

Q Notes

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SC Pride98 has its moment in the sun

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

MYRTLE BEACH, SC—Whether buff or bear, butch or femme, skin was in at the rally site following the ninth annual SC Pride March, in Myrtle Beach for the first time. Thanks to clear blue skies and mid-70s temperatures, t-shirts and no shirts, shorts and shorter shorts were the uniform of the day as an estimated crowd of 8000 (organizers' count; police claimed 5000) attendees listened to the afternoon's featured speakers or milled through the vendor area.

Just prior to the rally, 5000 of these folks marched through the so-called "superblock" on the Grand Strand. Their jubilant, but mostly unremarkable, demeanor exposed a year's worth of anti-gay comments by a few city officials and business and civic leaders as fraudulent myths.

Some onlookers actually seemed to be disappointed by the absence of deviance. (In this post-Springer era, men in evening gowns simply do not provide as much prurient entertainment value as they used to.) Of course, given the way Myrtle Beach Mayor Mark McBride had carried on about the Pride March for the past year, it's not surprising that some residents were expecting a freak show. But, as marchers trailed past, his inflammatory comments where put in proper perspective.

"I've seen worse from the Shriners," an unidentified man told a *Myrtle Beach Sun News* reporter as he watched the parade pass.

Pride weekend began on Thursday, April 30 with a 3:30pm Interfaith AIDS Memorial Service at St. Michael's Catholic Church. A gathering of 150 from a variety of faith communities came together to "remember the many we have lost to the AIDS pandemic." The service



Author Marc Adams at the rally

was a time for reflection and sharing.

Thursday night's events featured a VIP social from 6:00-8:00pm, a concert by 80s favorites Lisa Lisa and Cult Jam at House of Blues at 10:00pm and a Late Night Dance Party at the same location that ran until 5:00am.

Friday afternoon was filled by a schedule of workshops (including such topics as "All God's Children: Countering the Radical Right" and "Powerplay in Mayberry: Creating Change in Places That Rarely Do") that went from 10:30am until 5:30pm.

At 6:00pm, a VIP Social/Autograph Signing was held with visiting Pride98 dignitaries Candace Gingrich, Field Consultant with the Human Rights Campaign and half-sister of US House Speaker Newt Gingrich, Betty DeGeneres, spokesperson for the Human Rights Campaign's National Coming Out Project and mother of actress Ellen DeGeneres, and author Marc Adams, Lambda Literary Award finalist for his book *The Preacher's Son*.

Polyester leisure suits came back into fashion at 11:15pm when KC and the Sunshine Band took the stage at House of Blues. After a rollicking set, partiers had the choice of remaining at the venue for another Late Night Dance Party or heading over to Metropolis nightclub to hear Club 69 perform.

Saturday was the day to be at the beach. Setup began at the rally site at 8:00am and vendors were open for business by 10:00am.

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Two "Gang" members survive vote

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

CHARLOTTE—If two-out-of-three "ain't bad," how does one-out-of-three stack up? That is the question gays and lesbians in Mecklenburg County were asking after learning that "Gang of Five" County Commissioner George Higgins (R-District 5) had been defeated in the primary by challenger Tom Cox, but colleagues Joel Carter and Bill James had won their hotly contested races.

Despite gay activists', arts advocates' and uptown business leaders' best efforts to rally voters against Carter (R-District 1) and James (R-District 6), turnout was extremely low at a mere 16 percent. This allowed the incumbents to win by 523 and 443 votes respectively.

Both men took their victories as a statement from the people. Carter told *The Charlotte Observer*, "People are sick and tired of the rich, uptown interests attempting to buy off what we're trying to do." He added, "This election is about money and power. The arts were just a vehicle they used in a divisive manner."

The arts reference was to the infamous April 1, 1997 decision of five commissioners to withhold county money from the Arts & Science Council to keep from funding works that feature homosexual characters or themes. The vote split the board — and the community — into two factions and set up this year's electoral showdown.

James' post-election comments were pointed and personal. "[NationsBank CEO] Hugh McColl and the elites have been thoroughly spanked on their bare behinds."

50 state marches set for spring '99

NC Pride PAC taking the helm here

by Wanda Pico
Special to Q-Notes

WASHINGTON, DC—The Federation of Statewide Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Political Organizations has announced sponsorship of an historic, coordinated week of actions focused on state government and statewide organizing. After many national and statewide discussions and after conducting a state-by-state assessment of its members, the Federation decided to focus energy on members' home states. Under the theme "Equality Begins at Home," each state is called upon to plan an activity — a rally, rally, lobby day, press conference or other visibility campaign — in their state capital during March 21-27, 1999.

"Equality Begins at Home" will provide an opportunity to focus the national spotlight on the organizing challenges and legislative battles faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in state houses across the nation. The goal is to build statewide organizing capability across the nation and promote lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equal rights in every state.

