

Q Notes

The Carolinas' Most Comprehensive Gay & Lesbian Newspaper

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Groups from across NC participated in the March

after the march. And not a single one was stolen," Titus proudly noted.

Unlike previous years, the weather was perfect. With an overcast sky — that carried an unfulfilled threat of rain — it was just warm enough for some attendees to bare a little skin. The cooperative, unseasonal weather led to a turnout of nearly 5,000 (officially 3,900 wrist bands were handed out, but people came out of the wood work when the march began). Vendors were in full force and, according to Titus, had a great showing.

The economic impact on the surrounding area was significant. Over eighty-six percent of the rooms at the Omni Hotel were reserved by marchers. With only one food vendor at the march, area restaurants also benefited greatly.

Friday night's dance was also a success. While not as well attended as in previous years, there were over 700 people between the open dance floor and the special jazz concert at the King's Club (dubbed "Queens' Club" for the evening). The live jazz concert was a first for NC Pride. It was especially enjoyed by the "mature" crowd and is sure to be brought back next year.

Another major success this year was the NC Pride Drag Tour fundraiser that preceded the weekend. "The tour went to 12 bars across the state and really helped with publicity. In the end it raised over \$3,500. This really made the difference in pricing some of the other events," Titus commented. Final estimates on the cost of the march and festivities is in the \$60,000 range.

Next year's site has not been determined. Though there is some discussion about Asheville, no official bid has been received.

No money is necessary to make a bid to host the march. However, if someone wishes to make a bid, they must be willing to serve as co-chair and have in place another co-chair of the opposite gender (one male, one female). "It also helps to have 8-12 people ready for key positions on the board, but this is not required," said Titus. For more information and a Bid Packet, contact Mike Katz at (919) 990-1005, or email: ncprideinc@aol.com. ▼

Arts dispute erupts in NC House, Guilford and Mecklenburg Counties

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

RALEIGH—The fracas over government subsidies for "objectionable" art has moved to a larger canvas as the NC House of Representatives is now set to consider a bill that would empower all municipal governments to halt such displays if the presenter has received any state-provided grants. While at the local level, commissioners in both Guilford and Mecklenburg Counties have voted to cut allocations for community-based artists from their 1997-98 budgets. In each of the counties, the presentation of a play with homosexual themes was the catalyst for the curtailment.

The motion in the House is three-sentences long and embedded in the 343-page state budget proposal currently under consideration. The rider, introduced by Rep. Sam Ellis (R-Wake), would require that all artists seeking state funds sign a statement acknowledging that their work is subject to the approval of elected officials. It would extend to all city and county governments the right to halt "objectionable" presentations by any such artists.

In defense of his proposal, Rep. Ellis stated, "It's simple; if you're going to take our money, you subject yourself to our opinion. And 'our' is what I believe to be the opinion of the majority of the population."

Not everyone was in agreement with that assessment, however. "We feel it really smacks of censorship, plain and simple," said Rob Maddrey, president of the lobbying organization Arts North Carolina.

Rep. Alma Adams (D-Guilford) concurred. "They use the word 'objectionable,' but that's just a code word." She noted that Ellis' proposal is simply a way for officials to force their personal values onto citizens and subvert forms of artistic expression that they disagree with.

In Adams' home district, the county is embroiled in its own flap over the issue of government funding for contentious art.

It began with Community Theatre of Greensboro's May 9-16 performances of the gay-themed farce *La Cage Aux Folles* and culminated in the Guilford County Commission's decision to withhold funding for all community arts organizations.

Nearly 200 citizens, most from area churches, attended the commission's mid-May meeting to express their anger that the "anti-family" play was being presented by a group that had received money from the United Arts Council of Greensboro, an organization that receives money from the county.

At the June 4 meeting, Commissioner Steve Arnold presented a motion to cut all arts funding. After an hour of debate by funding proponents and opponents, followed by additional discussion among the commissioners, the measure was approved by a vote of 6 to 5 — split along party lines with the Republicans (Arnold, Joe Bostic, Walt Cockerham, Phyllis Gibbs, Mary Rakestraw and Chuck Winfree) prevailing over the Democrats (Melvin "Skip" Alston, Warren Dorsett, Donnie Dunovant, Bob Landreth and John Parks). As a result, the county is withholding \$30,000 from the United Arts Council of Greensboro and \$15,000 from the High Point Area Arts Council.

Through a compromise approved by commissioner's at their next meeting, the full \$45,000 was redirected to fund arts programs solely in the Guilford County school system.

Unfortunately, the situation may have produced another troubling outcome besides the loss of arts funding: a major rift between the gay and arts communities.

