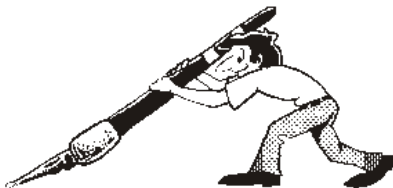


If Toledo Can Do It, Why Not You?

Stories from Murphy's Manor

I first met Murphy Robinson in February 1982 when he came out of the end of my pen. Ever since I've been writing and drawing four Murphy's Manor comic strips a month, lending new meaning to the phrase "that time of the month." Um, I won't pursue the metaphor any further than that. The continuing story is one of gay/lesbian Weekend Revolutionaries in a mid-sized mid-western city I call Black Swamp, Ohio. Most of the main characters live in a big old house owned by Murphy Robinson. From there, they pursue their livelihoods, happiness and occasionally indulge in political shenanigans.

I have laid out a rather large community in Black Swamp. All sorts of characters spend brief stays in my four panels - Bedouins exploring the caves near Qumran, Alexander Graham Bell and Watson, Charles Darwin, even Joe Camel and a talking rat from the Vatican. In more than 800 comic strips, I've done a lot of stand-alone cartoons featuring my regular characters. There have also been many that form larger continuing story lines. I hope these series cartoons stand on their own - they have to. Some papers that run Murphy's Manor are weekly, some biweekly, some monthly. Continuing series only work in weeklies, and even then I have no assurance that the cartoons will be run in the correct



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order. In this volume I am presenting some of the collected stories.

The first series I did was a short one, when I'd been doing these strips for about a year. It concerned Jeff Sorensen (one of the tenants at Murphy's Manor) falling for a very effeminate man who turned out to be heterosexual. For me, the high point of this series was when this swishy straight guy tried to teach Murf how to swish.

In this volume I present a few of my favorite series, dealing with a raunchy brand of gay religion, a few fine points of the Ohio Revised Code, and micro-activism. It would be traditional for me to close these introductory remarks by saying that I hope you enjoy reading the cartoons in this volume as much as I enjoyed drawing them. Drawing them involved sitting at my drawing table and staring at each strip for several hours, often far into the night while you were doing something trivial, like falling in love or dancing the night away. Be fair, now. Is it fitting for me to wish you as much joy as I experienced? Still, I do sincerely wish you thousands of ecstatic seconds in the world of Murphy's Manor.

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The Human Rights Ordinance



1998 Toledo City Council unanimously passed a Human Rights Ordinance. I was a member of the committee that wrote the ordinance language and put together the coalition to build support for its passage. Specifically, I was co-chair of the public outreach committee.

These cartoons form a personal chronicle of how we worked. The cartoonist side of me did not sleep. I got ideas for a series of *Murphy's Manor* cartoons as a by-product. Some of them are absolutely autobiographical!

Working on the committee was a great experience it was a dedicated group of people, and we had a clear goal. The committee was organized by Gays & Lesbians United (GLU).

MURPHY'S MANOR

by Kurt Erichsen



Toledo's Human Rights Ordinance campaign started during the city council campaign of 1997. We had an openly gay candidate, Louis Escobar, running. GLU held a candidate's night — I think we had about sixty people turn out for it. We didn't realize it till later, but this deeply impressed the candidates. There were actually more people in the audience than behind the podium. We had the biggest candidate's forum of the season.

I should say at the very beginning that this is a work of fiction. Despite my little game with initials, Emmett Leroy is not Louis Escobar. Like any other writer of fiction, I take bits and pieces of real characters and situations and regroup them in my own odd ways. In the following notes, I'll comment on some things that really happened, and others that are pure flights of my fancy.

Meet Andrew Paszko. He is the Mayor's Gay/Lesbian Community Liaison, and full-time political junkie. On his own time, he is quick to volunteer for Leroy's campaign.

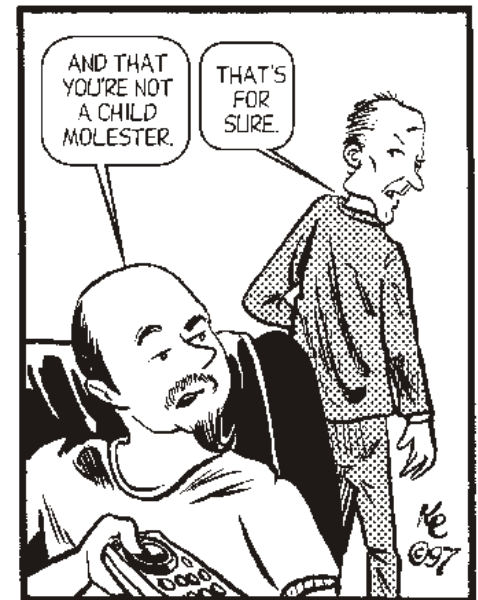
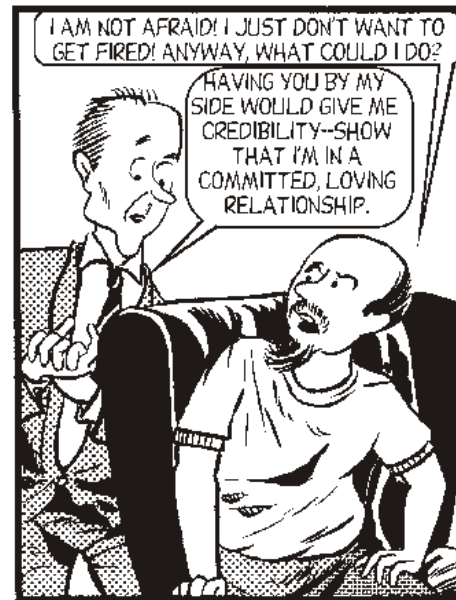
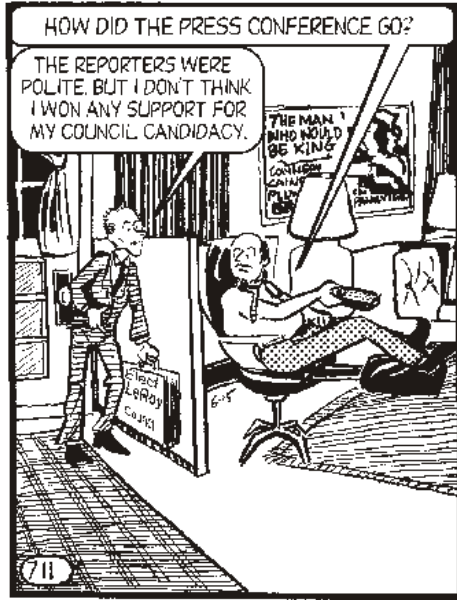
MURPHY'S MANOR

