

# Henderson may end gay-bias law

By KIMBERLY HEFLING  
Associated Press

HENDERSON, Ky. — As James Matthews puffs on a miniature cigar at the counter of the Eastgate Family Restaurant, he explains why Henderson doesn't need an ordinance protecting gays from discrimination in housing, employment and public accommodations.

"I think there's enough laws to protect everybody," says Matthews, 66. "Do you see anybody being unfair to anybody in this town?"

Jack Caton, 54, joins in the conversation from a nearby table. "It's a disgusting thing," says Caton, who owns a mobile-home dealership. "If anybody reads the Bible or anything, they'd know God doesn't want it."

The gay-rights law, often called the fairness ordinance, is likely to be repealed Tuesday by the Henderson City Council because anti-ordinance forces won enough council seats in the November election to overturn it. But the Ohio River city with 26,000 residents remains divided on the issue.

"Anything anybody wants to do is their business," says James Sutton, 72, also at the diner, who doesn't have a problem with the ordinance.

"What people want to do in their bedroom is their business."

Last fall, Sonny Ward, a council member who voted for the ordinance in October 1999, chose not to seek re-election. His seat on the five-member council was won by Bob Hall, who opposed the ordinance.

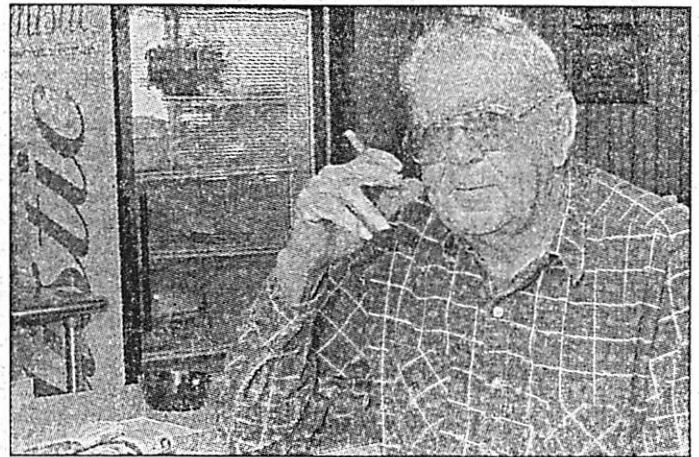
**THE ORDINANCE** was proposed by the Henderson Fairness Alliance, a gay-rights group led by Katherine Hope Goodman, a Xerox employee, and by the Rev. Ben Guess, then-minister of Zion United Church of Christ who has since been transferred to Cleveland.

When proposing the ordinance, Goodman and Guess presented council members with examples of discrimination against gays in the town.

The issue pitted church against church and neighbor against neighbor. At a public hearing it was standing room only as people from both sides lined up to state their opinion.

"I know cases where people have been friends for years, yet no longer speak to each other," Hall says.

Glenda Guess, Ben Guess' mother and a gay-rights activist, says there were times when the situation was so tense she



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"I think there's enough laws to protect everybody," said James Matthews, who opposes Henderson's gay-rights ordinance.

feared for her son's life.

"I really didn't think there was that much hatred in the name of religion, that much fear in the hearts of people," Glenda Guess says.

Before the ordinance was discussed, homosexuality was a taboo subject in Henderson, she says, describing the silence as "deafening."

Goodman says she thinks it's good the subject was finally out in the open, even if painful things were said.

"One thing folks in Henderson are to understand is that discrimination is a subtle form of hatred, and that type of hatred has no place in our community," she says.

No discrimination complaints were filed under the gay-rights ordinance, Goodman says.

The ordinance was chal-

lenged in court by a Henderson couple backed by Pat Robertson's American Center for Law and Justice who claimed it forced them as landlords to violate their religious beliefs by "facilitating or supporting such a sinful lifestyle."

**THE SUIT** was eventually dropped because the ordinance exempted single-family housing units, which the couple owned, says their attorney Francis Manion, of New Hope.

Similar ordinances have been adopted in Louisville, Jefferson County and Lexington.

"I believe the climate has changed for the good," Glenda Guess says. "I think there still has to be some healing, but I think we have to reach out to even those who spoke bitterly against us to try to heal our community."