

Question of the Week

by Angela Szesciorcka, news editor

How will Wal-Mart affect the area?



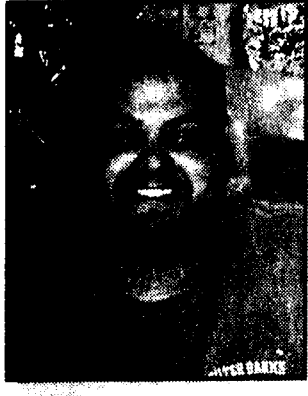
"It's probably going to put some of the local businesses out."

Nichloas Hudak
MISBD, 06



"It means more employment for students."

Chrissey Lambert
ASTRO, 02



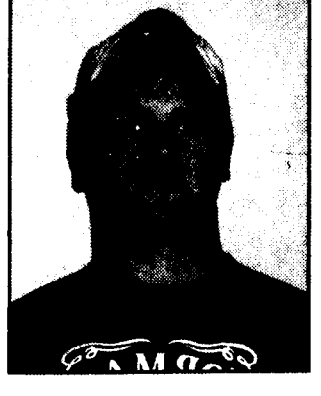
"It's somewhere to go other than Giant Eagle."

Ryan Orrico
MISBD, 06



"It's more convenient for those who don't have cars."

Dennys Franklin
BCBUS, 04



"It's not going to affect me because I don't go to those stores."

Justin Pityk
MISBD, 08

Have a suggestion for Question of the Week? Email your question to us at: behrcoll2@aol.com.

Seton Hall gay student group fights for equality

by Patricia Alex
The Record

Anthony Romeo says he only wants the camaraderie and recognition that other students at Seton Hall University have.

After all, he argues, there are more than 100 student groups and clubs recognized on campus in which students sort themselves based on everything from ethnicity to hobbies.

But Romeo's TRUTH organization a support group for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and homosexual students has had a tougher time of it at the Catholic university.

The group's application for university recognition was denied last month because administrators found it at odds with the school's Catholic mission.

"The most compelling guidance from the church directs us to care for the human person whose fundamental identity is as a "child of God" not a "heterosexual" or "homosexual," wrote Dr. Laura Wankel, vice president for student affairs. "No organization based solely upon sexual orientation may receive formal university recognition."

Though it denied the group official recognition, the university said TRUTH may operate on campus, apply for funds from the office of student affairs, and host educational events, meetings, and programs. The group cannot, however, host social events or sponsor religious services or activities.

The half-a-loaf approach is part of a balancing act that has played itself out at Catholic colleges and universities across the country. Catholic academe's version of "don't ask, don't tell." Official church teaching condemns homosexual acts.

"With public colleges, it's pretty straightforward _ they have to recognize these groups," said Nick Sakurai, director of the US Student Association's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Empowerment Project. "With private ones it's a little more gray. I've seen Catholic colleges that do recognize LGBT student groups, but it seems to vary from diocese to diocese."

At Loyola University in New Orleans, the school's LGBT group, which started in the early 1990s, has formal recognition and is funded by the student government, said Tyler Douglas, the co-president. He said the group, called Etcetera, encountered some resistance early on but now is fully accepted and very active on campus.

"The nickname for Loyola is Gayola," said Douglas. "It's a very, very gay school and it's

become a very open campus."

At Boston College, the school's LGBT group has been around for 30 years and has been denied several applications for college recognition. Closer to home, a group at Fordham University in the Bronx was denied recognition while another at the university's law school at Lincoln Center is recognized.

The Seton Hall compromise seems to be modeled after a similar setup at Georgetown University following a lawsuit in 1987 by students denied recognition. The courts found that a private university is not required to recognize a group but cannot withhold "tangible benefits" available to all groups, including funding.

At Seton Hall, Romeo said he will discuss the university's offer of a "special standing" with some of the other 20 members of his group. He admits the offer is a place to start but says the special standing funding smacks of "hush money."

"We just want a place at the table," said Romeo, a junior from upstate New York. "We're not asking for more or less than other groups."

Romeo said his group's application for recognition didn't follow regular channels and instead was bumped up to the archdiocese before coming back down as a denial. Jim Goodness, spokesman for the archdiocese, said he was unaware of the issue.

TRUTH's faculty adviser did not return calls for comment and Wankel's office referred questions to a university spokeswoman.

Natalie Thigpen, a spokeswoman for the university, said, "We acknowledge the need to work with the students in this area through an ongoing dialogue. We want to work with them to meet their goals but in a way that we're sure will be consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church."