The unchallenged homophobic tone of the meeting left many gays and lesbians incensed with Greensboro's arts leaders. Gary Palmer, a member of the Triad Advocacy Network, a gay political and educational organization, stated, "There are a lot of us who are very angry. We had been assured that (the meeting) wasn't going to be a gay bashing and it was." He expressed dismay that none of the arts speakers supported gays and lesbians in their comments. "I guess we were kind of naive about this," commented Stephen Carrigan, president of Alternative Resources of the Triad, a gay referral service. "From now on, we must be prepared as the gay and lesbian community to speak for ourselves, because (arts leaders) won't. No one denounced the fact that gays and lesbians were being used as a scapegoat."

The scenario wasn't the same in Mecklenburg County. After Charlotte Repertory Theatre's production of *Angels In America* created a "traditional values" furor last year, arts and even business leaders eloquently denounced the anti-gay stance of Commissioner Hoyle Martins' April 1 proposal to cut the county's \$2.5 million allotment to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Arts & Science Council. The result was the same, though, and the bill was approved by a vote of 5 to 4. The move left commissioners responsible for conducting the application and review process by which individual arts organizations are awarded their annual allowances — a task formerly carried out by the Arts & Science Council.

Presumably, artists that reflected "traditional family values" would be funded while others would be turned away — leaving commissioners in the position of being the arbiters of artistic merit. To some, this was unacceptable.

At the commission's June 17 meeting, the situation was resolved when the Democratic majority voted to end funding for all arts agencies rather than be forced into choosing which were deserving. (Because the county owns Spirit Square, commissioners did appropriate \$1.2 million for its continuation.) Unlike the April 1 meeting, Martin stood with his party colleagues (Becky Carney, Parks Helms, Lloyd Scher and Darrel Williams) to defeat Republicans Tom Bush, Joel Carter, George Higgins and Bill James.

At several points during the rancorous debate Republican commissioners stated that the Democrats were "hurting children" by their position — especially in relation to \$225,000 earmarked for Discovery Place, but the Democrats defeated three separate motions to fund the agency. Commissioner Scher expressed disappointment that Discovery Place representatives came to the meeting and asked for money, knowing that other worthy organizations were being punished because of censorship.

The tragic result of these measures is that the more "family friendly" an arts organization is, the more likely it is to be dependent on government subsidies for survival. The arts organizations that produce the "objectionable" works are the most likely to be self-supportive. In the rush to make NC a more moral state, officials might be sounding the death knell for the arts organizations that seek to instill virtues in our youth. ▼

More arts funding coverage can be found on page 6.

NC Pride March succeeds in gay-supportive town

by Shane Wolf
Q-Notes Staff

CARRBORO—The 1997 North Carolina Pride March and Celebration was held in Carrboro, just outside of Chapel Hill. Carrboro, which is so gay-friendly that even the mayor is gay, was all decked out with 50 rainbow flags hung from lightpoles throughout the town. But this year, Carrboro's utopian image was momentarily in question when the two city workers assigned to hang the flags refused to perform their duties, both stating, "It's against my religious beliefs."

"I guess they go to the 'Church of Hang No Rainbow Flags,'" quipped Sarah Titus, NC Pride co-chair. "The March and festivities were a great success. But if it weren't for the two city workers we might not have gotten any press coverage at all. It seems the press is always interested in a controversy and it seemed as if they were determined to make a story out of these two men. In the end, the town manager and some of the other higher ups put [the flags] up on Saturday and took them down on Sunday."

"I think this was a great welcoming to the march. The flags were purchased by individuals who sponsored them and then received one

ENDA reintroduced in Congress

by Kim I. Mills
Special to Q-Notes

WASHINGTON, DC—A bipartisan coalition of Senators and Congressmen reintroduced the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, a bill that would make it illegal under federal law to discriminate in the workplace on the basis of sexual orientation.

The five lead sponsors held a news conference on June 10 to spotlight the record level of support for the measure among lawmakers and the public. The bill — known as ENDA — is a top legislative priority for the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the nation's largest gay rights organization, in this Congress.

"This bill is about equal rights in the workplace for all Americans," said HRC Executive Director Elizabeth Birch. "The Employment Non-Discrimination Act rises above partisan, religious and regional differences — and support is growing as more people learn that job discrimination based on sexual orientation is legal in most of the country."

ENDA would protect Americans from job discrimination based on sexual orientation. It would prohibit quotas, and it would not apply to religious organizations, businesses with fewer

than 15 employees or the military.

Current federal law does not protect Americans from discrimination in the workplace on the basis of sexual orientation. In 39 states, an employer may legally fire workers solely because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or heterosexual.

Eleven states have laws prohibiting sexual orientation discrimination. California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Vermont and Wisconsin have had these laws on the books for a number of years; Maine and New Hampshire enacted such laws earlier this spring.

Incidents of such discrimination are widespread. In nine of the 11 states where there is legal protection, more than 2,000 complaints of job discrimination based on sexual orientation have been recorded.

Kerry Lobel, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), issued the following statement upon ENDA's introduction, "NGLTF joins our civil rights allies in supporting ENDA, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act of 1997. The message of ENDA is clear and straightforward. Dis-

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