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## Campaign begun to include same-sex couples in US Census count

by David Elliot  
Special to Q-Notes

WASHINGTON, DC—The Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies (IGLSS) and the Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) have launched "Make Your Family Count," a national public education campaign aimed at encouraging same-sex couples within the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered (GLBT) communities to be counted in the US Census.

"This campaign has one simple message: Our families exist and we must be counted," said Paula Ettelbrick, Family Policy Director of NGLTF's Policy Institute. "The US Census tracks changes in American family structures. Over the last ten years our community has had a major impact in changing family policies, from domestic partnership to second parent adoption. It's time that we include our families in the official count."

The "Make Your Family Count" campaign urges same-sex couples living in the same household to mark the "Unmarried Partners" option when asked to describe their relationships. The forms will be mailed to every household in the United States in March and April. The campaign has also launched a web site, located at [www.WeCount.org](http://www.WeCount.org), with information about the Census and guidance to GLBT couples on answering the Census forms.

"The Census will provide us with a gold mine of information. We will have a statistical picture of same-sex households by racial composition, where they live, and how many children they have," said Dr. Lee Badgett, Director of IGLSS. "The Census tracks changes in families in the US. Our families deserve to be

counted so that the full diversity of the American family can be reflected and presented to policy makers."

"All public policy flows from the US Census," Ettelbrick explained. "If we are not counted, we lose out on federal funding for research, funding for community services and passage and implementation of laws that benefit our community. We also sacrifice important opportunities for more equitable political representation of our community."

Ettelbrick added that information collected will lay the statistical foundation critical in demonstrating the need for domestic partnership benefits, funding for community services, and passage of policies that reflect the needs of GLBT families and their children.

"While legislation in states like Vermont, New Hampshire and Massachusetts has moved in our favor, we are seeing a definite backlash to our efforts through passage of laws blocking marriage and adoption in other states like Utah, California and Arkansas," said Ettelbrick.

"The Census count will allow us to break through the rhetoric and show dispassionately that hundreds of thousands of same-sex couples already share committed relationships and are raising children. These families need the same resources and recognition as any other family."

In 1990, the category of "unmarried partner" first appeared on the census form. Approximately 150,000 households self-reported as same-sex unmarried partners — a severe undercount compounded by the US Census Bureau's disqualification of same-sex couples who marked "spouse" to describe their relationship.

According to Badgett, the Bureau consid-



## CENSUS 2000

ered such a response to be a mistake because it is legally impossible for same-sex couples to marry.

"This year, the Census Bureau has indicated that it will simply re-categorize the answers from "spouse" to "unmarried partner" so that the data is not lost," said Badgett.

According to the 1990 Census, 75 percent of American families no longer reflect traditional definitions of families, consisting of a married heterosexual couple with children under 18. Unmarried couples comprised approximately 4.5 million families, a 400 percent increase since 1970. This figure reflects the rapidly changing family unit.

To date, the Census Bureau has not included a question about sexual orientation. GLBT people not living with someone of the same sex whom they consider to be an unmarried partner will not be visibly counted. However, a large enough count of same-sex households, with or without children, could help substantially in future efforts to be included in the Census.

For each same-sex couple that describes their relationship as being "unmarried partners" on the Census short form, researchers will be able to determine the racial, housing, age and demographic mix of same-sex households, as well as the number of children in the household. For the one-sixth of households that will receive the Census long form, researchers also will be able to determine education, citizenship and income, among other things. ▼

## Co-director of MMOW resigns

by Dan Van Mourik  
Q-Notes Staff

WASHINGTON, DC—Immediately after the last issue of *Q-Notes* went to press, new information was received that exacerbates the turmoil being experienced by the Millennium March on Washington for Equality (MMOW). With all of the up and downs reported here over the past several months, it would appear that problematic situations occur on nearly a daily basis.

According to the *Washington Blade*, one of two co-executive directors MMOW abruptly resigned, apparently over a disagreement about which company should be hired to produce the April 30 event. Neither march officials nor Malcolm Lazin, the co-executive director who resigned, would confirm whether he voluntarily quit or was asked to resign, or what prompted his departure.

The resignation followed the March board's reversal of a decision awarding the contract to coordinate the rally to three independent producers and National Events — a stage, light and sound company in Newington, VA. The board decided instead to hire Artists Services Inc. (ASI), a gay-owned company in Washington, DC.

Lazin's resignation is "a personnel matter that I would rather not talk about in detail," Ann DeGroot told the *Blade*. DeGroot is one of four national co-chairs for the march and executive director of OutFront Minnesota, a statewide advocacy group. She also is chair of MMOW's 19-member board.

Lazin, a Philadelphia resident and executive director of PrideFest America, an annual gay symposium and festival, also refused to discuss why he left.

