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## Washington Blade marks 35th anniversary

BLADE, continued from Page 63

used the pen name "Lou Romano."

"The reason I [used a pseudonym] was not because I wasn't out," Chibbaro says. "The reason was because I was a full-time employee for a trade association at the time, and they would not allow me to write freelance, particularly for a gay publication."

Nevertheless, during the mid- to late-1970s, the Gay Blade continued to grow. The number of pages increased, along with the size of its volunteer staff, and plans began unfolding to publish the newsletter more frequently.

Also, the Blade was printed on newsprint for the first time in 1974, and by the end of the year was being printed in the same tabloid size that it still maintains today. Also that year, the Blade moved into its first offices in Dupont Circle. Two years later, it expanded into a two-room suite on the 2400 block of Pennsylvania Ave., NW.

In 1975, the newspaper became incorporated as a non-profit corporation under the mantle Blade Communications Inc., and the staff decided to drop "gay" from the paper's



**Don Michaels** became the Blade's first full-time staffer in 1977, and was later editor and then publisher of the newspaper. Michaels, who left the Blade after he and two other principal owners sold it to Window Media in 2001, first banned the use of pseudonyms by Blade writers.

title, making it officially just the Blade.

Some accused the editors of trying to steer the newspaper into the closet, but the name change involved a more practical concern: It was discovered that a New York publication already owned the copyright for the title Gay Blade.

By the late '70s, many of the Blade's freelancers were receiving a nominal fee

for their stories, but the staff remained mostly volunteer. That changed in 1977, when Don Michaels became the newspaper's first paid staff employee.

Six months later, Michaels became the paper's editor, and quickly instituted a policy banning the use of pseudonyms on stories.

Please see **BLADE** on Page 77



**Lisa Keen**, the Washington Blade's top editor for nearly two decades, said covering the AIDS epidemic in the early years 'was like all of a sudden we were in the middle of the most enormous wave of news and history.' (File photo by Clint Steib)

## 35 years of history

The Washington Blade began in 1969 as a one-page monthly and a volunteer operation out of an activist's apartment. Today, it is a weekly newspaper with 35 full-time employees that, on average, includes more than 100 pages, and has sister publications in New York, Florida, Georgia and Texas.

**October 1969**

Nancy Tucker, Art Stone and a handful of activists publish the first issue of the Gay Blade. The newsletter, which is published monthly, consists of one side of a letter-size page, printed on a mimeograph machine in Tucker's apartment. The 500 copies are distributed to the city's gay bars.

**June 1972**

Now in its third year, the Gay Blade expands to a four-page monthly newsletter, including two pages filled with a calendar of events and a listing of bars for people planning to travel to New York for the 3rd Annual Christopher Street Liberation Day March.

**April 1973**

The Gay Blade undergoes yet another facelift: As its content expands to eight pages, the newsletter is published in a smaller format, roughly the height and width of a paperback novel.

**July 1973**

After four years, original editor Nancy Tucker leaves the Blade, calling for interested parties to take over the newsletter. That call is answered by Pat Price, who goes by the pseudonym Pat Kolar. It is also the first time in the Blade's history that stories contain bylines — though, like Price, nearly all of them are pseudonyms.

**July 1974**

The Gay Blade is printed on newsprint for the first time ever. It uses a format that is slightly larger than tabloid size, but by November 1974, the paper is reduced to the standard tabloid format that is still used today.

**October 1974**

Citing a lack of revenue and interest from D.C.'s gay residents, editors do not publish an issue during the month of the Blade's fifth anniversary. It is the only time in the paper's history when an issue is not published during the standard publishing cycle.

**November 1974**

The Gay Blade moves into its first offices, in Dupont Circle, on 20th Street, NW.

**April 1975**

The Gay Blade runs its first full-page ad, for the Miss Gay America Pageant.

**November 1975**

The Gay Blade officially changes its name to the Blade, and the newspaper also becomes incorporated as a non-profit corporation under the mantle Blade Communications Inc. The current issue is 16 pages long.

**June 1976**

The Blade hires reporter Lou Chibbaro, Jr.,

who at the time was working under the pen name Lou Romano.

**August 1976**

The Blade moves to a two-room suite on the 2400 block of Pennsylvania Ave., NW.

**June 1977**

Don Michaels, a volunteer at the newspaper, is hired to become the Blade's first paid staff employee. As the paper's business manager, Michaels is given a salary of \$318 per month. He also is the first staff writer to use his actual first and last names in the newspaper.

**January 1978**

Don Michaels becomes the Blade's editor. He begins enforcing a policy that pseudonyms cannot be used as bylines.

**November 1978**

The Blade changes from being published monthly to bi-weekly, signifying the growth of D.C.'s gay readership. The newspaper runs about 28 pages long, and regularly features color.

**February 1980**

The Blade ditches its digs on Pennsylvania Avenue and moves to 930 F St., NW, above what would later become the 9:30 Club.

**October 1980**

The Blade re-incorporates as a for-profit, employee-owned business and changes its name officially to the Washington Blade.

**July 1981**

With the front-page story, "Rare, Fatal Pneumonia Hits Gay Men," the Washington Blade becomes one of the first gay newspapers in the country to write about the disease that would become known as AIDS.

**November 1981**

Don Michaels becomes the Blade's publisher, a post he would occupy for two decades.

**April 1982**

For the second year in a row, the Blade publishes a special "April Fool's" edition chock full of fake stories, including one detailing how the dye used in tennis balls contributed to homosexuality. After a reader responded, convinced that the dye was the reason she was a lesbian, editors opted not to publish the special issue in subsequent years.

**September 1982**

The Blade changes its status (and its nameplate) to become D.C.'s weekly gay newspaper.

**November 1983**

Lisa Keen becomes the Blade's managing editor. She goes on to lead the Blade's editorial staff for 18 years.

**October 1984**

In celebration of its 15th anniversary, the Blade presents D.C.'s first-ever gay film festival, at the Biograph Theatre in Georgetown.

**January 1987**

The Blade rings in 1987 with a new office, located at the Victor Building, 724 9th St., NW.

**June 1988**

A long way away from the mimeograph days of old, editors begin using a computer to produce the newspaper, which now runs about 40 pages per issue.

**September 1992**

The Blade moves once again, this time to 1408 U St., NW, where its offices remain today.

**April 1993**

To coincide with the 1993 March on Washington, the Washington Blade publishes its largest issue to date. It contained 216 pages.

**September 1995**

The Washington Blade launches its Web site.

**October 1997**

Publisher Don Michaels announces the Washington Blade's launch of a sister paper: the New York Blade.

**May 2001**

The Washington and New York Blades are purchased by Window Media, a gay-owned media company that also owns the Atlanta-based Southern Voice and the Houston Voice. Michaels and Keen, who had been two of the Blade's three principal owners, leave their posts, replaced by William Waybourn and Chris Crain, Window Media's co-founders.

**February 2002**

The Blade undergoes its first major facelift in more than two decades, and updates its design.

**September 2004**

After 35 years and almost 1,400 issues, the Blade has 35 full-time employees on staff.

BRYAN ANDERTON