care,” she says. “They were like, ‘We know you as who you are, not as who you date.’”

Eventually word got out to the entire flight. She says it was nearly impossible to keep secrets living in such close quarters.

“Every single one of us knew every single thing about everyone else,” she says. “It wasn’t awkward. They just wanted to know.”

Instead, Hamrick says it was the men in the Air Force who carried the strongest stereotypes about homosexuality. During free time, when they were permitted to socialize, the women would often catch flak from the men if they appeared too physical with one another, or if they would “lean funny” against one another, she says.

“Our brother flight would talk about how all lesbians look like dudes, and that it’s hot when lesbians are together, but with guys, it’s gross. It made me uncomfortable. Yet it’s funny to me, because if they had any idea what they’re saying…”

She trails off, unsure what difference it would have made had the men known she was a lesbian.

“A lot of people are very close-minded,” she says simply.

Hamrick says she had gay friends in the brother flight, and she knew quite a few bisexual guys, too. One friend in particular was closeted to the males in his flight — only a few female friends knew about his sexuality.

“I think he wished guys would open up and talk to him,” she says.

When his comrades began to suspect
he might be gay, she says she noticed them distancing themselves from his friendship.

Even Hamrick’s dorm chief knew she was a lesbian, but it was never a hot topic of discussion until the day Hamrick and her straight best friend drifted off to sleep together after a long chat.

Their training instructor walked into the room to find them sharing a bed and immediately reported the situation to the dorm chief, who reassured the instructor that the girls were close friends and convinced her it wasn’t an issue of concern. Still, Hamrick says it was a wake-up call of sorts.

“That worried me, so we kind of watched what we did for a while,” she says.

SEARCHING FOR EXCUSES

After she graduated boot camp on Aug. 30, 2005, Hamrick entered technical school, where she says an “amazing amount” of the women said they were either lesbian or bisexual. The stigma of homosexuality wasn’t nearly as taboo among younger airmen, she says, although “with sergeants, it was a no-no.”

Because she didn’t discuss it openly, her higher-ups didn’t have any proof of her sexuality. But Hamrick says they pursued her relentlessly.

“They would always try and find reasons for me to be in trouble,” she says.

Swearing her flight was filled with women just like her, Hamrick says she isn’t sure why she alone was targeted.

“I was the quiet one,” she says. “I was the one who did everything I was supposed to.”

“If you’re gay, you just have to watch what you do.” — Ashley Hamrick
By late February, the pressure from her higher-ups had become unbearable. Hamrick swallowed more than 1600 mg of Tylenol in an attempt to kill herself. Fearing for her life, her friend Abby called an ambulance.

By the time they got to her, nothing was wrong, she says, shaking her head.

Still, Hamrick says the pressure of being in the military, especially as a lesbian, was often overwhelming.

“The military is a very big strain on your physical, emotional and mental state,” she says. “They’ll tell you you’re no good, ‘You don’t deserve to be in my Air Force,’ blah, blah, blah. They pick at stuff. You cry, they make you cry more. You get pissed, they make you get pissed more.”

Although Hamrick says she doesn’t necessarily think lesbian airmen have it harder than straight ones, she acknowledges that the day-to-day denial of her sexuality took its toll.

“If you’re gay, you just have to watch what you do,” she says.

RISING SUSPICIONS

Hamrick says the friendship with her two best friends, Abby and Amber, was the only thing that kept her sane during her time in the Air Force.

One night, Hamrick spent the evening consoling Amber, whose mother had just been diagnosed with cancer. When Hamrick was discovered missing during
room check, it was reported to her flight commander. “They asked me, I swear, eight million questions, all of which hinted toward, ‘We know you’re gay, and you’re not going to tell us,’” she says. “They didn’t have proof of me being gay, so they looked for other things.”

That other thing would turn out to be her knee.

What began as a pulled groin muscle during a one-and-a-half-mile run eventually led to a series of doctor’s visits, x-rays and half a dozen incorrect diagnoses.

A month after arriving at technical school, Hamrick was moved to Tango, the medical flight, where she was forbidden from training or exerting herself physically. Instead, she was relegated to answering phones and doing clerical work while the Air Force conducted her medical evaluation.

For three months, Hamrick waited to find out whether she’d be allowed to remain in the Air Force or, if she was discharged, whether it would be honorable or dishonorable. An honorable discharge would mean the military pays Hamrick a $300 stipend every month for the rest of her life, she said. A dishonorable discharge, which she feared might happen based on suspicion of her homosexuality, would force her to cut all ties with the military.