Dianne Hardy-Garcia, the march's other co-executive director, will now serve as the event's sole executive director, DeGroot said. Philadelphia resident Michael Gallagher will continue in his role as the march's finance director, but only the Millennium March office in Washington, DC, where Hardy-Garcia is based, will remain open. The Philadelphia office where Lazin, Gallagher, and Robin Bentley, a former march staff member, were based is scheduled to close.

DeGroot said the MMOW board's finance committee will handle issues related to generating revenue and financial management, duties that Lazin had handled.

Although Lazin did not explain his resignation, it appears to be directly linked to the board's change in event producer. While Lazin believed the switch was a result of influence from the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), HRC's Conway said the board selected a new producer because ASI could coordinate the event at the lowest cost.

ASI officials said they could produce the event for \$550,000, the amount board members have agreed to spend on producing the rally. The bid from National Events exceeded the budgeted amount by \$62,000.

Lazin said National Events did "come within budget," however, because the actual amount of funds being set aside for the rally is \$605,000, which includes the budget for producing the rally as well as for other costs related to stage and facilities management.

Lazin also said the bid made by National Events included all possible costs that could crop up, but ASI's bid was less specific in terms of outlining exactly what costs would be covered.

In spite of Lazin's departure, March organizers are confident that the event will run smoothly and be a success. ▼

## Local gay activists discuss issues with police chief

by David Stout  
Q-Notes Staff



Connie Vetter

CHARLOTTE—A handful of gay and lesbian community leaders met with Chief of Police Darrel Stephens on February 29 to initiate a dialogue on sexual orientation and pitch several policy changes. Unfortunately, the group left without getting much of what it

wanted. One attendee attributed the stonewalling to political caution on Stephens' part.

Connie Vetter, an attorney with the Southern Center for Law and Justice and co-chair of Meck PAC (the county's GLBT political organization), was the driving force behind the encounter. "I met [Stephens] at a reception and he seemed nice. I talked about the Southern Center for Law and Justice and my work with Meck PAC and said that I would like to organize a meeting with a few gay community leaders. He told me to contact him."

As a result, Vetter, Bob Barret, Dan Kirsch, Tonda Taylor and Phil Wells met with Stephens for about an hour in his uptown office at the Law Enforcement Center. Four main issues were covered: adding sexual orientation to the police diversity training program; openly recruiting gay and lesbian officers; changing the department's handling of park solicitation arrests; and organizing a community-wide dialogue with the chief during OutCharlotte 2000.

Reportedly, Stephens seemed puzzled by the

first request. "He seemed unsure of where we were coming from," Vetter recalled. "He kept saying that he didn't know the status of sexual orientation as it applies to the diversity program and that he would look into it. Of course, we went in knowing that it's not a part of it and we told him so. He seemed cautious at first, but got a bit defensive when we tried to nail him down on the issue." Still, Stephens agreed to look into the matter and share his findings and any possible policy changes.

Unlike the matter of sensitivity training, Stephens' position on actively recruiting gays and lesbians for the police force was crystal clear — even if his reasons were not. "He just said 'no way,'" stated Vetter. "He wasn't really clear on his reasoning. He said he had thought about it and faced the same situation in other places, but absolutely wouldn't do it. He explained something about looking at the percentages of the population — I think he was talking about race and gender breakdowns — and hiring and said it would be difficult to hire a percentage of gays. It felt political to me. Open recruiting is more about making a statement through the ranks that [homosexuality] is okay than it is about hiring gay and lesbian police officers."

Despite Stephens' hardline stance against recruiting, the topic ushered in the day's biggest victory. He asserted that all police officers have a right to be free from harassment and assured that no one would be fired from the police department for being gay or lesbian.

On its third point, the group didn't attempt to argue the propriety of park stings, but instead tried to change the manner in which the campaigns are handled. They suggested that police officers need to make a distinction be-

tween sex in public parks and conversations about sex. Vetter, who has represented numerous clients arrested in park solicitation sweeps, said that two alternatives were proposed: issuing warning tickets before making arrests and alerting the gay community when operations are planned so internal education can be done to curb activities.

"We got no commitment on the park arrests," Vetter stated. "Chief Stephens said that he really didn't know what was going on in that area and that they only conducted sweeps when they received complaints from neighbors. I tried to explain the heavy emotional weight of these arrests. He said he would think about it and maybe he will."

The last talking point of the meeting seems to have the best chance of panning out. Vetter told *Q-Notes* that she "felt good" about the possibility of securing a meeting between GLBT citizens and the police chief or one of his representatives during the next OutCharlotte celebration, scheduled for October.

Despite the few bright spots, Vetter said that, overall, the gathering left her discontented. "I had high expectations. I had perceived [Stephens] as being a little less political, but he seemed to be looking at how everything could be used against him."

Still, she was hopeful that the meeting was a foundation on which better relations could be built. "He met with us, he seemed to hear us and, who knows, he may work on some of the issues we talked about."

For the group's part, they plan to wait "a few weeks or a month" before following up on their diversity training request and hope to schedule a full meeting in six months. ▼