by Kurt Erichsen



MURPHY'S MANOR

by Kurt Erichsen



If you think Leroy's partner looks like a caricature, but you can't think who, you're on the right track. Toledoans may recognize the face. Except that's not who it is. The point is one of caricature. It struck me at a party that this member of the Toledo GLBT community bore a striking resemblance to a famous historical figure. Plus fifty pounds or so. Yes, I drew this strip with a reference photo at my drawing table. The photo was of Vladimir Lenin. Aren't you glad *you* don't know any cartoonists??

Toledo is still a town of ethnic communities, and making the rounds of festivals is *de rigeur*.

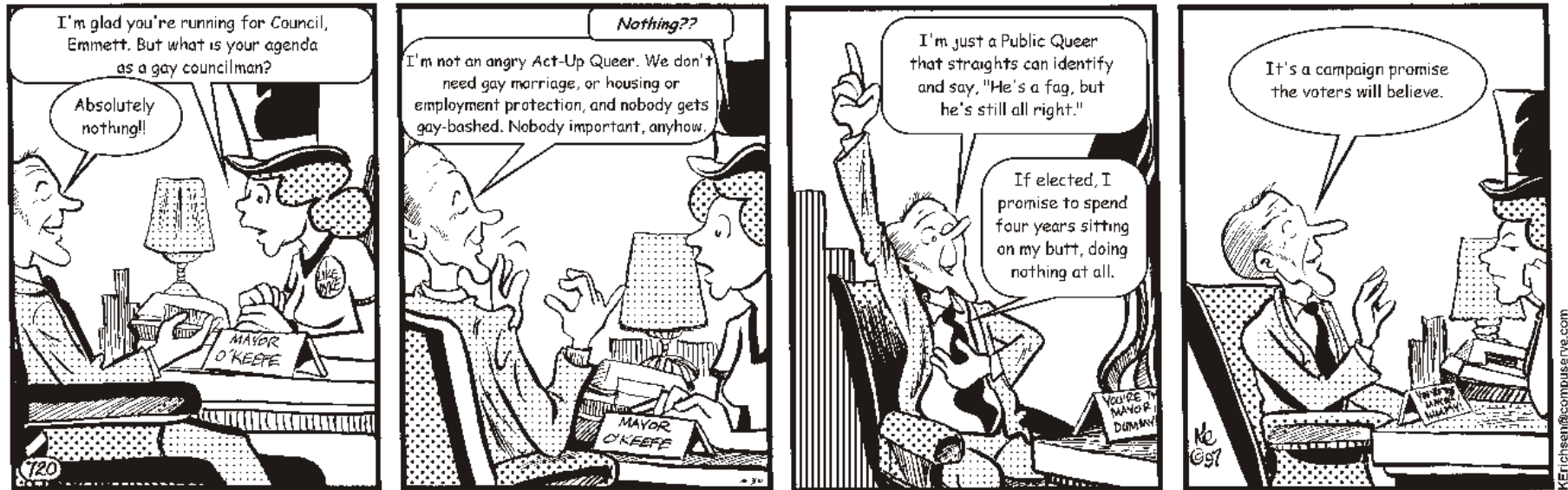
MURPHY'S MANOR

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This is one of those flights of fancy I was talking about. There are gay people who have this do-nothing attitude, but our elected officials didn't.

MURPHY'S MANOR

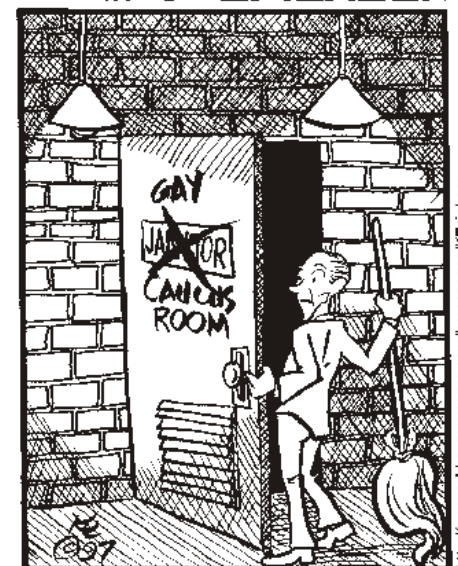
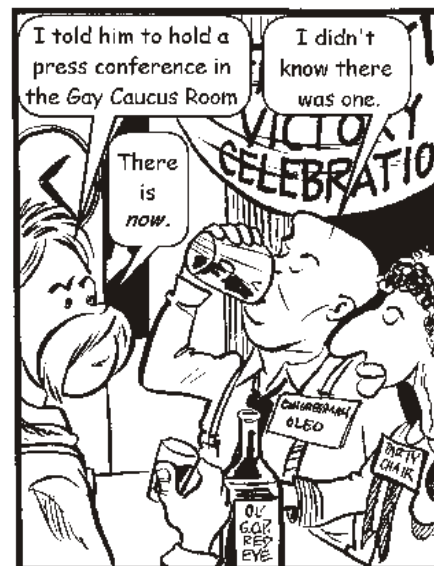
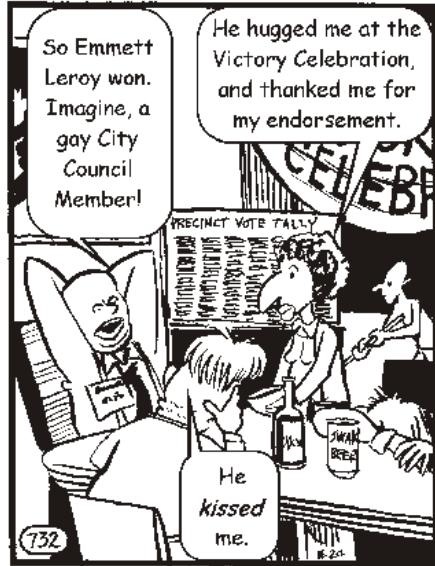
by Kurt Erichsen