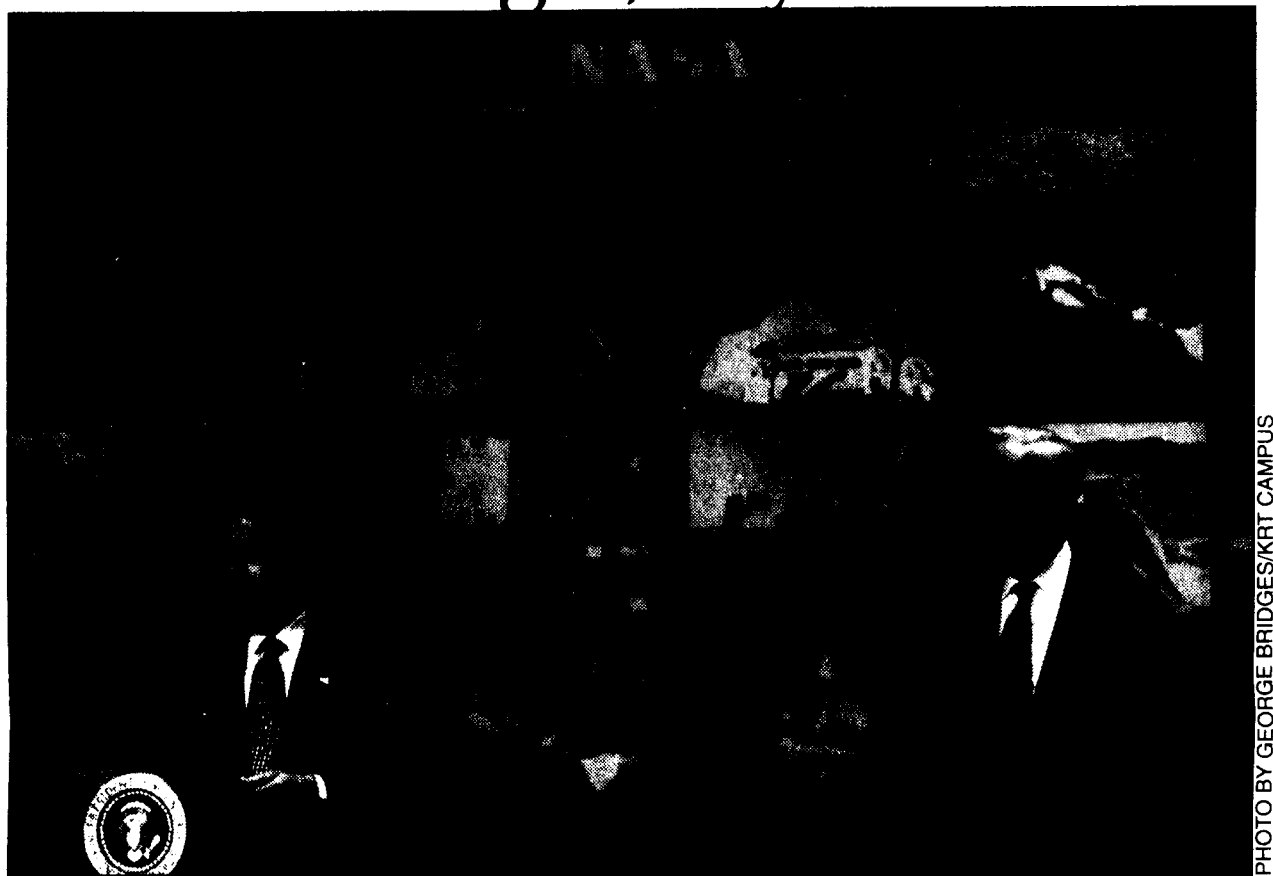
But Romeo feels the university has inconsistently applied the "Catholic mission" rationale. He argues, for instance, that the spouses of divorced employees receive health benefits through the university even though Catholic teaching is opposed to divorce.

Romeo said the group is needed since there have been a half-dozen incidents of anti-gay graffiti in campus dormitories in recent months.

He, too, was a victim, when epithets were scrawled on his door in Aquinas Hall in October.

"We need a forum for discourse and discussion," he said. "I didn't have that when it happened to me."

NASA in dark over Moon-Mars mission budget, says O'Keefe



President George W. Bush, left, with NASA Administrator Sean O'Keefe, right, speaks about new goals for NASA, including sending manned missions to the moon.

by Seth Borenstein
Knight Ridder Newspapers

How much will President Bush's grand plan to send astronauts to the moon and then Mars cost? NASA Administrator Sean O'Keefe said Wednesday that his agency doesn't know and doesn't want to know just yet.

Coming up with a cost for the mission or even a date for sending humans to Mars would "start to close off options," O'Keefe said. When pressed by reporters Wednesday for a ballpark overall price tag, he responded, "Let's not presume that somehow we've got an answer to it now."

Critics, liberal and conservative, challenged what they called the

agency's blank-check approach.

"There's no other program of this magnitude that Congress has ever endorsed where they didn't have at least an estimate for the price tag," said former Rep. Dick Zimmer, R-N.J., a fiscal conservative who often challenged NASA while in Congress. "It's bad management; it's probably bad politics. I don't think they're going to get away with it."

Jill Lancelot, president of the liberal Taxpayers for Common Sense, a Washington budget watchdog group, said the administration "ought to be down-to-earth with the American public instead of putting out these pie-in-the-sky plans. ... In this time of record budget deficits, we certainly don't want

to start a project when we don't know what the costs are."

Lancelot said NASA's approach is the equivalent of buying a house or car without knowing the bottom-line costs. O'Keefe said that's an unfair comparison because NASA hasn't designed the mission so it doesn't know what the house will look like.

O'Keefe, a former deputy budget director and self-professed "bean counter," said this approach is part of a new kind of NASA thinking that's outside conventional limits and assumptions.

NASA has come up with 25 to 30 different possibilities for the mission in recent months and some look better than others, O'Keefe said. Though he declined to offer a cost estimate, he said figures of \$500 billion or \$1 trillion were "preposterous."



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