



ENTERTAINMENT

March 6, 1991

*Cruise*

MAGAZINE

# Tony Garneau

"Monday's child is fair of face," starts the old poem, and on Monday, June 13, 1938, Anthony A. Garneau was born to Bessie and Alfonse Garneau in the Drayton Plains (now Waterford) area of Michigan. Bessie and Al operated a small farm, and no doubt needed the eight children their union was to bear — four sons and four daughters. Tony Garneau passed from this earth on Sunday, February 24, 1991.

Young Tony was to distinguish himself in school. One of those who came to call at the funeral home was one of his grade school teachers, now 81 years young and full of stories about "young Anthony." Leadership and care for others were evident even as a boy. She remembered him on the school safety patrol and how good he was at looking out for the younger ones at school.

After graduating from high school, he joined the United States Navy and served from 1957 to 1959. During his two-year stint in the service, he managed to see a bit of the world when his ship called at several foreign ports.

Returning home from the service, Tony took a job with the A & P Supermarket chain. Again his leadership skills came to the fore as he worked his way up to become a Store Manager — the job he held when he left the company to open a bar. Here too, you could get a sense of the impact Tony had on his fellow workers when they came to call to pay tribute to the man that they had known and loved. The fact that it had been over eighteen years since they had worked together did not matter.

## Cover Story

High school graduation photo of Tony Garneau circa 1955.

In 1973, Tony bought the Gigi's Supper Club on West Warren in Detroit. The age of the great supper clubs had waned and Tony saw the possibilities of creating a place that would be just right for the Detroit area's emerging lesbian and gay community to gather and socialize in comfort. The building, hard in an old Polish neighborhood, needed a good deal of work, and not all of it could be done at once. In February of 1973, the bar opened in the downstairs area, while work continued on fixing up the upper level. Once the upstairs area was finished, the business moved upstairs, and the downstairs languished as Spring rains and heavy storms would flood the basement from time to time.

In the Spring of 1977, the basement was pumped out and cleaned up, and the downstairs was opened as "Foof's Down Under." That lasted about a year and a half, closing with a big farewell New Year's Eve party on December 31, 1978.

A few months later, they re-opened the basement as the "Branded Man," Detroit's first gay country/leather bar. In the Summer of 1979, the operation just became the Upper and Lower Decks of Gigi's. During the 1980's, the downstairs became a westside space for women, and Friday night female dancers were begun.

Through the years, Gigi's has become known as an all around gay bar serving both a male and a female clientele. In many ways, it was like a bar you would find in a town that had only one gay bar. Early on, the bar established its Monday night male dancers show that has become an institution in the Detroit gay community that continues to this day. In the same regard, Detroit's show community has always had a home at Gigi's. While many other show venues have come and

## COVER STORY

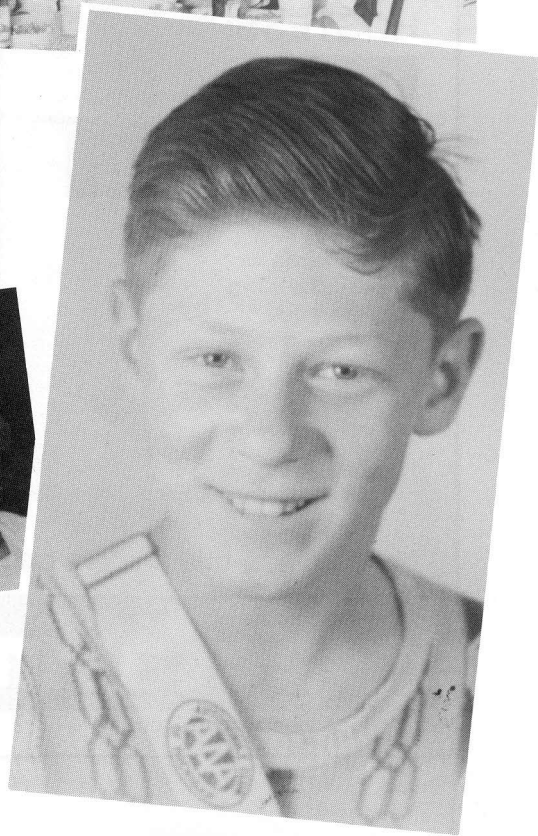
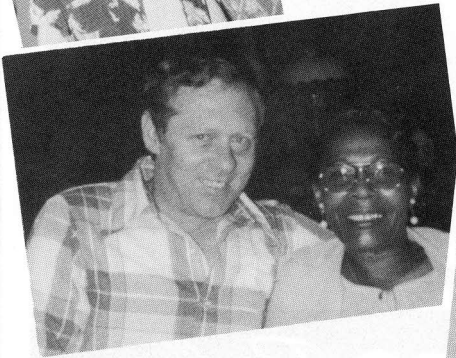
gone, there has always been a show schedule at Gigi's. All of this is the way Tony wanted it. His philosophy was a simple one of serving the clientele and creating a comfortable and friendly place.

