

## Don't Let Jackson Heights Gay Murder Be Forgotten

Seven days before thousands of New Yorkers perished at the hands of suicide hijackers, Edgar Garzon met an equally senseless fate. He died from wounds sustained in a bias attack in Jackson Heights. He had been beaten into a coma with a baseball bat or lead pipe three weeks earlier — because he was gay.

The police, who are actively pursuing leads in the case, have not forgotten about Garzon. Let's hope no one else has either, especially public officials whose duty is to remind residents that brutally attacking people because of their sexual orientation is outrageous and unacceptable.

A Colombia native, Garzon settled in Queens' largest gay community in Jackson Heights. Some residents believe that the borough, no matter how tolerant of its wide diversity, is more susceptible to this kind of bias attack than a lot of people might assume.

In fact, another bias killing horrified the gay community 11 years before, when Julio Rivera was beaten to death a block away from where Garzon was attacked in mid-August. That high-profile murder helped galvanize the community and heighten its social and political influence, culminating this year with the opening of the borough's first two gay community

centers — in Corona and Woodside — and an openly gay candidate for City Council, Jimmy Van Bramer, finishing second in the multi-candidate District 25 race.

For now, there's a \$15,000 reward for information leading to Garzon's killers, including \$10,000 from the city. Community leaders also hope to reschedule a town-hall meeting with police officials that was originally planned for Sept. 12, a day after the World Trade Center terror attack.

Gay residents' fear and anxiety are just as real today. So it's up to law enforcement and elected officials to put their minds at ease.

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ADVANCE PHOTOS ■ IRVING SILVERSTEIN

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Fire Commissioner Thomas Von Essen walk toward St. Patrick's Cathedral to attend the memorial mass for Assistant Deputy Chief Gerard A. Barbara, of West Brighton.

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