

FEBRUARY 2004

Houston's gay, lesbian, bi, and trans magazine

# Out Smart



Our First Decade: 1994-2004

[www.outsmartmagazine.com](http://www.outsmartmagazine.com)





# OutSmarted

A couple of friends talk about  
*OutSmart* magazine's beginnings and  
the first 10 years

by Steven Foster • Photos by Tim Brookover



*Steven Foster, longtime contributor to the magazine, sat down with his friend Greg Jeu, magazine founder and publisher, to chat about a decade of OutSmart. Listen in.*

**Steven Foster: You know, you are the worst interviewee on the planet.**

Greg Jeu: I know, I know. You'd think that after doing this for almost 20 years that I'd be better at this. Sorry, I guess that's going to be your problem today, buddy [laughs].

**Before we start walking through some issues, let's talk about how *OutSmart* got started.**

Well, we were still publishing our holistic magazines *Uptown Express* and *Health&Spirit* [1985–1999] at the time. And we had . . .

**Now when you say "we," you mean the people you were working with at the time, but it was really you, right?**

I'm the publisher, but it always has been "we" no matter who was working at the magazine. It really does take an entire team to put the magazine out each month.

**Oh, I got it, go on . . .**

Before we started *OutSmart*, our community had only the typical bar-oriented magazines and the weekly tabloids. They didn't seem to be a great representation of the diversity of the community. With all the sex and bar ads, they just continued to feed the same stereotype of our community. They certainly didn't show the full dimension of gay people. We felt there was so much more to our community that wasn't being

addressed or even being acknowledged. And we really wanted to help empower the community to know our place in the world . . . you know, all the components that make us healthy gay individuals.

**This was 10 years ago. Companies weren't exactly dying to talk to the gay market.**

Right. But one of the biggest decisions we made in the very beginning was to not accept any sex-oriented advertising. And back then, for free pubs, it was their source of revenue, their bread and butter.

Starting out in our first issue we had just a handful of advertisers. We had some very lean years. Today, we have over 200 regular advertisers who support us and the community in *OutSmart*.

Luckily, we discovered a lot of gay-owned



and gay-friendly businesses that wanted to be visible and part of our community, and they also didn't want to be associated with all the sexually explicit advertising.

So we decided early on that we wanted to build the magazine with both gay-owned and gay-friendly advertisers who valued our community. And we really wanted to be partners with them, to help our businesses grow together.

It just seemed a bit more comforting to know that the merchants you were supporting, at the very least, appreciated your business and that the money you gave them wouldn't be given to some religious-right organization to be used against you.

**At any rate, you had some great ideas on how to build the magazine.**

After we got off the ground, people started calling us and gave us some great story suggestions—people they considered their role models, issues that we should address, and stories they thought we should cover. It was a very creative time for us.

**This was right after your partner Joey Cundiff died.**

Everyone knew the toll Joey's death took on me. I told them why [the magazine] was necessary. I felt our community wasn't being educated about important issues they needed to know. And I wanted to help people avoid the same bad experience I had gone through—losing your partner and then your home and assets just because you didn't know about the legal documents that could protect the people you love and care about. It was a nightmare, but looking back, it

