



# 'Navigaytor' welcomes city's tourists

*Travel guide highlights gay-friendly sites, events*

**August 20, 2007**

**By Robert Loerzel**

While Chicago has a reputation as a fairly welcoming place for gays, until recently the city lacked travel guides emphasizing that point to gay tourists.

"No one was talking to this audience at all," says David Jefferys, president of Philadelphia-based Altus Group, which is preparing to publish a new edition of the "Chicago City Navigaytor," a guide aimed at gays and lesbians visiting the Windy City.

Altus Group, a marketing firm that targets gay and lesbian consumers, publishes similar guides for Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, San Diego and New Orleans. The first Chicago edition &#151; a glossy, full-color, 24-page booklet &#151; was published in 2006, when Chicago hosted the Gay Games, followed by a second edition in February. Mr. Jefferys says the need for the book seemed obvious: "It kind of screamed out to us."

Adding a section on restaurants and aiming to expand to 46 pages, Altus plans to publish a new edition in January. So far, Chicago's North Shore Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Oak Park Area Convention and Visitors Bureau have signed on as advertisers.

"We have always wanted to be welcoming to the gay community, and there really wasn't a publication dealing with gay tourists," says Gina Speckman, executive director of the North Shore group. Ms. Speckman credits the 2006 edition with attracting gay tourists to the suburbs. "We were able to get people to stay in Evanston during the Gay Games," she says.

## **REACHING OUT**

The "Navigaytor" is not the only Chicago guide with a gay perspective. In 2006, Chicago publisher Lake Claremont Press released Kathie Bergquist and Robert McDonald's "A Field Guide to Gay and Lesbian Chicago," although that 281-page paperback is not aimed strictly at tourists.

Digital versions of the "Navigaytor" can be downloaded at [www.citynavigaytor.com](http://www.citynavigaytor.com). The booklets, distributed at visitor information centers, hotels, bookstores, bars and restaurants, describe major tourist attractions as well as gay-friendly neighborhoods, events such as the Gay Pride Parade, and gay-oriented nightclubs, bookstores and theaters. The new dining section will rate Chicago restaurants on, among other things, how comfortable they make gays feel, Mr. Jefferys says.

In a national survey released in December, nearly half of the gays and lesbians who responded said a destination's gay-friendliness is important to their travel plans. The survey, conducted by the Travel Industry Assn., Harris Interactive and Witeck-Combs Communications Inc., also asked gays and lesbians to name gay-friendly cities.

Chicago ranked 12th in the United States, behind San Francisco; Key West, Fla.; New York; Fire Island, N.Y.; Provincetown, Mass.; Los Angeles; Miami/South Beach; Las Vegas; New Orleans; Palm Springs/Palm Desert, Calif., and Boston.

"Destinations that reach out to gay tourists have seen that it makes a big impact," says Jerry McHugh, senior director of research for Community Marketing Inc., a San Francisco firm that studies gay tourism. In a September report, the company estimated that gay and lesbian tourists spend \$55 billion a year in the United States. Chicago ranked as the No. 4 destination for gay travelers on business trips and the No. 7 site for leisure travel.

According to the Travel Industry Assn., gay men last year reported spending an average of \$800 a trip, compared with \$540 for heterosexuals traveling alone.

Just having a booklet such as "Chicago City Navigaytor" improves the city's reputation among gays and lesbians, says Mr. Jefferys of Altus Group. "It says, 'You're welcome. You're important.'"