By February, her medical evaluation was complete: Hamrick was being medically discharged. Although it meant that monthly stipend, Hamrick says she would rather the Air Force had simply asked her whether she was a lesbian.

If she had been asked whether she was, Hamrick says she would have once again denied it so she could remain in the Air Force.

There lay her struggle — share the secret of something that was ultimately her, or pursue the love of her life, the Air Force. It is a decision Hamrick thinks is unfortunate and unfair that LGBT people must make.

“I loved what I was before I found out I was getting medically discharged,” she says. “You have to be a brave and honorable person to put on that uniform and strap on that gun and go out into the field.”

On April 11, the day she left the Air Force, Hamrick was in for a final surprise, one that confirmed what she’d suspected all along — some of her higher-ups knew she was a lesbian.

Months earlier, she’d posted about her sexuality on her MySpace homepage: “My best friend told me something the other day that said, ‘You’re 75 percent lesbian and 25 percent straight.’ I said, ‘I guess that means I’m a lesbian.”’
The day technical school ended, Hamrick was turning in her uniforms when her sergeant called out to her.

“Twenty-five percent, huh, Hamrick?” he yelled.

No one knew what he was talking about, she says, so it wasn’t as telling as it might have been, but the shock of being outed was overwhelming.

Representatives from Lackland Air Force Base would not comment on this particular incident.

“I probably stood there and just stared for, like, 20 minutes,” she says. “I was absolutely in shock.”

MOVING ON

Airmen on medical discharge have six months to get “rechecked and fixed,” Hamrick says. She could have had surgery on her knees and then reapplied for duty.

Exhausted by her experiences, she chose to stay home in Ravenna. She got a job as a bus driver for PARTA and eventually moved to Kent with some friends where she goes to PRIDE! Kent meetings and tries to stay involved with a supportive LGBT base.

But she’s the first to admit she hasn’t moved on.

“I constantly tell myself if I’d done something different, I may still be there,” she says. “But everything in the world happens for a reason. I wasn’t meant to be in the service. I was meant to meet the people I did.”

Despite the military’s ban on gay troops, Hamrick says the devotion she feels to her country hasn’t wavered — she just hopes to see a change to that requirement soon.

“I’ll never forget the friends I made. I’ll never forget all the people in Iraq that have died,” she says. She chokes up when she talks about Sept. 11, saying she almost wore her uniform on the five-year anniversary.

“It was an emotional strain that I didn’t want to deal with anymore,” she says.

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By the Numbers

60 Percentage of respondents reported by Pew Research Center in 2006 that favored allowing gay troops to serve openly.

63 Percentage of respondents in a 2004 Gallup Poll that favored allowing gay troops to serve openly.

800 Number of openly gay discharges that held highly-crucial jobs as reported by the Government Accountability Office.
Number of gay people serving in the armed forces (including the Reserves and the National Guard) as reported in 2004 by the Urban Institute.

Number of members of the armed forces who had been discharged for being openly gay as of 2006 as reported by the Government Accountability Office.
Hiding behind technicalities

Officially named the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Pursue, Don’t Harass” policy, the United States Military’s stance on gay, lesbian and bisexual service members, outlines the reasons for which LGBT members of the military may be administratively discharged.

According to the Human Rights Campaign’s Web site regarding LGBT issues in the military, the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy allows service members to be discharged if they:

■ State that they are lesbian, gay or bisexual.
■ Engage in sexual contact with someone of the same sex.
■ Attempt to marry someone of the same sex.

Since the policy’s enactment in 1993, the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network reports that more than 9,000 service members have been discharged under the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” law; the peak number of 1,273 discharges occurred in 2001. These discharges are typically dishonorable, so affected service members are not eligible for military pension and are stripped of their titles.

HRC reports that the policy especially affects women. In 2002, 36 percent of all discharges related to “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” were women, although they only made up 15 percent of the entire military. And even though the “Don’t Harass” section of the policy prohibits violence against suspected LGBT service members, many women have reported being victims of what they call “lesbian baiting.” This is when they are identified as lesbians, whether they actually are, and are relentlessly harassed for their presumed sexual identities.

The “Don’t Pursue” section of the policy was designed to prevent officers from carrying out investigations to actively weed out LGBT service members. However, 37 percent of service members reported witnessing or experiencing anti-gay harassment and threats, according to the HRC. Furthermore, no military-sponsored therapy options exist for LGBT service members to discuss their sexuality in confidence, so those struggling with such issues are left with few places to turn for support.