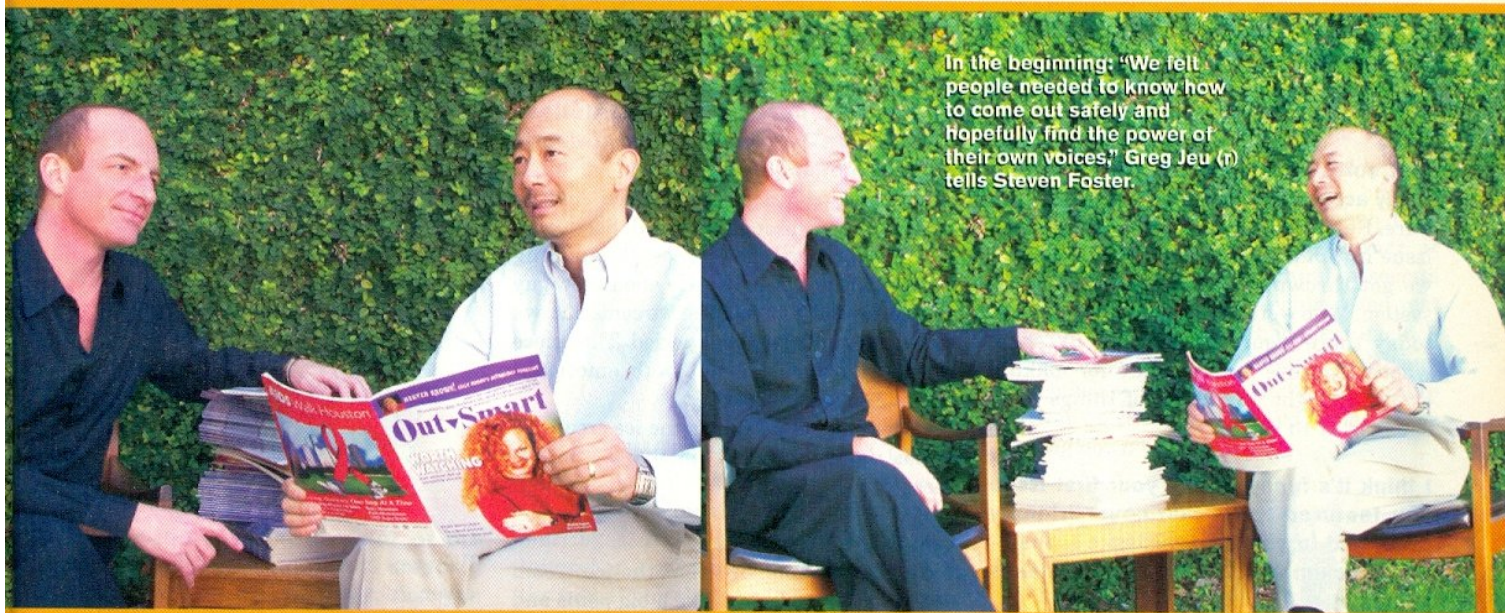
came down to the office and we sat for hours stuffing them into the magazine.

**This is fascinating, talking about this now. I mean, we still have a way to go, of course, but 10 years ago, well . . . face it, who would have thought the sodomy law would have been overturned because of two men from Texas? Come on. It was a fantasy 10 years ago.**

Exactly. I think many of the changes began with the March on Washington in 1992.

**I remember. You and Nancy Ford were in *Newsweek*.**

We were good buddies and she was very involved in the gay community. Nancy and I went to the March in Washington in '92. It was an incredibly healing experience. We were marching with thousands of



In the beginning: "We felt people needed to know how to come out safely and hopefully find the power of their own voices," Greg Jui (r) tells Steven Foster.

A lot of them developed in the early planning days, after I told my friends that I wanted to start up a gay magazine. They literally helped create the vision for it.

I'd ask them to do some creative processing with me. "Pretend for a moment that you just picked up a new gay publication that really spoke to you and you were jazzed about what you read in it. What are you seeing? What are you reading?" We got some terrific ideas. Sometimes there was so much creative energy floating in the room that I swear you could see it.

Most of the people that I talked to were friends who knew the history of where I came from. I even talked to my parents about it. Everyone knew my feelings about the injustice toward gay relationships and how I got shafted.

really was a major catalyst and the fuel to start this publication.

**Back then, the religious right was so powerful. They were such a driving force. And they were teaching so much hate and misinformation about our community.**

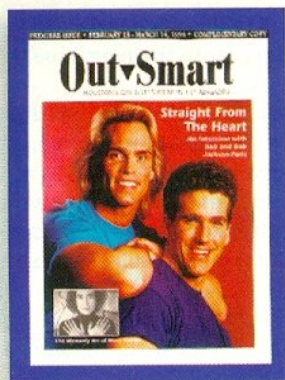
I remember telling my parents what I wanted to do, and they were unbelievably supportive. Growing up as first-generation Asian Americans, they had experienced racial discrimination, and then they witnessed gay discrimination being directed at their son. My family has been such a big part of *OutSmart* even from the start. They've done some incredible things to help out.

