

Charlotte town meetings help identify needs and solutions

by Robert Marcus James
Special to Q-Notes

CHARLOTTE—Communications, a local political group, and a community center were highlighted as the three major issues and needs of Charlotte's gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community at a series of Town Meetings held during November. Forty-two individuals attended the three town meetings (12 women, 30 men), with eight people identifying themselves as newcomers to Charlotte. The meetings were facilitated by Sue Henry and Dan Kirsch, co-chairs of NC Pride 1994.

"We felt we had the responsibility to find a way to continue the goodwill generated by the success of NC Pride 1994," said Kirsch. "By inviting the community to an open dialogue, we hope people will feel they are included in deciding what is important for the future of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community here in Charlotte."

Community was also discussed at the Town Meetings—what is community? Do we have community in Charlotte? Most participants felt there was a community in Charlotte, but that it is still going through growing pains, mostly because people are at so many different stages in the coming-out process. Participants felt that if we could learn to share more resources with each other, that if we could focus on our diversity as a strength, and if we could provide more support to each other, then we could truly become a community.

Participants at the Town Meetings were not only asked to identify issues and needs of the community, but to offer some solutions. Regarding communications, some needs expressed included: more visibility, educate the non-gay community, archives, sensitivity training, a radio or TV show, educate the media, a community calendar, a community mailing list, and a community newsletter. Solutions included communicating with the Real Estate Association, the Charlotte Chamber, and the Convention and Visitor's Bureau; getting someone to monitor the media; create a sensitivity training group and/or speakers bureau; use free Public Service Announcements on TV and Radio; and hold annual leadership/skills building workshops.

Around the political issue, participants expressed a need for a local political group to replace First Tuesday, which dissolved two years ago when people did not step forward to lead the organization. It is hoped that another local organization could address domestic partnership law, work with NC PridePAC, possibly provide legal assistance to anyone who's lost a job due to discrimination and possibly field openly gay candidates for future elections.

A desire for a community center was expressed at every Town Meeting. A center was

seen as a community resource, a safe environment in the coming-out process, and a place to provide much needed meeting space for local organizations. It was felt that a center could also consolidate some of the organizational needs of local groups, such as a combined mailing list, community calendar, etc.

Work will continue on the three major issues and needs identified by the Town Meetings. Task forces for communications, political and a community center are being established during December, and they will meet two or three times during January and February to identify current resources and suggest ways to make something happen. Another town meeting will be held in late February or early March to announce the results of the task forces.

In addition, an informal Leadership Net-

"...We hope people will feel they are included in deciding what is important for the future..."

work met for the first time at the end of November to talk about the positive steps some corporations have taken regarding gay and lesbian issues, and to hear about discrimination in employment practices in other companies. This group, made up of current organizational leaders, community activists, and up-and-coming leaders, will meet every other month beginning in January to provide encouragement and support to colleagues, and to help determine a "community agenda."

Participants at the Town Meetings also complimented NC Pride 1994 for bringing the community together, allowing individuals and organizations to be included on a level that was comfortable for them.

The same premise of inclusiveness will be used to plan an annual cultural festival for the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community. The festival will likely kick-off on October 11, National Coming Out Day, and run for several days. October is also National Gay & Lesbian History Month.

A leadership team is currently being put into place, spearheaded by Dan Kirsch. More announcements about the festival activities are expected in February.

Any member of the community is invited to participate in the future of our community. To sign up to be on a task force, to be included in the leadership network, or to work on the cultural festival, write to NC Pride 1994, PO Box 32062, Charlotte NC 28232-2062, or call Sue Henry at 704/332-7473 or Dan Kirsch at 704/536-1372.

GLAD district conference largest ever

by Susan Tedder
Q-Notes Staff

WILMINGTON, NC—The Gulf Lower Atlantic District (GLAD) of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC) held its Fall Conference at the Hilton in Wilmington, NC, November 11-13. This conference, with over 400 registrants, was the largest ever in this district, and reflects the fact that GLAD has the distinction of being the fastest growing district in UFMCC. GLAD represents six states with a current total of 31 church bodies.

Special guests for this conference were Marsha Stevens, author of the hymn "For Those Tears I Died," and a traveling music minister within UFMCC, and the Reverend Elder Dr. Troy D. Perry, founder and moderator of the denomination.

The conference, in addition to its regular business meeting, offered a variety of workshops and worship services. The workshops included a series for adult children of alcoholics, or those in relationships with them, inclusivity, antagonists in the church, worship, music, building bridges between lesbians and gay men, and Christian social action.

Friday night, the Reverend Ruth Harper, Superintendent of the Wilmington District of the United Methodist Church, and a member of the executive committee of the North Carolina Council of Churches gave a supporting and encouraging message. Rev. Harper apologized for "being a drop of water [of support in

the mainline churches] where an ocean is needed." Following her message, the Reverend Christine Oscar of St. Mary's MCC in Greensboro offered "the liturgy of the quilt" where those in the district who have passed on are remembered.

Saturday morning, the breakfast speaker was former Representative Karen Gottovi of the North Carolina State Legislature. Rep. Gottovi, on the heels of the fall elections, rallied for grassroots efforts against the rising tide of the Religious Right. That evening, Rev. Perry spoke in his usual inspiring way about how important it is for gay Christians to grow in faith and determination. The closing service was led by GLAD District Coordinator, the Reverend Jay Neely of First MCC in Atlanta. Rev. Neely used the example of the child's game of 'tag' to explain how individuals in the district and the denomination are responsible for spreading the message of the church.

GLAD currently has churches in Birmingham, Huntsville, Mobile and Montgomery, Alabama; Atlanta (2), Augusta, Columbus, Savannah and Stone Mountain, Georgia; Biloxi, Gulfport, Hattiesburg and Jackson, Mississippi; Asheville, Boone, Charlotte (2), Greensboro, Hickory, Raleigh, Wilmington, and Winston-Salem, North Carolina; Charleston, Columbia, Greenville, and Myrtle Beach, South Carolina; Chattanooga, Knoxville, Nashville, and Tri-Cities, Tennessee. For information, contact the church nearest you.

Protect
Yourself
with good health

from

GNC
GENERAL NUTRITION CENTERS
Where America Shops for HealthSM

Complete Line Of:

- Vitamins to keep you healthy!
- Sports nutrition to make you more beautiful!
- Clothing to show off what you have! (Midtown Only)
- HIV nutritional information
- Knowledgeable, helpful staff
- Family owned & operated

City Fair

211 N. College St.
Charlotte, NC 28202
335-1551

Midtown Square
401 South Independence Blvd.
Charlotte, NC 28204
347-1551