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Charlotte's oldest gay club will be torn down after 30 years of operation

Much is lost in Oleen's closing

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

CHARLOTTE—Once their eyes had adjusted to the darkness and the everpresent cloud of disco fog mixed with cigarette smoke that saturated the club, first-time visitors would find the entire GLBT community in microcosm laid out before them.

The scene: A shirtless bartender is busy mixing a Manhattan for a grandfatherly sort while two Birkenstock-clad lesbians challenge a redneck male couple in matching flannel for control of the pool table. Sitting by the dancefloor is a boisterous crowd of straight-but-not-narrow crossdressers lobbing money and words of support at the drag queen making her public debut. Bookended by these scenes are customers of all ages, races, genders, sexual persuasions and economic levels, socializing shoulder-to-shoulder on the dusty concrete floor of the one-room establishment.

Welcome to Oleen's. Be glad you got here before she's gone.

Following the last weekend in May, Oleen's will close its doors for the final time at 1831

South Boulevard, the same location it has occupied for the past 30 years.

The Greenville, SC family that owns the property has sold it out from under the club, cashing in on the frenzied growth that is remaking this former industrial zone into one of the city's most vibrant entertainment districts. Southend, as the tony locale is now known, simply outgrew the little, ramshackle gay club.

When Oleen Love joined with Don Robertson and Marion and Oakey Tyson (who later started Scorpio) to open the club in May 1970, they probably had no idea how important it would become in building an organized GLBT community in Charlotte. (The city's only other gay club, The Neptune, a converted gas station with dirt floors located on North Tryon St., closed shortly after Oleen's opened.)

One person who watched the journey from the front — first as a patron and from 1985 onward as the club's manager — is keenly aware of the bar's place in history. "Gay bars were the only places to go to meet others. It's not like today with the Internet, social organizations and

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NC Pride readies for annual event

SC Pride "postponed"

by Mark A. Colston
Special to Q-Notes

DURHAM—The North Carolina Pride 2000 Coordinating Committee is putting the finishing touches on this year's gay pride festivities. Multiple events are scheduled for the weekend of June 9 - 11 at various locations around Durham. The official festival, march and rally will be held Saturday, June 10 on Duke University's East Campus from 10:00am until 5:00pm.

This year's gathering marks the 15th consecutive year for Pride in North Carolina. To mark the anniversary, the event will carry the theme, "Its Time: Come Out for Pride," which organizers say reflects the fact that despite the many social, political and economic gains that have been made by GLBT individuals and institutions across the state, much work still needs to be done to achieve full civil rights.

Still, the gathering is meant to be an upbeat occasion. "Accomplishments and victories will...be celebrated by promoting unity and visibility among lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgendered people," organizers assure.

The official NC Pride 2000 March and Festival kicks off Saturday at 10:00am with a workshop on transgender issues. An anti-racism workshop begins at 11:00am, followed by the march at 1:00pm. The rally — scheduled to run until 5:00pm — will conclude the day's events on Duke's East Campus. Among those

expected to speak at the rally are openly-gay Carrboro Mayor Mike Nelson, Rev. Jimmy Creech and openly-gay Superior Court Judge Ray Warren.

Coordinating Committee member Shelly Golden says that volunteers and money are needed to make this year's event a success. She encourages anyone interested in volunteering or financially supporting NC Pride 2000 to contact the Committee. Members can be reached at the official web site (<http://go.to/ncpride>) or by email (NC Pride2000@aol.com).

SC Pride on hold

Even as North Carolina Pride prepares to kick off, the South Carolina Pride Committee has postponed its annual event.

SC Pride Committee President Bert Easter stated in a press release, "We had formed a Pride Committee of volunteers that really never got off the ground."

He added that because Pride was not held in the spring, fall was the target period for a series of local events around the state.

Regional celebrations are being planned in Florence and Columbia with hopes of adding more cities to the schedule.

Reportedly, the SC Pride Committee is also planning to adopt a year-round campaign of community service rather than continue focusing on a once-a-year party.

They are meeting every 3rd Sunday at the South Carolina Gay and Lesbian Community Center to investigate the options. ▼

NC cities' partnership laws upheld

by Clay Ollis
Q-Notes Staff

CHAPÉL HILL—Orange County Superior Court Judge Orlando Hudson issued a summary ruling on May 9 permitting the towns of Chapel Hill and Carrboro to continue to provide health insurance benefits to domestic partners of their employees.