Some gay bars have a reputation of locking the doors at official closing time and becoming orgy houses. All I can say is I must be going to the wrong places.

MURPHY'S MANOR

by Kurt Erichsen



<http://fourworld.com/userve.com/homepages/KE/erichsen>

I decided early on that the results of my election would go the same as Toledo's. And Escobar *did* win. In a field of 12 candidates running for 6 at-large seats, he came in sixth. Which is good enough.

MURPHY'S MANOR

by Kurt Erichsen

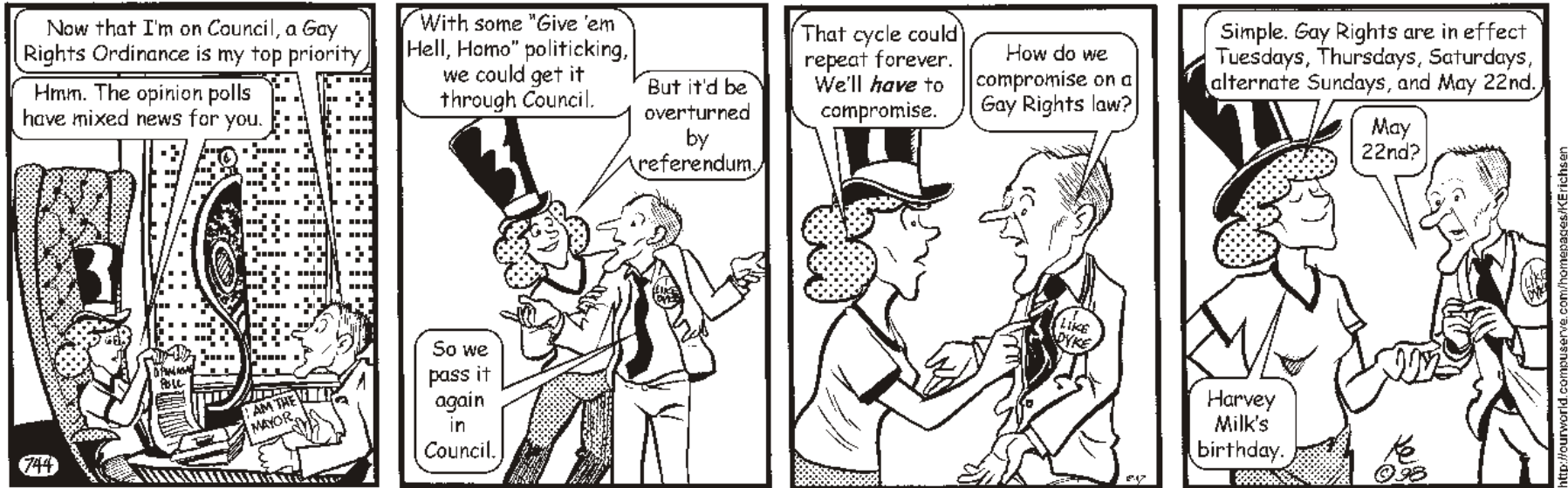


<http://ourworld.com/user/ie.com/homepages/KERichsen>

The Gay Agenda is really a lot simpler than some people may imagine.

MURPHY'S MANOR

by Kurt Erichsen

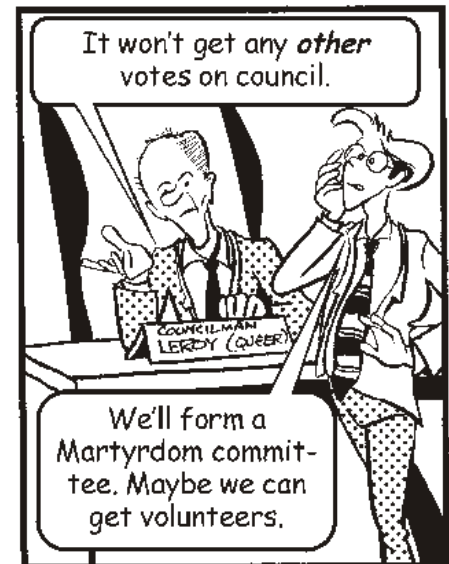


During our work on the Human Rights Ordinance, we were always looking over our shoulder for a referendum challenge. We always wondered how much we might have to compromise in advance to get something acceptable.

