

# Town Meeting Crowd Hits 91

By **DON KING**  
Editor

Charlotte's gay/lesbian community turned out 91 strong Monday, Sept. 15, for the first widely publicized meeting of a local political activist group since the demise of the last such group in 1984.

Gay/lesbian political activism died in Charlotte after the election of Harvey

Gantt as mayor two years ago; but its rebirth as One Nation Indivisible was strong and determined.

ONI was formed in July to stage a vigil to protest the appearance of a discredited psychologist invited to Charlotte by the antigay group Concerned Charlotteans. The Sept. 15 meeting brought ONI out of the closet as a decid-

edly activist organization determined to help the gay/lesbian community wrest a position of power in local and state politics.

Among the men and women attending the meeting, 31 registered to vote and 18 joined ONI, getting membership cards on the spot, courtesy of a laminating machine from Oleen's. Dozens more carried home ONI membership applications, many vowing to send in the \$12 annual membership fee. Steve Freeman, co-owner of Charades, offered to pay for 10 memberships in ONI for those who can't afford to join.

During an open-mike session, people told stories of harassment and rejection.

■ A former first-grade teacher and church organist said he had come to Charlotte to live and work because church members in his smaller town who found out he was gay vowed to run him out of town if he didn't leave.

■ A man who appears in television commercials said that if it were known he is gay, he probably wouldn't be hired as an actor.

■ A former Baptist minister told of unrelenting rejection and economic suffering since he found the courage to acknowledge his gayness.

Others spoke of personal experiences and hopes for changing the antigay tide they see in Charlotte.

Rick Carter, known in gay entertainment circles as Boom Boom Latour, called for gay/lesbian bar patrons to read, register to vote and become involved. In his unique way with words, he told the crowd with dead seriousness that "your mouth is important to your friends." No one laughed, knowing that he was urging everyone present to talk up gay activism and involvement and the possible consequences of inaction. He warned that gay bars were not immune from the hit list of antigay activists.

The meeting was held in the disco room at Charades, but no one was dancing as ONI organizers recounted offenses against the community, including the Charlotte police department's antigay employment policy.

Freeman spoke up for individual members of the department.

"When my partner (in Charades) was stabbed," he said, "the police couldn't have been more concerned. They stayed with us for 16 hours straight."

And he related the change in attitude policemen who have never worked off-duty hours at Charades experience after one night.



Bill Purcell of the Tradesmen registers to vote at Town Meeting.

"When they first start, they're scared to death because they don't know what to expect," he said. "But after their first night, they're amazed. They say they had no idea the job would be so easy. They didn't know it would be so different from working a regular (straight) nightclub where they have to break up fights and deal with violence such as stabbings."

At a table near the disco room's entrance, people signed a petition stating: "We, the undersigned, in signing this petition, recommend to the city and county of Charlotte/Mecklenburg the inclusion of openly gay persons on public committees and commissions."

ONI members vowed to carry the petition to other gay meetings as well as nongay gatherings to collect hundreds of signatures. The petition was in response to Gantt's never-fulfilled 1984 promise to appoint a member of the community to the Human Relations Committee.

In the piano bar, ONI members used a portable tape recorder to document instances of harassment and discrimination.

And people didn't flinch as a Q-Notes photographer used a camera with flash to record the scene.

## Acceptance To Host Forum

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may register if they will have established residence in Mecklenburg within 30 days of the election.

■ **New 18-year-olds.** People 17 may register, too, if they will be 18 on or before election day.

■ **Persons who have moved** from one voting precinct to another within the county.

Mecklenburg residents may register during office hours at any public library or branch, Mechanics & Farmers Bank, Huntersville Town Hall, Pineville Town Hall, Matthews Town Hall, and the Board of Elections (8-5 Monday through Friday and 10-4 Saturday) at 741 Kenilworth Ave. Suite 202 (Park Plaza office condominiums).

Persons who have not previously registered must provide a form of identification such as a driver's license (N.C. or otherwise), a birth certificate, a check with name and address on it, a student ID card — anything indicating persons are who they say they are.

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*One Nation Indivisible is Charlotte's gay/lesbian political action organization. Memberships are \$12 per year. Send check, payable to One Nation Indivisible, to ONI, P.O. Box 221841, Charlotte 28222.*

Q-Notes is published monthly by Queen City Quordina-tors, a nonprofit corporation.

WARNING: Publication of a person's picture or name should be taken as no indication of sexual preference.

DISTRIBUTION: Except for file and exchange copies, all 5,000 copies are distributed to gay/lesbian-identified organizations and establishments and to selected colleges. **November issue distribution: Wednesday, Oct. 29.**

SUBSCRIPTIONS for 12 months are available for \$12, payable in advance.

ADVERTISING: Display advertising may be rejected for any reason. Rates available on request. **November issue deadline: Friday, Oct. 24.**

**Q-Notes**

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