Despite outspoken opposition to the policy by former President Bill Clinton and decreasing numbers of sexually related discharges, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” still exists as umbrella military law, with no foreseeable lift of the LGBT military ban in the near future.
Two current professors and one former professor share their stories of being LGBT, their worries and hopes for the university and how the atmosphere at the Kent campus compares to one of the regional campuses.

STORY | BRYAN WRO TEN
PHOTOS | GAVIN JACKSON
POWERFUL PROFILES

Daniel Nadon

Daniel Nadon
Daniel Nadon is tired of having to come out over and over again.

New students every semester, new neighbors when he and his partner take a walk — but he says it has its benefits.

Students know they can come and talk to him if they need to, he says.

“People I never met or had in class will knock on the door and talk to me about what is going on in their lives,” he says.

BOLD BACKGROUNDS

Nadon, associate professor of theater and dance at the Trumbull campus, has taught for 14 years at Kent State. He is a co-coordinator for the LGBT Studies minor with Richard Berrong.

After attending the University of Colorado for undergraduate work, he studied at the University of Michigan for his Master’s degree.

TEACHING LIFE LESSONS

“I feel really lucky to be able to teach LGBT Studies,” he says.

He says there is a mix of students who take the courses. Some students take the minor to enhance their majors in areas like psychology, education or social justice, he says.

“Not too many math majors take it,” he jokes.

Other students who take it are LGBT and want to learn more about themselves, Nadon says.

Even in the introductory class, he says students will approach LGBT issues from different angles. It gives them a lot of information that isn’t readily available to them in other classes, he says. This helps LGBT students because it’s easier to relate to the subject matter if it means something to them.

“It’s hard to find yourself reflected in other courses because they are so heteronormative,” he says. “They may not come across any LGBT characters or situations at all. They don’t relate to it in any meaningful way.”

KENT CAMPUS VS. TRUMBULL CAMPUS

Nadon teaches classes at the Trumbull campus, as well as the Kent campus for LGBT Studies courses. In terms of the LGBT community, he says they are completely different.

“There just isn’t the motivation, and there’s a fear of visibility here on campus,” he says of Trumbull. “They’re not wanting to be seen.”

He says there is a small-town mentality at Trumbull. However, he says it’s slowly changing. The students are learning in his classes, and they are finding their own voices. It will be a step-by-step process, he says, through visibility on campus and coming out.

“They are acknowledging who they are around campus and removing the shame of visibility from the quotient,” he says.

It’s not just up to the students to make this happen, he says. There needs to be progress politically and socially, he says. If it continues, he says it certainly won’t be a non-issue, but it won’t be as major an issue as it is now.

“People seem more open than they were 14 years ago when I arrived,” he says. “But we aren’t there yet.”
In his 22 years teaching at Kent State, Richard Berrong says no one ever took a shot at him for being gay.

But that doesn’t necessarily mean the entire university welcomes him.

There is a lack of community — lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or otherwise — among the faculty, he says.

“It’s very segmented, departmentalized,” he says. “I can’t really say what the faculty attitude is toward LGBT faculty.”

A MAJOR MINOR

Berrong, a professor of modern and classical language studies, is the co-coordinator of the LGBT Studies minor with Daniel Nadon. He completed his undergraduate work at the University of Virginia. He attended Stanford for graduate studies and completed his doctorate at Cornell.

He taught at the University of Louisville and completed post-doctorate work at Case Western Reserve before coming to Kent State in 1985. He was tenured in the early 1990s.

REACHING OUT TO STUDENTS

Berrong says he had a Safe Zone sticker on his door for years.

No one came for the Safe Zone.

“In 22 years, I never had a student come in and say, ‘I’m gay or lesbian, and I have a problem,’” Berrong says.

He says some students who have the LGBT Studies minor come in and talk to him about the program, and even that number is small. He says he doesn’t feel it’s his place to single out or pry into a student’s life if he suspects something about him or her.

“Students don’t come to me,” he says, “and it’s a shame.”

FLOWERS CAN BE DECEIVING

Berrong compared the actions of the university administration to the flowerbeds around campus.

“They look really nice. They put out immediate prettiness,” he says, clarifying that it’s important to understand the upper administration is different from the day-to-day administration.

By day-to-day administration, he means the administrators who interact with faculty on a daily basis, such as deans.

“It’s a completely different world,” he says about the upper administration. “They call the shots, which is why the (faculty) senate is completely powerless.”

The LGBT atmosphere around campus is sort of non-existent, he says. Under President emeritus Carol Cartwright, Berrong says it simply was not an issue. He says she promised the faculty domestic partner benefits years ago if another university in Ohio offered them. When other universities did, he says benefits never came.

