

Q Notes

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Decision to pull *Queer* photo sparks controversy

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

CHARLOTTE — GLBT readers of the *The Charlotte Observer* received a pleasant surprise when they flipped to the paper's Sunday Arts section December 10 and found extensive coverage of Showtime's groundbreaking new series *Queer As Folk*.

But if they had known that the photograph originally slated to accompany the page one feature — depicting two male cast members just prior to a kiss — had been dumped for being too explicit and replaced with the chaste image they saw — two of the show's stars standing by a bar — their enthusiasm would likely have been curbed.

And if they had known the full scope of the process that led to the decision, they probably would have been greatly disappointed, just as some of the newspaper's own employees were.

Questions involving the manner in which the photograph was challenged, the potential homophobia behind its removal and the ongoing effort to downplay the decision have all bitterly divided newsroom staffers according to one inside source.

Apparently, press operators at the *Observer* initiated the removal of the photo on Thursday, December 7 — just before the section was scheduled to be printed — when they undertook an action to communicate their concerns about the image. The manner in which they did this is unclear, and the launching point of the debacle.

One recounting holds that pressmen simply called Managing Editor Frank Barrows and Publisher Peter Ridder to the press room to voice their opinions; Barrows reviewed the photograph and determined that it needed to be replaced.

But another, more troubling, version of the morning's events — one that has been circulating through the *Observer* news-

room since the situation unfolded — charges that pressmen refused to print the section before Barrows arrived to remove the offending photograph.

Many staff members are frustrated that Barrows and *Observer* Editor Jennie Buckner, who was out of town that day, will not clarify what transpired in the pressroom.

"It's almost as if it's a secret," said a newsroom employee who requested anonymity. "We're not being told and you get the impression that they don't want us to know. All we can do is imagine what was said and many are imagining it was anti-gay. It's a mystery that no one seems to be able to solve."

In a memo to the newsroom staff issued December 8, Barrows took sole responsibility for the decision. "I thought [the picture] was too erotically charged for a general-readership newspaper, especially when combined with display type that read 'Tongues Untied' directly over the mouths of the two people as they leaned so closely together that their foreheads touched."

He explained that this was "not a case of the pressmen editing *The Observer*; it's not their job. I simply did not get the chance to edit the package the day before. Thus when I did get the opportunity to assess the photograph, the only intellectually honest course was to apply the same standards I would have at an earlier point, regardless of how the page was brought to my attention."

Barrows added that there would be a "follow up" with press operators, but he gave no details about the events of the previous morning.

Q-Notes attempted to interview Barrows, but he did not respond to our request by press time.

The New York Times covered the controversy in a December
See PHOTO on page 4



Kiss, but don't tell: This promotional photo from *Queer as Folk* was deemed too "erotically charged" for publication in the *Observer*.

Cullen to head GLSEN DC office

by Jim Anderson
Special to Q-Notes

WASHINGTON, DC — The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network [GLSEN] announced early in December that Mary Kate [MK] Cullen, who resigned in March as executive director of Equality North Carolina PAC to become GLSEN's Public Policy Director, will head the organization's new Office for Public Policy in Washington, DC. The office will identify federal, state and local public policy strategies and expand the organization's work with the Department of Education and mainstream education organizations.

"Over the past few years educational policy leaders and elected officials have begun to wake up to the reality that GLBT students and staff exist and need support," stated Cullen. "In opening an office in the Nation's capital, we're better positioned than ever to build coalitions, influence the federal government and stakeholder organizations, and articulate a clear strategy for national change."

In addition to expanding GLSEN's work with national mainstream education and civil rights groups, the Office for Public Policy will provide leadership in mapping out the states and communities in which GLSEN will leverage resources to pass safe schools legislation, expand nondiscrimination policies or fight anti-gay initiatives. It will also direct GLSEN's Research Project, which brings together academics and activists to identify research gap areas and strategies to fill them.

"As GLSEN's reputation within educational communities has grown, so has the need for GLSEN to have a strong and steady presence in Washington," stated GLSEN Executive Director Kevin Jennings. "We are delighted that MK Cullen has transitioned from long-time



Mary Kate [MK] Cullen

GLSEN volunteer to Director of Public Policy. Her grassroots experience and commitment to progressive social justice organizing will help to bring about a safer school day for LGBT youth around the country."

A nationally respected grassroots organizer, Cullen comes to GLSEN with an extensive background in both statewide legislative activism and student organizing. Before she served as executive director of Equality North Carolina PAC, a statewide organization working toward gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) rights, she worked as a field organizer and trainer director for the United States Student Association. In her capacity as GLSEN's Director of Public Policy, Cullen will oversee coalition-building and research initiatives and work to identify and advance the organization's public policy agenda. ▼

Toronto church will offer legal same-sex marriages

by Bruce Weese
Special to Q-Notes

The Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto [MCC Toronto] has announced it will be performing legal, same-sex marriages beginning in January 2001.

At an MCC Toronto church service held on December 3, Senior Pastor Rev. Brent Hawkes told the congregation, "MCC Toronto is proud to announce that beginning in January 2001 we will be issuing marriage licenses for same-sex weddings. Until now, we felt restricted from acting on our beliefs by what we thought was a legal impediment regarding same-sex weddings. Being called by God to marry same-sex couples, we recently sought legal advice and as a result, we have changed our position on the legality of same-sex marriages. In keeping with the ancient Christian tradition of banns of marriage we will now be issuing marriage licenses for same-sex weddings. We believe we will be the first to issue these licenses anywhere in the world. As you may know, the issue of same-sex marriage is currently before the courts and we are seeking to participate in those court proceedings."

Attorney Douglas Elliott has advised the church that pursuant to Section 5 of the Ontario Marriage Act, the church has the authority to follow ancient Christian tradition of publication of banns of marriage instead of requiring couples to obtain a marriage license.

Under Ontario law, couples who wish to marry can either obtain a license from a local municipal clerk or they can have banns published in a church they regularly attend. The municipal clerks in Ontario have declined to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples and this is the subject of a current court case in the Ontario Divisional Court.

Until now, no church in Ontario has offered to marry same-sex couples by publishing banns of marriage. Banns of marriage consist of an audible announcement of the intention to marry at a church service in accordance with that church's practice, usually each Sunday for three Sundays preceding the wedding. It is the church that issues the marriage certificate following the wedding ceremony.

MCC Toronto is a member congregation of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches [UFMCC], an inclusive worldwide fellowship of Christian congregations with a special outreach to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. Since its founding in 1968, UFMCC has grown into a denomination of approximately 45,000 members in 300 churches in 18 countries.

MCC founder Rev. Troy Perry states, "Our denomination is very proud of the Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto, Canada, and the fact that, under the leadership of Rev. Brent Hawkes, they are challenging the marriage laws of the province of Ontario on the issue of same-sex marriages. This will be the first time in Canadian history that a same-sex marriage will be performed and a marriage license issued."

"We were delighted with the overwhelming response of our congregation and several couples have already expressed interest in being married in our church" said Rev. Hawkes. ▼



Senior Pastor
Rev. Brent Hawkes
MCC Toronto

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