Here's the Great Question we had to answer as a committee advocating a Human Rights Ordinance: "Can you prove there's really a problem and that this legislation is needed?" Even our supporters ask this, saying, "what should I say to an opponent who thinks we're asking for special rights?" I heard of a human rights ordinance effort in another city that got tangled up in this question and ultimately failed. They tried to prove a need by conducting a survey. Our approach was to collect letters of testimony and use national statistics.

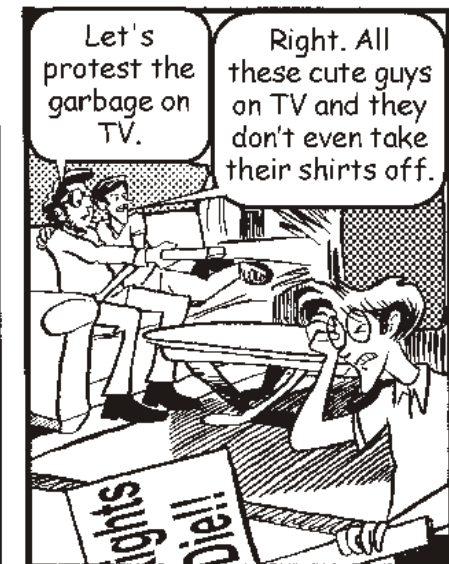
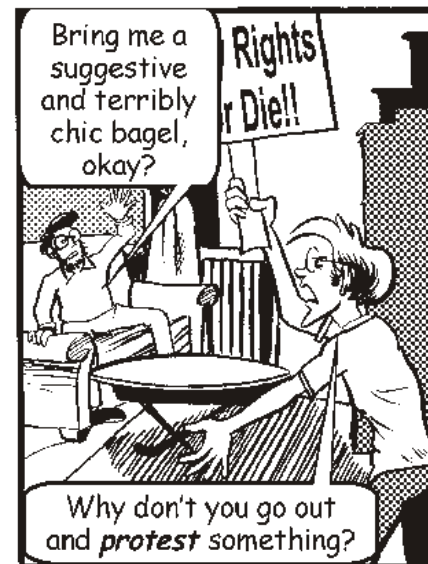
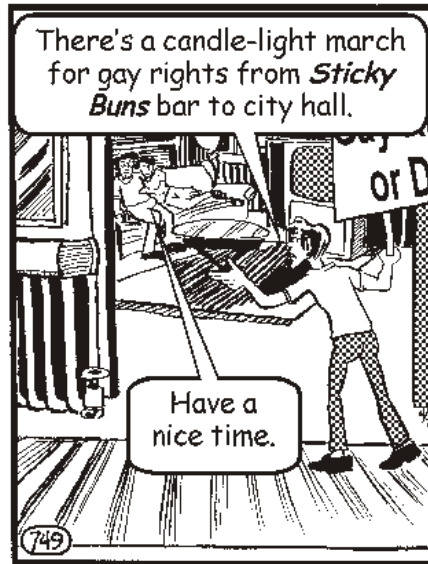
MURPHY'S MANOR

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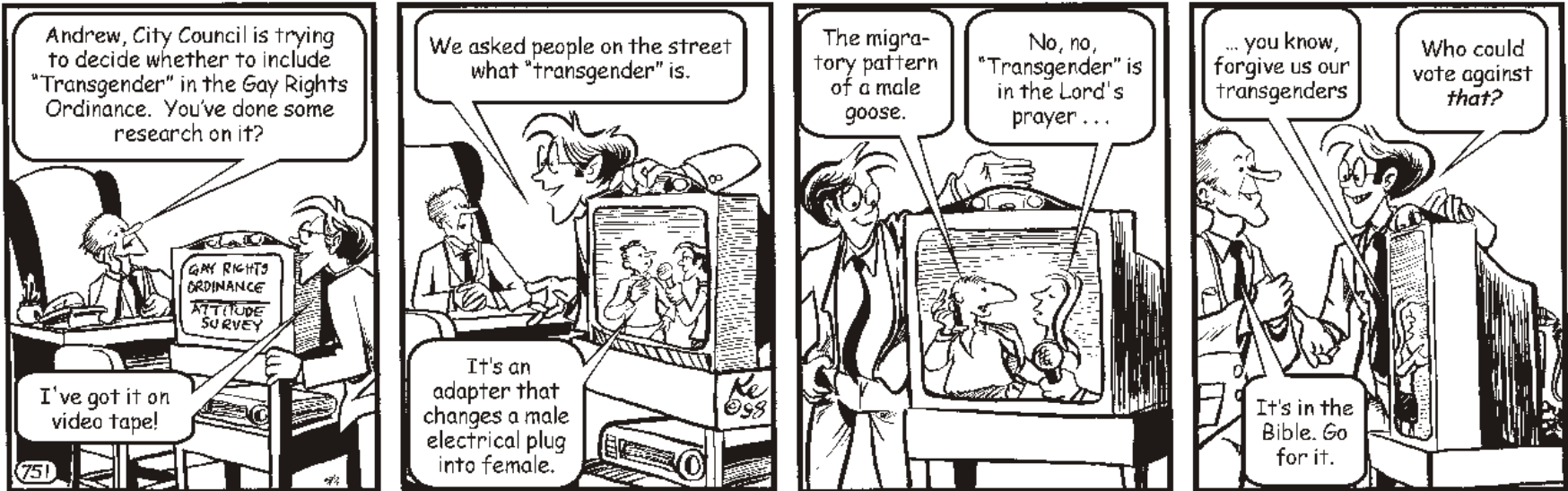
<http://fourworld.com/userve.com/homepages/K/Erichsen>

We're not the only ones asking for legislation!