The laws were challenged in a suit filed in 1999 by 12 plaintiffs from Chapel Hill and Carrboro. Nate Pendley, attorney for the plaintiffs, argued that the towns overstepped their authority by passing such ordinances and that state law allows only spouses and children to be considered as dependents.

Sharon Thompson, attorney for Chapel Hill, argued that state law allows municipalities to set their own definitions for the term "dependents."

"It's just a contractual decision as to who should be given dependent coverage," said Michael Brough, Carrboro's town attorney.

The ruling means the towns can continue to provide the benefits, though the plaintiffs have 30 days to file an appeal.

In practice, few employees take advantage of the benefit. Chapel Hill estimates that it spends about .005 percent of its budget on benefits for domestic partners.

"I am extremely pleased that the judge agreed with what we have been saying all along — local governments have the authority to provide domestic partner benefits, it is a reasonable thing for them to do and it does not violate any public policy. It is unfortunate that the town is being forced to spend taxpayers' dollars to defend their actions against such an organized political attack," said Thompson.

"Clearly, the judge wants someone further up the line to decide the issue," said Pendley, implying an intent to appeal the decision.

A 1996 challenge to the laws was thrown out when the anonymous Chapel Hill plaintiff refused to be identified. ▼

Money missing from March coffers

As much as \$750,000 might be involved

by Dan Van Mourik
Q-Notes Staff

WASHINGTON, DC—The Millennium March on Washington for Equality (MMOW) has struggled with controversy since its inception. Even now that the event — held the weekend of April 28-30 — is over, problems continue to plague the organization.

Organizers state they have not received any of the revenue promised them by the company that produced the festival in conjunction with the march. Believing an amount of money reaching six-figures was stolen, they called in the FBI to investigate. The FBI confirmed that it is investigating allegations that someone might have walked off with as much as \$750,000.

"We did receive allegations that the funds are missing," said FBI spokeswoman Susan Lloyd. "We have opened a preliminary investigation into this allegation. At this point, we have not independently confirmed any of it, including the amount of money or the people involved."

MMOW organizers have not ruled out a lawsuit against Millennium Productions LLC, the company that agreed to turn over 65 percent of the revenue from the sale of food, souvenirs and tickets to entertainment events during the festival.

However, Jose Ucles, director of Millennium Productions, said that he and his business partners were also "victims."

"We were robbed of half a million upwards, perhaps \$750,000," Ucles said. "It had to be someone who knew us, and that is the sad part."

Ucles said he and his staff have been auditing wristbands as well as food, drink and entry tickets since the event, in an attempt to figure out exactly how much money is missing.

"We are not the only victims, so are the many people and organizations that worked so hard to make the Millennium Festival and MMOW such a success. We feel terrible that we are unable to meet all the financial responsibilities associated with the festival," Ucles said. "Our hope is that the authorities will be able to get to the bottom of this and be able to recover the

stolen amount."

Wristbands were sold to attendees of the festival for \$5 as a donation to MMOW, to offset its related expenses and for accounting purposes. Food and drink tickets were used for similar accounting purposes.

The dispute over funds began on the last night of the event. Organizers said members of Millennium Productions told them "that they couldn't pay us what they owe us," said Ann DeGroot, MMOW co-chair. "We think they owe us about \$750,000." At the end of the march, organizers said they realized that they had a major problem. Without the money, they couldn't hope to repay the money they borrowed from companies to stage the event. On Monday, May 8, they informed other committee members. On Tuesday, May 9, they approached the FBI's Washington field office.

"It is fair to infer at this point that someone simply walked off with the money," said Michael Boucher, a Washington-based lawyer who served as general counsel for the march.

Two agents from the FBI's white collar crime unit met with Boucher and two MMOW board members — Raleigh attorney Michael Armentrout and Human Rights Campaign (HRC) staffer Margaret Conway. At least three people have been identified as suspects, Boucher said.

While the FBI continues to investigate the missing funds, additional questions arose about the handling of the money for which they've already accounted. Some

people involved said there were problems getting the money from the Brinks trucks to the bank.

However, Malcolm Lazin, a former executive director of the march, has been repaid the \$400,000 loan he made to the Millennium Festival. On May 4, Millennium Productions wired the money to Lazin plus \$100,000 in interest. Lazin stated that the interest, less financing costs, "would go to charity."

Michael Gallagher, MMOW's financial director until he was dismissed several days after the march, said Lazin's \$100,000 loan fee was meant to "ensure that money goes back to the community." He said MMOW had promised to give money to local community organizations, but that it was unlikely that MMOW

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