I remember one time the printer forgot to do inserts in the paper, and my family

other people. After being discriminated against, after having my relationship disrespected because I was gay, marching with thousands of people helped to re-energize my soul, and it kind of brought things back in perspective.

When we came back, we were hyped and felt so empowered to do something. The only way our community was going to have a voice was to come out and be counted. We wanted to help people with the process. So we named the magazine *OutSmart* because we felt people needed to know how to come out safely and to be smart and educated about our rights . . . and hopefully find the power of their own voices. We all needed to know our political power and the clout that our collective voice could create. →





**First Cover, February 1994**

**Steven Foster: How was the first cover [of then-gay poster boys Rod and Bob Jackson-Paris] decided?**

Greg Jeu: If I remember correctly, I believe they came out with their book [*Straight from the Heart: A Love Story*]. And these guys were going to be at Crossroads Market. People stood in line because it was one of the first gay love stories.

**And, sorry, I think you needed something really accessible on the first cover.**

Sure. But back then we also did a gay pride issue in *Uptown Express* [June 1993], and we got thrown out of the public library system. Who would have ever guessed that today there would be a major TV show where gay guys are the stars for making over a straight guy? A lot of things have changed in 10 years.

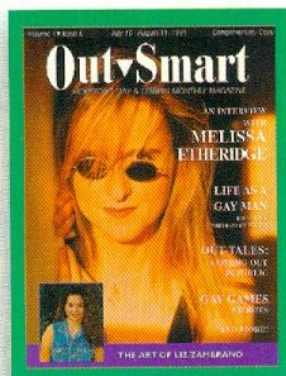
**I think it's funny that in your first issue you featured these two cover-friendly guys, and in your second issue [conservative columnist] Dale Carpenter makes his debut.**

[Laughs] I remember somebody called and said they hated him. "He's a gay Republican!" I had never even heard of a gay Republican. I know this sounds stupid, but it just seemed incomprehensible to me. I just couldn't imagine gay people being part of that political party. And then everybody thought I was a Log Cabin Republican because we published his articles. I think Dale is an excellent writer, but me, a Log Cabin Republican? No.

**So you've put things in the magazine that weren't your bag.**

Oh, absolutely. We were reaching out to the community, and we were fortunate because we had a lot of people who approached us wanting to write pieces for the magazine. We've published some really great interviews and features about health,

spirituality, politics, and other issues that directly addressed the unique needs of our community, and our stories have won awards from both the gay and mainstream press associations. But sometimes I wondered what the hell we were doing. I mean how do you print a gay pub that's mainstream without being cliché about it or flat and dead?



**July 1994**

**You say you didn't know what you were doing, but here you have Melissa Etheridge on the cover. You were obviously doing something right.**

Yeah, Nancy did that. Great piece. And we had many continuing series. Bill Scott, who helped start the Montrose Counseling Center, wrote a great article about how gay people develop—that when we come out, we have a second adolescent period. That piece was really honest about both emotional issues and sexual activity.

Speaking of . . . Here's the ice cream ad [holds up an innocuous image of a multi-scoop cone].

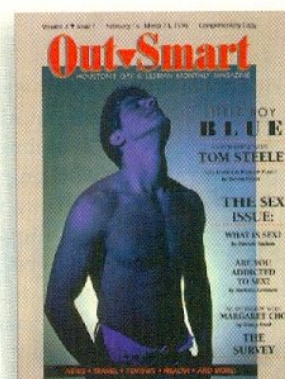
**What's the ice cream ad?**

Fiesta got a complaint that the ice cream cone in their ad looked like a big penis and that it was pornographic. The complaint was more about their company advertising in a gay publication. Unfortunately, I don't think they stepped up to the plate to defend their position. And it must have been at a time that diversity training was not an issue for them. The gay press has always been more scrutinized than the mainstream press.

