

Ballplayer is proud of moms

By Alison Dickman
PGN Staff Writer

When Cincinnati Reds relief pitcher Joe Valentine came out to a Newsday reporter last year about growing up with two moms, he thought his situation was pretty unique.

Valentine — who will speak to youth Feb. 4 at a Mountain Meadow fund-raiser — did not realize how many other children grow up with gay dads, lesbian moms or reared in same-sex households.

The event, which is co-sponsored by the Delaware Valley Legacy Fund and six other local organizations, is the first gay event for the 26-year-old pitcher, who recently signed a contract in the Houston Astros, and will compete for a job with the Major Leagues this spring.

"I truly didn't comprehend the impact I had on kids — I was 25 [last year] when the story broke," Valentine told PGN in a recent phone interview from Long Island, N.Y., where he lives during the off-season.

"I didn't know anybody else personally in my situation. When I found out how many people it affected, I was literally blown away."

Once Valentine found out that millions of children in the United States are growing up in similar households — statistics say between 6 and 14 million children are reared in same-sex households — he realized he could make a difference.

Valentine will share his life story and take questions from audience members Feb. 4 before playing a game of catch with youth.

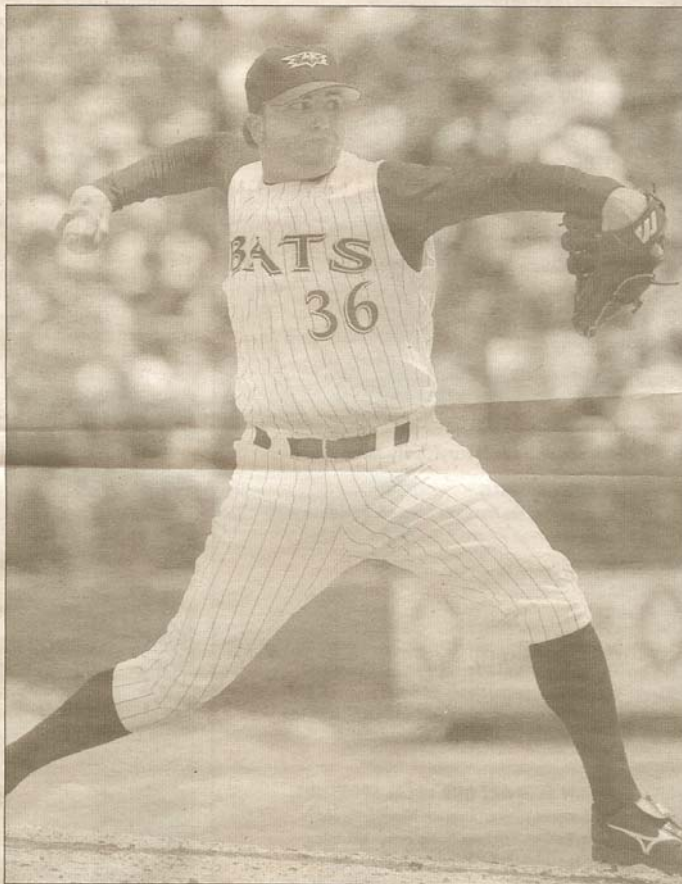
Carolyn Thompson, executive director of Mountain Meadows, which operates a day camp in southern New Jersey and runs local year-round programming for children with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender parents, said Valentine is a pioneer.

"Here he is, a straight man making great strides to eradicate homophobia by coming out to talk about his parents," Thompson said. "He has come out saying the fact they are lesbians affected very little in his life, and he's talked a lot about how his parents are great, and that it's great to have two moms cheering him on."

After the public learned Valentine was a product of a same-sex household, the e-mails started pouring in from kids and parents thanking him, and he became a "role model." — something he said it took some getting used to.

"It's hard to see myself as a role model, but if I can be a role model and help people, that's great," he added.

Although Valentine does not have any other events lined up in the gay community, he said



The Associated Press file photo

OUTSPOKEN SON: Pitcher Joe Valentine will attend a fund-raiser Feb. 4 for Mountain Meadow, which holds year-round programming for children with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender parents. Valentine, 25, a pitcher for the Houston Astros, was reared by two moms.

and other organizations in the future.

Growing up in Long Island, Valentine said neighbors and friends did not think twice about his family situation, but he did not discuss it with many people other than close friends.

"There were times [in high school] when I wouldn't talk about it except if I was talking

sure they weren't going to judge me or freak out," he said. "I didn't talk about it much until after high school, until I felt more comfortable in my own skin."

Valentine, who married his high school sweetheart last January, said he hopes he can

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use his personal experiences to help kids who are afraid to talk about their families.

"It's not an easy thing talking about it with other kids growing up in a more traditional family ... but the more you can talk about it, the more it's not weighing on you," he said.

Valentine first told ballplayers about his family in response to a negative comment made by another player during last year's spring training.

Another player said he thought a kid brought up by two gay parents would be "messed up," Valentine said.

Without hesitation, Valentine

If you go

What: Mountain Meadow will hold a fund-raiser featuring Houston Astros relief pitcher Joe Valentine

When: 3 to 5 p.m. Feb. 4

Where: Cavalry United Methodist Church, 801 S. 48th St.

Information: Call (215) 772-1107; Web site: www.mountainmeadow.org

said, "You're talking about me."
"I said, 'I've been raised by two women,'" he said. "Then he said, 'Now I know somebody, I've

learned not to pass judgment on that, because now I know somebody and that's not the case.'"

Thompson believes Valentine's ability to be open about his upbringing in a sport labeled as "macho" and "homophobic" is significant.

"I also think it will have an impact on the wider spectrum besides just in sports, because he was the first person to come out publicly to have l/g/b/t parents, really paving the way for a whole generation of youth to come out and make an impact by being open about who their families are," she said.

And Thompson said this next generation coming out about their backgrounds is important, because they are the allies the sexual and gender minority communities has been looking for. ▼