In Toledo, we were careful to call our ordinance 'Human Rights.' Because it protects straights as well as gays by extending rights based on real or perceived sexual orientation. And there have been cases where straight employees have been fired from gay businesses because of their sexual orientation. It also added a hate crimes provision to all protected classes. I found all this too lengthy to explain in a comic strip, so I called it the Gay Rights Ordinance.

MURPHY'S MANOR

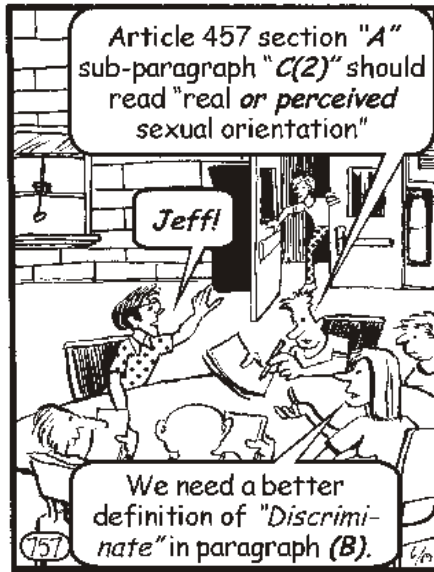
by Kurt Erichsen



Toledo's ordinance includes "transgendered," which has been compromised out in some other cities. I believe the above is a completely true explanation of why we succeeded.

MURPHY'S MANOR

by Kurt Erichsen



<http://fourworld.com/user/compuserve.com/homepages/K.Erichsen>

I wasn't on the committee that did the research and writing of the ordinance. My hat is off to those brave martyrs who slogged through the legalese.

MURPHY'S MANOR

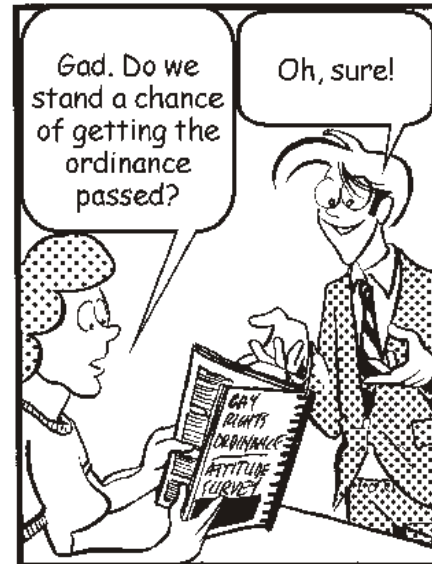
by Kurt Erichsen



I've seen several public opinion polls on gays that show support for civil rights and disdain for sex. Luckily, we didn't have to take steps like the strip below

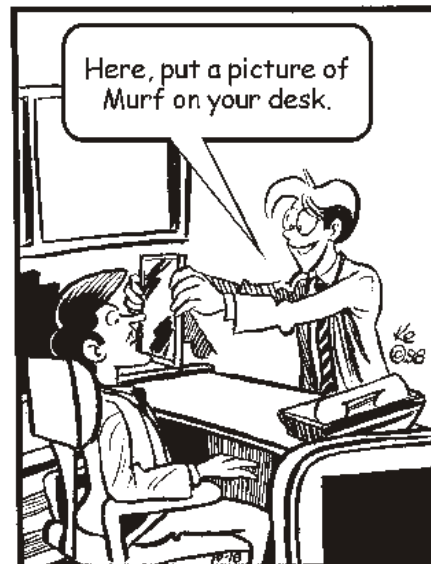
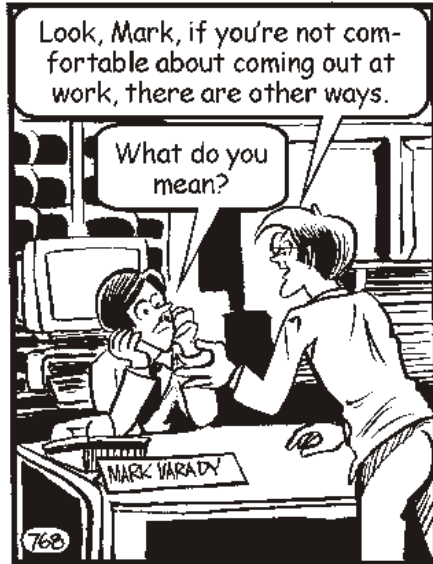
MURPHY'S MANOR

by Kurt Erichsen



MURPHY'S MANOR

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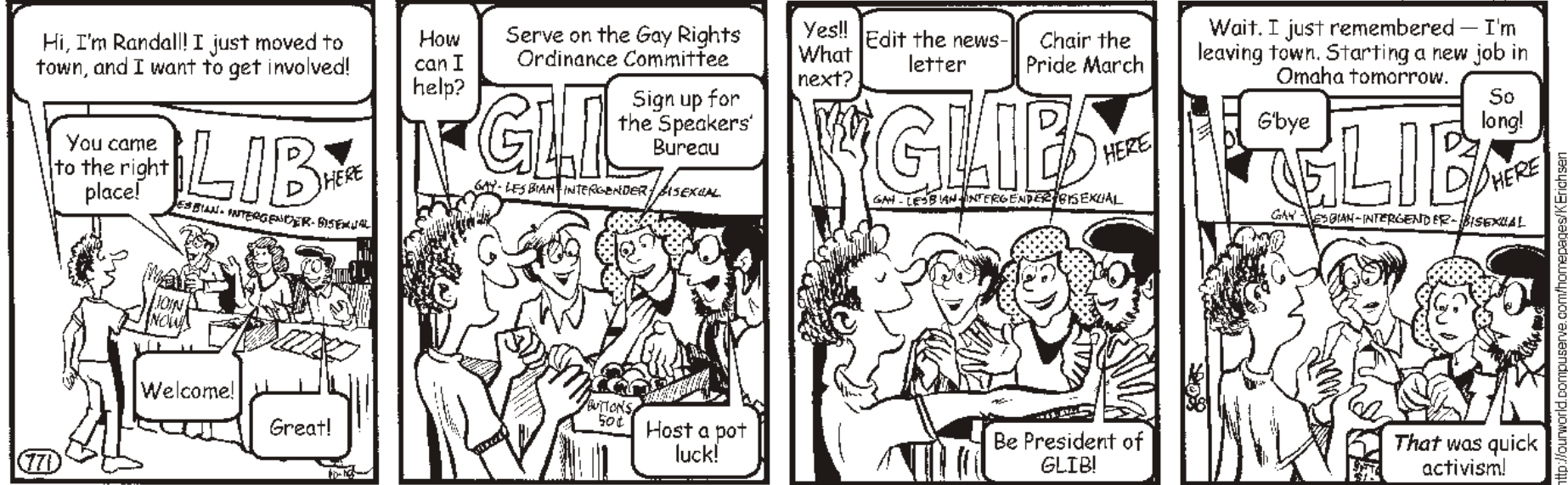