**February 1996**

**Then you get to The Sex Issue [both laugh]. God, that was controversy.**

You know, I went back and re-read that piece, and I remember how much controversy was stirred up by it. Maybe it was ahead of its time to speak so frankly, but I thought it was a story that needed to be told. This particular issue covered a variety of topics that all had to do with healthy sex-



uality. We discussed sexual addictions. We featured a guy named Tom Steele. He was a guy who had led a tough life. He came from a broken home, his two brothers were in prison, and, by the way, he was also an adult film star.

There was nothing vulgar about our cover photo, and there was nothing vulgar between the pages; however, we were kicked out of Walgreens and Kroger for a few months.

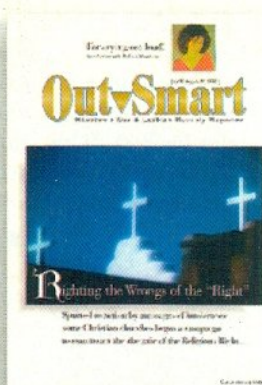


**November 1996**

We were thrilled to have Chastity on our cover. At the time, she was the National GLADD [Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation] spokesperson. Blase [DiStefano] interviewed Chastity, and we were excited about her coming to speak at the LiB [Lesbians in Business] meeting, but Blase wasn't allowed in because he was a guy. A lot of women were really upset, because they felt, as we did, that this event should have been open to the entire community. I remember Lea [Bogle, Premier Paging & Wireless owner] being upset, as a lesbian in the community, that the organization would treat him that way. She saw it as reverse discrimination.

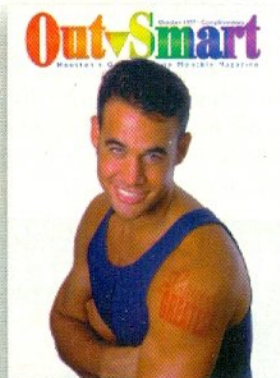
Fortunately, I think our community has improved, and the "all-male" and "all-female" events that specifically exclude people based upon their gender have pretty much disappeared. I think that's a great sign of our community progress.





July 1996

This is one of my favorites, since spirituality has always been a big part of my life. This issue was a way to bring our community and spirituality together in a very special way. It was a way to show that some churches are open and loving and how they embrace both gays and lesbians instead of trying to diminish and destroy us.



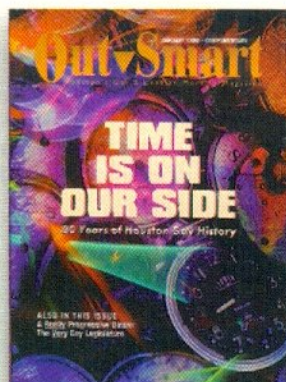
October 1997

This was the year the interior of the magazine had spot color—kinda stepping things up. It was also the year that you started winning awards—National Gay Journalism Association, the Vice Versa. This was important. It was our first Gayest & Greatest Readers' Choice Awards. It is such a great cover.

**And an exhausting concept to keep going year after year.**

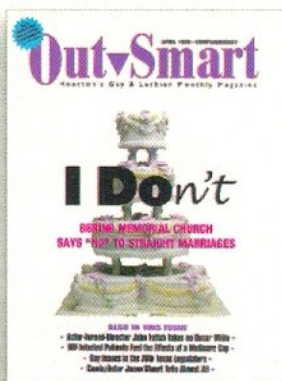
Yes, but it's worth it. It has been very rewarding to give our readers the chance to compliment the people they admire and the businesses they support. And for a lot of businesses, Gayest & Greatest has become a coveted title that they're proud to have received.

**I've always liked how OutSmart covered both global community issues and more local ones. National celebs and hometown heroes.**



January 1999

The Milestones issue was really cool. It was a timeline of Houston gay history, when our community organizations got started. It covered 30 years of our city's gay history starting from 1953 all the way to the year 1999.