It was Tony's wish that the bar continue to operate after his death, and in that regard, he made the necessary legal arrangements to assure that it would. The bar continues to operate in the hands of several longtime employees, one of his nephews, and some friends.

While building a going business on Detroit's westside, Tony again used his

leadership skills in a number of needed and, in some cases necessary, causes. Through his longtime friend and mentor Bookie Stewart, he became interested in helping meet the needs of Autistic Children, and in Boysville of Michigan.

Early on at Gigi's, he spearheaded a drive to collect toys and money for items to be given to children who might not otherwise have a Christmas. This Toys for Tots effort has continued annually ever since. True to his form, Tony was not content to raise the funds or collect the toys and turn them over to some agency to possibly use some of the funds for



**Anthony A. Garneau**

June 13, 1938 -  
February 24, 1991

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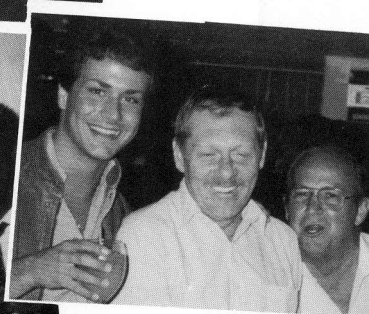
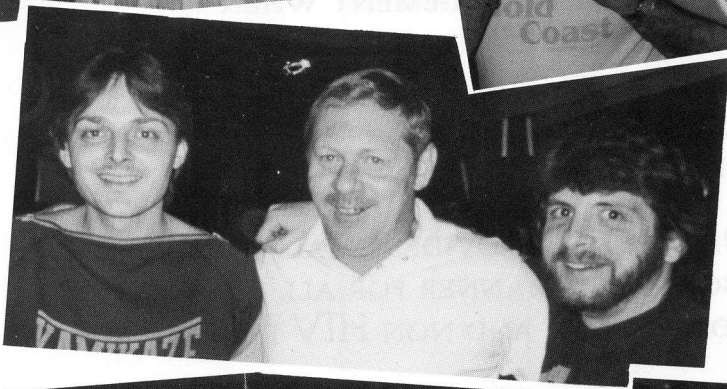
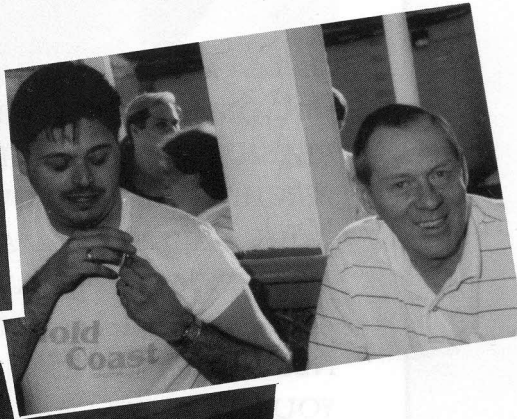
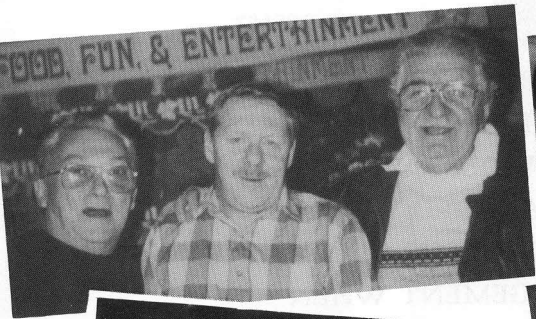
administrative costs. The days before Christmas would find Tony renting a truck and recruiting others to help him put together and deliver the packages to the needy families.

