

Popular 'Simpsons' Character Smithers Comes Out as Gay

In a recent episode of Fox's *The Simpsons*, "The Burns Cage," Waylon Smithers Jr. (voice of Harry Shearer) comes out of the closet to Mr. Burns. Burns, not gay, isn't interested in Smithers' advances, so Homer Simpson (voice of Dan Castellaneta) decides to find Smithers a boyfriend. Yes, that's right, in Season 27, Smithers, after many years of dreamy infatuation with Mr. Burns, comes out as a gay character.

Bringing an idea he had two or three years ago to our television screen now, show writer Rob LaZebnik uses the storyline to confirm his love and support of his own son, 21-year-old Johnny, who is gay. Only in "Hollyweird," am I right?

Predictably, the storyline is also a piece of political activism:

Rob says gay storylines, even on cartoons, are important. "Sometimes TV can have a real impact on people's thinking," he says.

In the episode, Homer uses the computer app "Grindr" to find gay men for Smithers. He and Marge host a party, inviting gay men in hopes that Smithers will find someone. There is a standard gay reference—an animated cameo by former Star Trek star George Takei, a well-known Hollywood gay activist. Smithers leaves the party with the Cuban bartender.

The writers of *The Simpsons* have slowly brought homosexuality into the show over the years. On 2/16/97, the episode "Homer's Phobia" showed Homer feeling threatened by a gay shop owner's sexual preference. On 4/13/03, the episode "Three Gays of the Condo" had Homer moving out of the family home and in with a

gay couple. On 2/20/05, in "There's Something About Marry," gay marriage is legal in Springfield and thought to be a vehicle for increased tourism. What will be next for the liberal writers—transgender characters?

The ironic part, though, is that LaZebnik's son didn't need the show character to validate his father's love for him. He states clearly that he has only felt love and support from his father all along. Maybe his father should just give it a rest already.