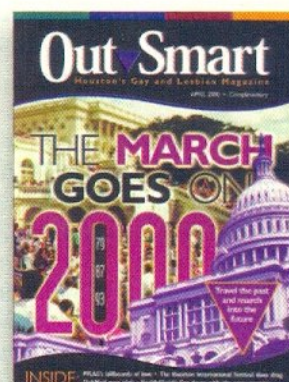
April 1999

This is when Bering [Memorial United Methodist Church] was going to be kicked out of the denomination if they affirmed gay marriages. It was great to document the time when a church realized the hypocrisy, the injustice of that. And they took a stand. [Bering decided to ban all wedding ceremonies in response to the Methodist church ruling that prohibits ministers from performing same-gender unions.]

April 2000

**Here's the big one.**

Yeah, April 2000 is when we switched from newsprint to slick gloss magazine stock. We'd been trying for so long. I was proud because we had a professional and polished look. In newsprint, pictures just don't pop out that well. In slick, everything looks polished. Being on slick improves everything—the way you're marketed, even the public's perception of you. It was a great time, because it transformed us from just a normal freebie magazine into a more high-caliber publication. It brought our product

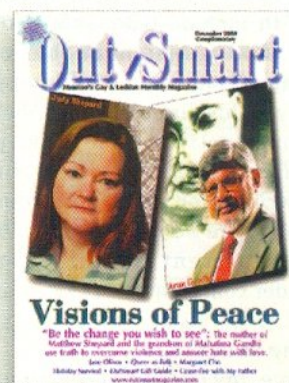


up to a higher standard. We were able to do a lot more graphically, and we were no longer limited by newsprint.

**By this time, OutSmart had won the nation's best gay and lesbian local magazine award for the second year in a row.**

Yes, and it was quite an honor again. The press awards took place at a gay and lesbian journalist summit during the 2000 March [on Washington]. For me, it was the first time that I had really had a chance to connect with other gay publishers. It really helped me to know that we were all facing the same issues together.

At the awards ceremony, when they announced OutSmart as the winner, it caught me off guard. Jim [Hurst, associate publisher] and I were speechless and just so proud of this honor. We had taken a bunch of our coworkers to the march, and I just remember walking back to the table where we were sitting and everyone had tears flowing down their cheeks.



December 2000

This Shepard/Ghandi issue is one of my favorite issues and one of the more powerful pieces that we've published. Alan Davidson interviewed Arun Gandhi, Mahatma Gandhi's grandson, on how to use truth to overcome violence and answer love with hate. We also had an interview by John Aston, who talked with Judy Shepard, Matthew Shepard's mom, on what it would



## OutSmarted continued from previous page

take for the world to be a different and safer place.

Just what Matthew Shepard's father said to his killers gives me chills to think about it. [In a dramatic end to the 1999 case, convicted murderer Aaron McKinney accepted a deal for two life sentences—avoiding the death penalty—brokered at the request of Matthew Shepard's parents, Judy and Dennis Shepard. "Mr. McKinney, I give you life in the memory of one who no longer lives," Dennis Shepard told his son's murderer in court. "... I would like nothing better than to see you die, Mr. McKinney. However, this is the time to begin the healing process. To show mercy to someone who refused to show any mercy. ... Mr. McKinney, I'm going to grant you life, as hard as it is for me to do so, because of Matthew."]



January 2001

**We're up to the month when the cover line changed to include bisexuals and transgenders. And I remember that conversation happening when I first met you.**

Well, Lilly Roddy [astrology contributor and transgender activist] had been part of *Uptown Health&Spirit* for years and then started writing for *OutSmart*, which was perfect for where we were. We did it because it was important to Lilly and the transgender community.

**Talk to me about that.**

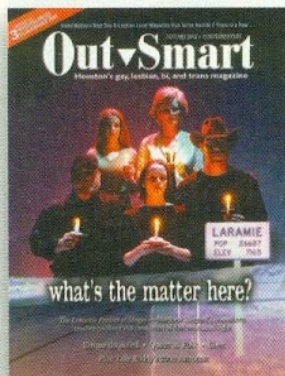
At the time, my concept of *community* was that we were all part of the same community. However, we discussed it at the office, and we went round and round about it.