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Coming out is still a selective process.

MURPHY'S MANOR

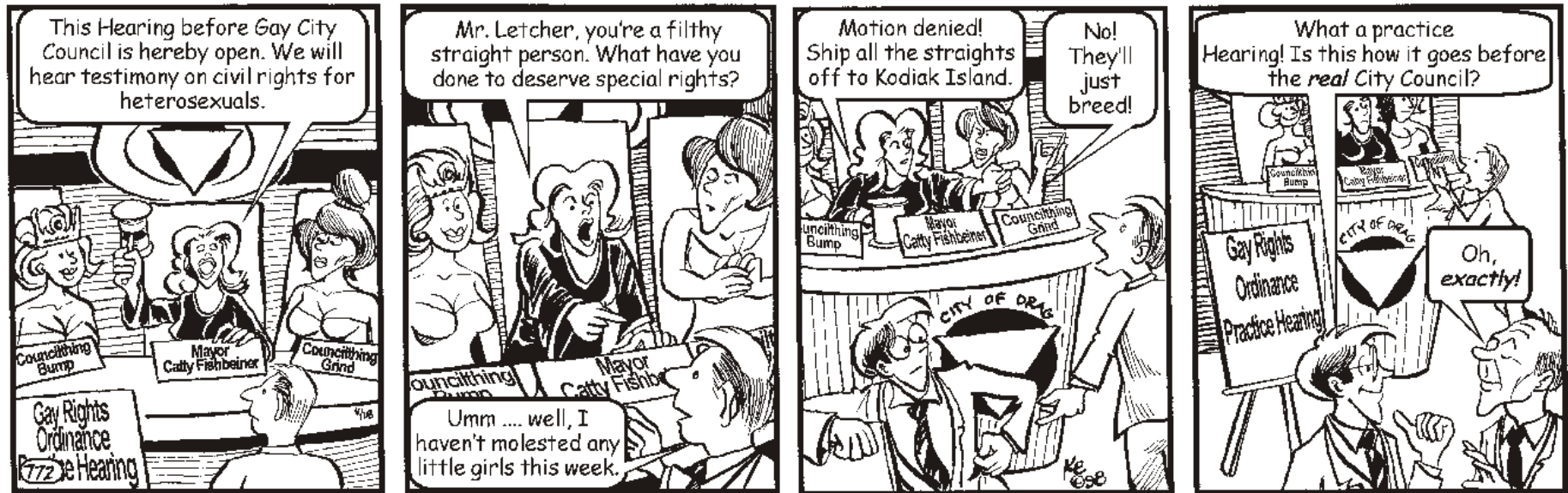
by Kurt Erichsen



This is one of the completely true strips. At one committee meeting I met a man who wanted to get involved and was full of energy and ideas, and I thought he was going to be a great asset. Before the meeting was over I found out he was about to move out of town! Well, it was nice of him to write a comic strip for me.

MURPHY'S MANOR

by Kurt Erichsen

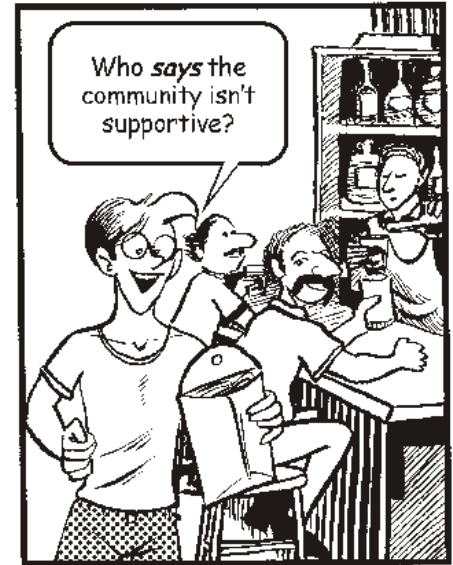
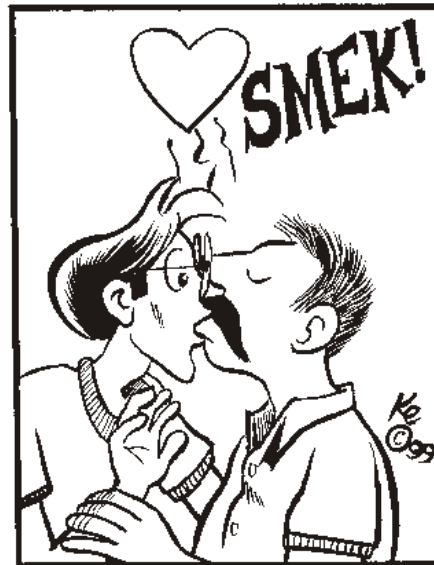


<http://fourworld.com/user/erichsen>

As our work drafting legislation and lining up endorsements for the ordinance drew to a close, we knew the day would come when we had to give our presentation to Council. We held a practice session, but it bore little resemblance to the above. On a local note: when the Public Library brought Joe Kennedy in on a speaking tour, he got the name of our Mayor wrong, calling him "Mayor Fishbeiner."