“It wasn’t particularly benign neglect,” he says.
Interested in Safe Zones? Check out fusion.kent.edu for a list of Safe Zones at Kent State University.
Robert Johnson helped create the LGBT Studies minor when he taught at Kent State. He was also the head of the sociology department for his last four years before leaving in 2004.

He left to chair the sociology department at the University of Miami. Why did he leave? No domestic partner benefits and not wanting to work with President emeritus Carol Cartwright anymore, he says.

**WORKING WITH PRIDE!KENT**

Students and his colleagues were very supportive of the program, Johnson says. Things were looking positive. The number of LGBT professors were increasing, he says, and PRIDE!Kent was very active.

As the adviser for PRIDE!Kent, he says he didn't have to do too much because the members already knew what to do. He says he gave them support and helped them deal with bureaucracy.

“The whole time I was there,” he says, “they were self-motivated.”

The LGBT Studies minor was doing well.

“Almost all LGBT studies were on the east and west coast,” he says. “Very few in the heartland of the country.”

But not everyone was pleased, he says.

Cartwright and most administrators seemed uncomfortable with the LGBT Studies minor, he says. State legislators wrote letters to Cartwright, he says, asking her, “Why are you wasting money on these causes?” Because of all the pressure on her, he says there was always nervousness regarding anything LGBT.

**SAYING GOODBYE TO KENT STATE**

“I can't remember a year I wasn't happy there,” he says. “I had a list of reasons — good reasons — to stay.”

He says being able to offer a college education to students in a state that was in dire need of education was fulfilling.

“It was a very worthy calling to be teaching at Kent State,” he says.

But, in 2004, Johnson made the decision to leave. He says the University of Miami made an offer to let him chair its sociology department. The opportunity to work at the very selective university, let alone lead a department, was attractive to Johnson. Added to that was the absence of domestic partner benefits at Kent State. After years of waiting for them to come, he says it was time to go.

The president of the University of Miami is Donna Shalala, former secretary for Health and Human Services under the Clinton administration. This only added to his desire to move.

“So my choice was work for Carol Cartwright or work for Donna Shalala,” Johnson says. “The choice was clear — I was going to like working for President Shalala a lot better than President Cartwright. And I was right.”

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It has destroyed millions of lives.  
It has brought together a world.  
It has brought together a nation.  
It has created a generation of stereotypes.  
It has created an understanding of a community.  
Its image has evolved, but its threat is still present.  
And 2006 marks 25 years of it lingering in public and Kent State consciousness.
Danny Boomhower was 1 year old when AIDS was discovered.

He was 5 when he first saw the “Silence = Death” campaign. He remembers the postcards the Surgeon General mailed out to the public to alleviate fears about the virus.

Twenty-five years later, the United States mourns the loss of more than 529,113 of its citizens to AIDS, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. At least 7,714 of these people were from Ohio; 38 of them were from Portage County.

No known cure exists, but awareness has increased — AIDS has gone from being thought of as the “gay” or “junkie” disease to something that can affect anyone. While most agree the increased tolerance is positive, some argue it has made people more complacent when dealing with the disease. To many of today’s college students, AIDS has always been a part of society. Constantly hearing about something creates complacency. It makes it lose its urgency.

“I’ve seen it go from being scare tactics to ‘let’s work together’ to, at the present moment, not much of anything at all,” says Boomhower, who is a risk reduction specialist at the Community AIDS Network in Akron. The network provides education, awareness, housing and social services to people living with HIV and AIDS, as well as to their families. Boomhower’s job is to educate the public, especially homosexual men, about the risks of HIV and AIDS and how to protect themselves from these risks.

Fifteen years ago, this kind of information was a lot easier to get at Kent State, says Eric Van Sant, chapter adviser of Delta Lambda Phi, a fraternity for gay, bisexual and progressive men. Van Sant was a Kent State student then and an active member of organizations similar to today’s PRIDE!Kent.
“Fifteen years ago at noon, we were doing safe sex presentations in the plaza,” he says.

The groups had AIDS education chairmen and made it their responsibility to supply condoms and dental dams to students. Van Sant used to carry dozens of condoms in his book bag to hand out around campus. He says it worries him that he doesn’t see that activism and awareness anymore.

“It’s become a second thought,” Van Sant says.

Boomhower thinks today’s teens and 20-somethings don’t grasp the seriousness of the virus.

“In our community today, I think there’s a lot of misunderstanding about HIV/AIDS.”

Medicine companies often give a false sense of security, and many people think they can just take the prescriptions and be fine.

“A lot of their advertisements show young, fit men climbing mountains, walking dogs,” Boomhower said.