The Detroit gay and lesbian community also has benefited from Tony's leadership. He helped form Bars and Towels, Inc. (BTI), an early organization of owners of gay businesses. Among BTI's innovations were annual summer picnics, and the Sunday BTI Mixed Bowling League, which went on to become the largest (gay or straight) mixed bowling league in the country. The bowling league conti-

nued long after the BTI organization folded, and is still bowling Sundays at the State Fair Lanes in Detroit.

When there was talk in 1982 of formally organizing Detroit's gay bars into the Detroit Bar Guild (DBG), Tony was there to help. He served as president of the organization, and was always there when some work needed to be done.

When the scourge of AIDS began to rear its head in Detroit, Tony and others in the DBG decided that Wellness House, a recently organized entity formed to assure that people with AIDS (PWA's)





had a place to call home, deserved their support. Likewise, Tony donated his time and efforts to the Health Education Association of Detroit (HEAD) — a group organized to provide assistance to people in the Detroit area who have needs (financial or otherwise) as a direct result of AIDS. Tony was a member of the Board of HEAD at the time of his death.

His altruism was not channeled exclusively through organizations such as the DBG and HEAD. Many have spoken of his generosity in personal and soft spoken ways. It was not uncommon for him to help out a friend or customer in need. He would pay the rent or hospital bill or whatever else was needed at the time. Many have related personal stories of help Tony provided them whether it be a loan of money, advice or help getting them out of a mess of some sort.

Often Tony was one of the first customers when a new place opened within the gay community, introducing himself and offering to help in any way he could — and he meant it! Likewise, when a special event or anniversary came along, Tony was right there to congratulate or console.

Tony was just a great, generous man, a good decent soul with a stubborn pride. He did things not for show or admiration, but because it was the right thing to do. No, don't talk about a public thank you or giving him some award, he only did what was right.

Some, however, refused to listen and in June, 1990, Tony Garneau was honored by the City of Detroit with its Spirit of Detroit Award recognizing him for a lifetime of giving and caring for the people and the city where he lived and worked.

A man of simple pleasures, when Tony allowed himself to break away, he liked to garden and landscape. His home in the Rosedale Park area of Detroit and the surrounding berms and traffic islands benefited from his skill and hard work. All the people in his neighborhood came to know and love Tony like so many others had. His little garden in the back-

yard was a prolific one, and he was always sharing his bounty of tomatoes, peppers, etc. with his neighbors and friends.

When Tony allowed himself to really get away, he would visit Key West, Florida — a place he truly loved. "He was the best known out-of-towner on the island," explains Key West resident and longtime friend, Hank Trent. Tony's gregarious and friendly personality quickly made him seem like a native. Tony had hoped that when it came time for him to retire, that he would move to Key West to live out his final days. For that reason, friends hope to take his cremated remains to Key West and to scatter them in the Gulf of Mexico at sunset.

About a year ago, Tony's health began to fail him. True to his nature, he kept it quiet and began to fight it on his own. When cancer was discovered, doctors began chemotherapy and in early January of this year, he had colostomy surgery. He had been undergoing therapy after the surgery when things took a turn for the worse. He was in good spirits to the end and thankfully did not suffer much for very long. He died quietly in Mount Carmel Mercy Hospital early on the morning of Sunday, February 24, 1991.

Private funeral services were held on February 26 at the Coats Funeral Home in Waterford. The family and his staff also received those wishing to call at Gigi's that same afternoon.

Tony Garneau is survived by three sisters, one brother and sixteen nieces and nephews. In addition, he leaves thousands of loving friends, colleagues and customers in this community in which he worked and led.

His staff and those who loved him have asked that memorial contributions be made to the Health Education Association of Detroit (HEAD), 660 Livernois, Ferndale, Michigan 48220. Tony would tell you not to give in his name, but to give because it is needed and it is the right thing to do.

— Phillip O'Jibway