MURPHY'S MANOR

by Kurt Erichsen

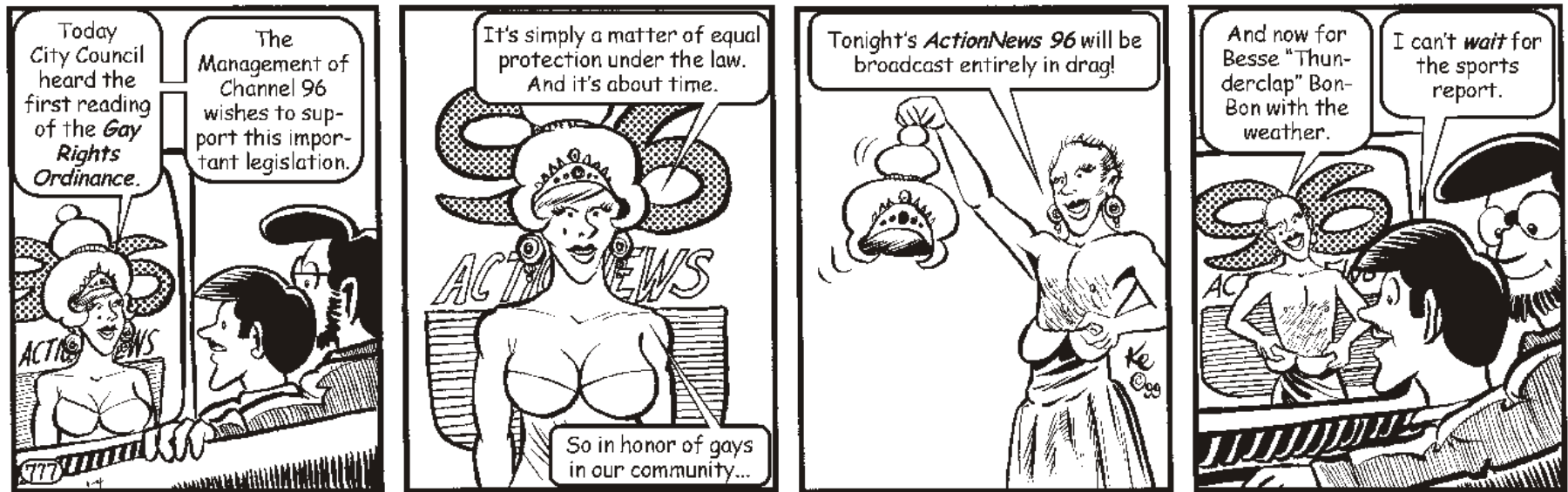


<http://fourworld.com/user/compuserve.com/homepages/K/Erichsen>

Absolutely true. We hit all the bars in town one night, passing out flyers and talking to patrons. I guess you could say I got pretty good feedback.

MURPHY'S MANOR

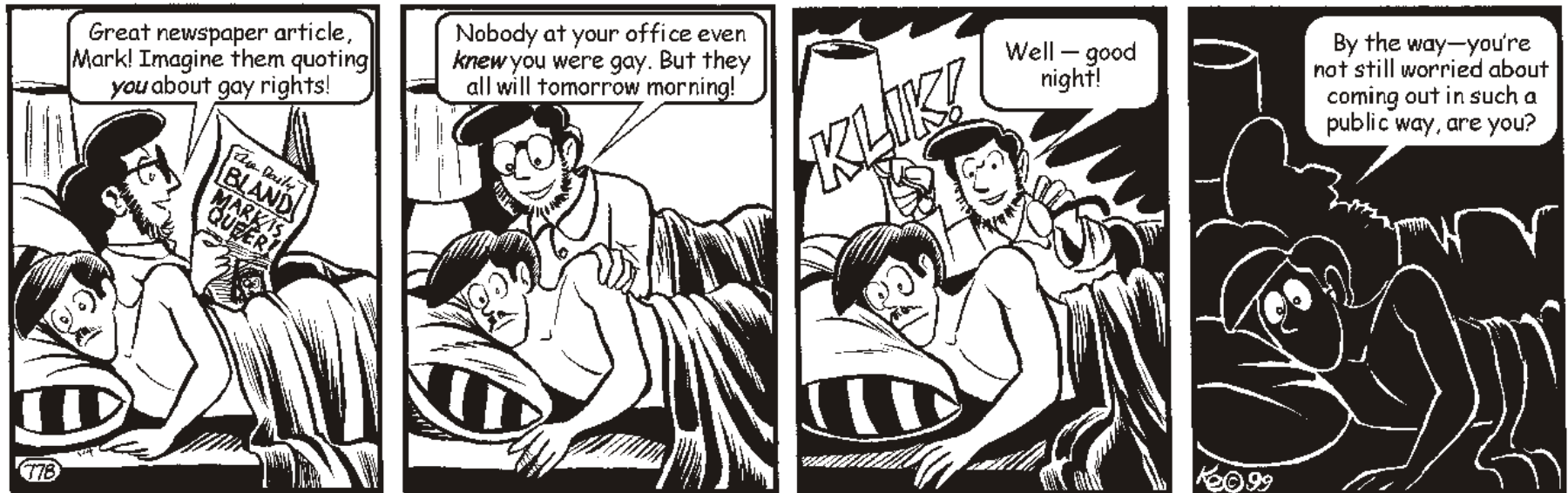
by Kurt Erichsen



While we were working on the ordinance, one of the local TV stations did a supportive piece on gay rights and a rather degrading exposé that equated drag to being gay a few nights later. We tried to puzzle out the logic behind this and completely failed. My theory is that they were well meaning but just stupid.