"The 'Equality Begins at Home' actions enable us to focus our energy on organizing and educating at the state level. Clearly, more and more battles are fought in the states. With anti-gay initiatives and referendums from Colorado to Maine, and the right wing organizing against our families, we must build a stronger grassroots movement in every state," explained Paula

In the at-large races, Republican candidates Tom Bush (an incumbent member of the "Gang"), Steve Helms and Tom Vance all moved on to the November general election as did Democratic incumbents Becky Carney and Parks Helms along with former Commissioner Jim Richardson.

The remaining, current Commissioner, Hoyle Martin, also a "Gang of Five" member, was not involved in a primary race. A former Democrat, Martin switched his party registration to unaffiliated and now must gather 16,000 signatures to get on the November ballot.

The general election will be historic, regardless of the outcome, due to the presence of openly gay candidates Chris Cole and Andrew Reyes.

Democrat Reyes will square off with Tom Cox for the District 5 seat while Cole, a Libertarian, will be aiming for an at-large victory. Because homosexuality was such a prominent and contentious issue during the past year, both candidates stand to gain a lot of attention this campaign season. This should provide them with excellent opportunities for addressing important county issues — and assuring voters that they are more than just "the gay candidates."

The general election will be held on Tuesday November 3. It is critical that all voting-age gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender citizens register and go to the polls. For more information on candidates, registering to vote or volunteer opportunities, contact Mecklenburg Gay and Lesbian Political Action Committee at (704) 553-7906.

Ettelbrick, co-chair of the Federation and Legislative Director of New York's Empire State Pride Agenda.

The "Equality Begins at Home" actions will be organized by each of the existing 36 political organizations active in the Federation. Each state will design an action that best fits with their state and their political goals. Each state will develop a plan for integrating local groups and our allies into the action.

North Carolina Pride PAC figures to be the lead agency in the Tarheel state. Executive Director MK Cullen says the group is already planning strategies for the 1999 NC General Assembly session and the visibility from the "Equality" event will reinforce their work.

Joe Herzenberg, co-chair of Pride PAC's Lobbying Committee, feels the time is right for this kind of activism in NC. "In the last five years, we have seen a huge growth in LGBT

people coming out and organizing their elected officials to get protections under the law. Also, there has been an increase in the number of organizations that work with and for the LGBT community. There will be many individuals and groups from all over the state that want to work on this week of action."

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), coordinating organization for the Federation, will help to organize the states that do not have existing statewide political groups. The "Equality Begins at Home" actions have been given office space in NGLTF's office.

Kerry Lobel, executive director of the Task Force, said "The political center of gravity is in See MARCHES on page 22

Indigo Girls concert in SC cancelled

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

IRMO, SC—Everyone from gay and lesbian leaders to music superstars expressed dismay at the cancellation of a South Carolina High School performance by the Indigo Girls because of the popular duo's sexual orientation.

"Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth face harassment and violence in schools across the country. This is precisely why," said National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Executive Director Kerry Lobel.

The Grammy Award-winning duo, Amy Ray and Emily Saliers, were slated to give a free half-hour performance during a May 7 talent show at Irmo High School near Columbia. The show was part of a series of scheduled high school performances by the singing group, but school Principal Gerald Witt canceled it, saying through a spokesperson it was because Saliers and Ray are lesbians. When the cancellation touched off a tidal wave of publicity, he began attributing the cancellation to other reasons, in addition to the singers' sexual orientations.

After hearing the news, Saliers issued this statement: "We are saddened and angry to hear that our show at Irmo High School has been cancelled. It is a blatant case of homophobia. The show was cancelled because we are gay. In the wake of recent violence in schools and the often bleak environment for kids which includes the cutting of school arts programs and lack of creative outlets, we believe that playing free high school shows will provide a positive musical and emotional experience for high

school students. Despite this particular cancellation, we will play in Columbia, SC and we'd like to thank the people there and elsewhere who support our collective message of respect and justice for all human beings."

On the West Coast, where they are recording a new album, SC-based band Hootie and the Blowfish heard about the cancellation and issued a scathing response. "The entire band is willing to do whatever it takes to get this concert rescheduled," said Rusty Harmon, manager for Hootie. "The Indigo Girls represent everything that is good about the music business. They write beautiful songs and work for good causes. If the people who made this decision knew anything about their music, they'd know this. But they're too ignorant and narrow-minded."

Undaunted by the controversy, the Indigo Girls made good on their promise and scheduled another show in the area.

On the day of Irmo High's talent show, they performed at Columbia's Township Auditorium at 4:00pm, just after school hours. Of the 3000 tickets available for the show, 2000 were distributed free to area students on a first-come, first-served basis. The other 1000 were sold to the public for \$15.

In the end, Irmo's students seemed to have more respect for diversity and free speech than its administrator. "I think [the cancellation was] a form of censorship," said Jennifer Barnhard, editor of *The Stinger* student newspaper. "I'm conservative; I'm proud to call myself a Republican...but I don't think it's right to judge people. ▼