**That bisexual and transgender people were already included as part of "gay and lesbian"?**

Yes. We just didn't put a label on it. I didn't see "them" as separate from "us." I always assumed gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgenders were all part of the "gay community."

**So what changed you?**

I think [then-editor] Ann Sieber's sensitivity to the transgender community helped us understand that the transgender community felt left out. It was important that everyone in the community felt like they were included.

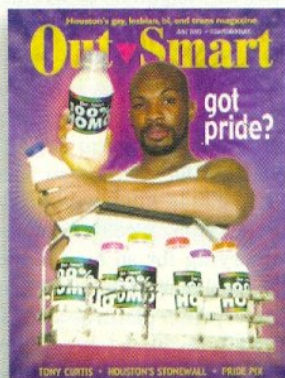


January 2002

**And then '02.**

We went back to newsprint. After 9/11, we almost bit the dust on the printing. Advertisers didn't know what they were going to do. No one knew what they were going to do.

It was hard stepping back to the old newsprint-style paper after having felt like we stepped up with the full-glossy magazine. That was really difficult for us. I remember getting a very kind note from Susie Works. I had met her years ago when she used to place ads for Theatre Under The Stars. She said that she really respected the content we were producing in *OutSmart* and that it didn't matter really what kind of paper we were printed on. That I shouldn't worry about it. She really helped take the sting out of what seemed like a tough business decision. But still it mattered to me. I knew we had to do this to survive. ... And so we did.



June 2002

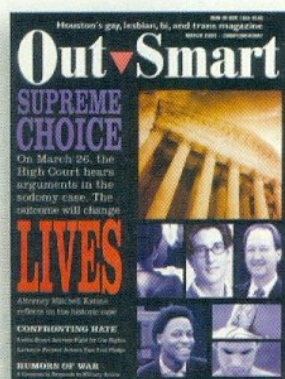
**Oh! This Pride issue. This is the one with the Tony Curtis interview!**

You know, people had tried to find out if he'd hopped the fence for years and, go figure, Blase basically gets him to admit it. Even the tabloids picked it up. That was pretty fun. [Curtis later backed off his statements to *OutSmart* in interviews with other publications, including *Vanity Fair*.]



January 2003

This was Tim's [Brookover, *OutSmart*'s current editor] initiation in starting an annual tradition of featuring people in our community whose names you might not recognize. It has been a great hit, and we just finished our second People to Watch issue. This has been one of many of his innovative ideas.



March 2003

Now, this is one of our best covers. Extremely powerful! It was hell for us to do this story. Josef Molnar, who wrote the feature, traveled to Washington, D.C., to attend the hearing before the Supreme Court. We knew this event was history in the making, and we knew we had to be there in person to cover it.

**And this is the month you went back to slick, too.**

Yes, it was a big step to return to slick paper so quickly after 9/11, but we felt doing that was important for the magazine, and we were fortunately in a better financial place at the time that made the move possible.





October 2003

Here are two humble people [*Lawrence v. Texas* petitioners John Lawrence and Tyron Garner] who were not seeking publicity and ended up as symbols for equality. I think God used them for a larger purpose. Look what it did for the entire nation, especially when you realize what they were up against, when you realize they could have pled guilty and faded into the background. They're heroes.

**The simplicity of that truth . . . it's revelatory.**

Yes, absolutely. They took the high road.

**Don't you think you've done that with the magazine—taken the high road?**

I can't say for sure, but I hope I have. Look, I think we're all given opportunities to do great things, and sometimes we recognize them, sometimes we don't. I know from experience that when we feel empowered and inspired, our path sure does seem more illuminated and clearly defined. It's a lot easier to be pro-active and take action with your life when you have healthy self-esteem and a sense of pride in yourself, whether you're gay or straight.

*Read an expanded version of this interview at [www.outsmartmagazine.com](http://www.outsmartmagazine.com).*

*Steven Foster began contributing to OutSmart magazine with the third issue. He appeared on the cover of the November 2001 issue as the subject of "Sleeping with the Anime" and was part of the inaugural "People to Watch" class in the January 2003 issue.*