MURPHY'S MANOR

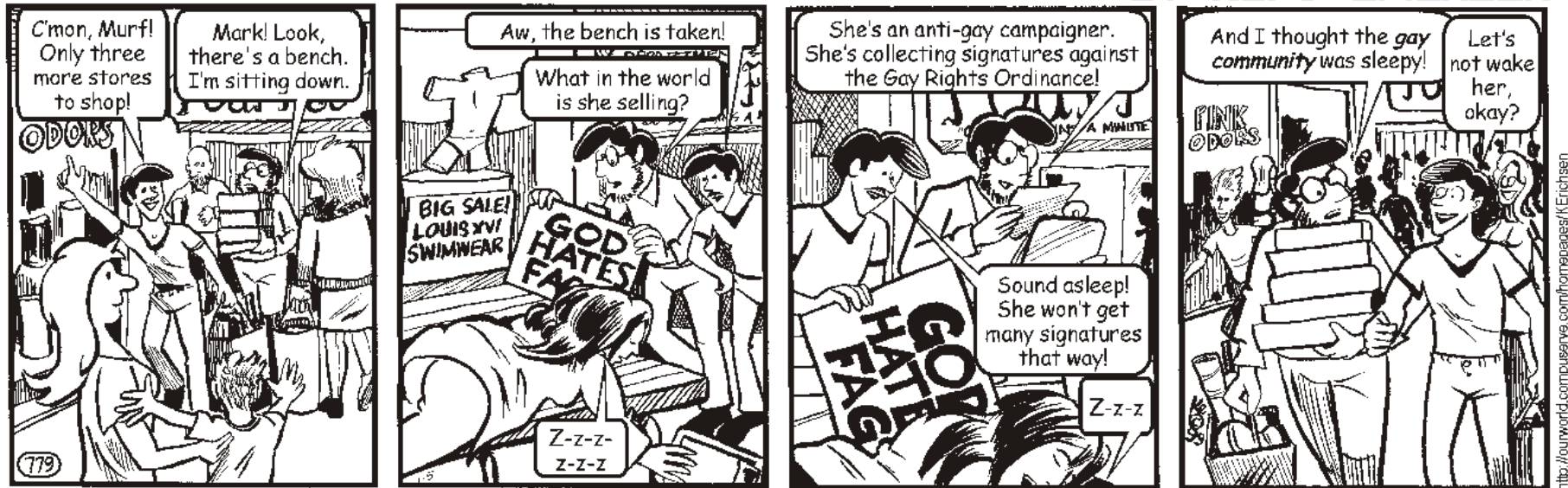
by Kurt Erichsen



This strip is the most autobiographical of all. The Sunday evening before the Ordinance was to be introduced, I got a call from *The Blade*. No, not *that* Blade — I mean *One Of America's Great Newspapers!* As the reporter explained that she wanted to ask me about the proposed Ordinance, I pictured myself walking into the office the next morning with "Queer!" painted on my forehead in big red letters. I've had gay cartoons published under my real name for nearly 20 years, and am out to my family and friends — but the Newspaper of Record was still a step. There was never a question that I was going to stick by my principles, but I did mutter 'well, here goes nothing' as I told her she could publish my name.

MURPHY'S MANOR

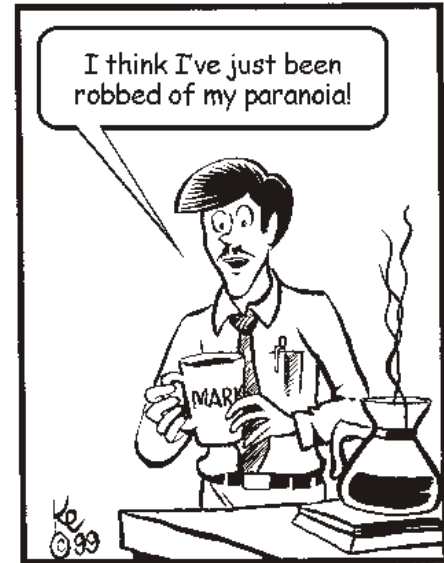
by Kurt Erichsen



Some people regard Toledo as a backwater. The Gay Community here has been accused of being sleepy – but *not quite* as sleepy as the opposition!

MURPHY'S MANOR

by Kurt Erichsen



<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/KErichsen>

After my interview in *The Blade*, I got nothing but positive reaction from my co-workers. If anybody had anything nasty to say, they kept it to themselves.

This strip represents one of my flights of paranoia. It's true that I have a supervisory position, but my coming out has changed nothing, for which I'm glad.

MURPHY'S MANOR

by Kurt Erichsen



The Ordinance finally went before Council with 9 co-sponsors, led by Escobar, and was passed 12-0. It was adopted on December 8, 1998.

MURPHY'S MANOR

by Kurt Erichsen



In closing — we have an ordinance for our city of 320,000 people, but nothing for the surrounding area of 400,000. As more and more of America lives and works in suburbs (which may not be so open to Gay Rights Ordinances as the central city) or unincorporated areas (where there is no municipal government) the one-city-at-a-time approach becomes unsatisfactory. Either we need legislation at the state level, or we should move to our side of the corporate limits.