

PC World Editor Blasts Ga. Sodomy Law

Progay Editorial Generates Angry Responses

by Peter Frelberg

When the half million subscribers to *PC World* and *Mac World*, two national computer magazines, received the November issues, they could not help but be surprised. In the space reserved for editorials, where editor and company chairman David Bunnell usually writes about topics directly related to personal computers, his commentary for the month was headlined, "Coming Out of the PC Closet."

The editorial was not a personal coming out piece, for Bunnell is straight. Instead, Bunnell delivered a sustained attack on Georgia's sodomy law, the legislation that was the basis for the U.S. Supreme Court's decision last June upholding the right of states to ban consensual, private gay sodomy.

Using strong language, Bunnell called Georgia "the home of an oppressive law" that conflicts with the ideal of greater freedom offered by the personal computer. He

asserted that the "personal computer world should think twice about supporting high-tech development in states that lack a decent social climate for high-tech to operate in." And he concluded by giving Georgia Gov. Joe Frank Harris' address so that readers could write demanding a repeal of the sodomy law.

Readers wrote—to both Harris and Bunnell. According to Barbara Morgan, press secretary to the conservative Georgia Democrat, "several hundred" letters were sent to the governor, most of them supporting the sodomy law. In a reply to one letter-writer, Harris reiterated his "total support" for the law.

Bunnell, meanwhile, has received more than 1,000 letters, with only about 20% agreeing with his position; the remainder either felt he had no business discussing the issue in a computer magazine or expressed strong support for sodomy laws. Some ripped out Bunnell's column and wrote *queer* and *fag* across it.

Nor did the controversy end with letter-

writing. In Georgia, some fundamentalist computer businesspeople called for advertisers and readers to boycott the magazines. J.B. Deters, president of Peachtree Technology Inc., was quoted by the AP as saying, "If the guy wants to push his ideas about gay sex, he doesn't get to do it with my \$8,000. We don't need some pundit from San Francisco rubbing dirt in our faces."

Bunnell reported that about \$32,000 worth of monthly ads, including Deters',

ers and engineers have "been the brains behind some of the most significant products" in the personal computer industry. Bunnell asked, "How can people who are gay feel secure living in Georgia when an inhumane law hangs over their heads like the sword of Damocles?"

Bunnell wrote that all "concerned citizens... should come out of our closets and rally to the cause of justice and freedom by exorcising this distinctly user-unfriendly law."

Bunnell said he was touched by some of the expressions of support, some of them from gays in the computer business.

"I was in Dallas, and a man in his 50s came up to me and he had tears in his eyes. He said his son was a gay programmer, and he said, 'You don't know how much I appreciated that column.'"

Bunnell commented, "Even though only 20% of the letters were favorable, it was worth it. You can't run a good magazine as a popularity contest. Some of our

sales people are pretty concerned about losing advertising pages, but I say in the long run the magazine is going to benefit. We're putting a human face on it."

The editorial drew praise from High Tech Gays (HTG), a San Jose-based organization of gay people in the computer industry. "I was initially surprised," commented HTG President Rick Rudy. "It seemed like an unlikely place for such an editorial, but I was very pleased... Even gay people have a hard time going out on a limb like that... I think it was remarkably brave."

Bunnell has accepted an invitation to address an HTG meeting in January. The 39-year-old head of PCW Communications Inc. believes it is more important than ever that people speak out.

"We can't let the fundamentalist right-wing Christians take over the country..." Bunnell noted, "because they are a minority and they don't have the right to impose their values on everybody."

THOMAS MICHAEL ALLEMAN



Out of the "PC closet": Editor David Bunnell blasted Georgia as "the home of an oppressive law."

have been withdrawn; in addition, some 100 readers have canceled subscriptions. No other article or commentary in the magazines' history ever generated such reaction.

"I'm a little bit overwhelmed by it all," Bunnell said in an interview. "I knew it was controversial, I expected some reaction, but it's... more than what I had thought would come."

"The letters come from everywhere. There's a lot of hatred of gays. It's very disturbing. I'm shocked, and I'm concerned about the fundamentalist right-wing Christians who think they founded the country and that America is a Christian country."

Bunnell expressed no regrets about writing the editorial: "I'm glad I did it. I think it's important that people speak out and say what they believe. I think that just because we're a personal computer magazine doesn't mean we're not a part of the culture and society that we live in."

Noting that gay programmers, design-