However, the pills can’t help everyone, and there are plenty of side effects. “We’re kind of forgetting how devastating this virus can be. Kids don’t care about this issue anymore. People are not scared anymore. They think that ‘I’ll be fine.’”

**A PRO OR A CON?**

Sophomore psychology major Tim Branagan looked at one of these ads, and all he could see was a healthy, attractive young man listening to music.

“That doesn’t scare me,” he says.

The more people view the disease as something manageable, the less afraid they become — which can be both positive and negative. People might be less afraid to get to know someone with the virus, he says, but humanizing it does take away the fear of getting the disease.

“I think we took the face of AIDS and made it a human face,” Branagan says. “It’s harder to hate when it has a human face.”

AIDS was stigmatized for a long time as something you could only get if you were homosexual or using drugs. The first widely publicized case of AIDS came about with “Patient Zero,” a gay man who was having sex with a lot of partners in bathhouses, Boomhower says. The virus spread quickly through the community, partially because gay men felt they had to hide and have sex in secret places such as the bathhouse.

As society makes strides toward accepting homosexuality, people are no longer forced into the “gay ghettos,” Van Sant says.

“It’s more spread out.” He pauses. “And more camouflaged.”

According to Avert.org, an international HIV and AIDS charity based in the United Kingdom, the cases of sexually transmitted diseases in the United States have been increasing. In 2004, Ohio was ranked seventh in cases per 100,000 people with gonorrhea.
We’re kind of forgetting how devastating this virus can be.

Kids don’t care about this issue anymore. People are not scared anymore. They think that ‘I’ll be fine.’

Danny Boomhower
Risk Reduction Specialist at the Community AIDS Network in Akron
People don’t die from AIDS. They die because the virus ravages their bodies, rendering them unable to fend off illness.

“Here’s the real insult,” says Christopher Woolverton, a biology major at Kent State who specializes in infectious microbiology, “The virus gets into the cells that are designed to protect the body and destroys those cells.”

The human immunodeficiency virus, or HIV, causes AIDS.

“The virus kind of tricks the body,” Woolverton says. “When it leaves one person, the virus steals the membrane from the cell it was in, making it look like a human cell. That’s how it invades the body so easily. There’s no real fight.”

The virus clings especially well to CD-4 cells, those with a specific type of protein often found on white blood cells, such as T-cells. From there it finds its way into other tissues and can be transferred through bodily fluids such as semen, vaginal fluid and breast milk.

Woolverton says AIDS has to be treated like smallpox and polio have been.


Since there is currently no vaccination for HIV, closing the virus off seems like the best option.

“The best defense we have right now is isolation, which is to teach people not to swap body fluids,” he says.
“If we’re not careful, we’re going to be back where we were 15 years ago.”

Branagan says he was first taught to view AIDS like the “kiss of death.” He agrees that view has changed over the years, but teens still aren’t getting a lot of information about the virus. In his high school sex-ed class, students were basically taught to just not have sex.

Sexual education needs to begin as young as junior high, Boomhower says.

“Parents aren’t having these conversations with kids, so teachers should do it,” he says.

Honest and open education is the key, so students are prepared when they decide they are physically and emotionally ready — not after it’s too late.

“If they can see people getting shot up on TV and having sex on TV, why not teach them about it?” Boomhower asks. “If you want to protect people, all you have to do is teach them.”

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The Community AIDS Network in Akron provides education, awareness, housing and social services to people living with HIV and AIDS and their families.
AIDS in Ohio

AS OF DEC. 31, 2004:
- **In Portage County** 60 people have HIV or AIDS, and 38 have died since 1981.
- **In Summit county** 605 people have HIV or AIDS, and 356 have died since 1981.
- **In Cuyahoga county** 3,137 people have HIV or AIDS, and 1,787 have died since 1981.

Danny Boomhower of the Community AIDS Network in Akron says since the statistics were last compiled, there have probably been at least another 15 people in the Kent area who have contracted the virus.

PERSONS REPORTED LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS

**COUNTIES WITH MOST AIDS CASES**
1. Cuyahoga
2. Franklin
3. Hamilton
4. Montgomery
5. Lucas
6. Summit
7. Stark
8. Mahoning
9. Lorain
10. Butler

**COUNTIES WITH LEAST AIDS CASES**
1. Vinton
2. Van Wert
3. Noble
4. Putnam
5. Wyandot
6. Morgan
7. Harrison
8. Monroe
9. Morrow
10. Hardin

Holmes
Mercer
Carroll

Source: Ohio Department of Health