

A fun-filled Pride weekend in Charlotte was a Gay old time

Marshall Park bursts with pride

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

It seems that nearly everyone got what they wanted from this year's Pride Festival, held May 5 in Marshall Park. Organizers were thrilled by the strong turnout; vendors reported brisk sales;



Stand up and cheer!
Charlotte Pride 2001 committee members were all on deck to thank everyone involved with making the event such a success.

Pictured (l-r) are: Jeff Englar, Kevin Washburn, John Stotler, Jeff Schmehl, Kris Ledbetter, Shalimar Strahan, Jen Lichter, Rob Tynes.

sun worshippers got a gorgeous day outdoors; people watchers were happy with the dearth of clothes in the crowd; and the main stage audience was treated to a variety of entertainment by national and local acts.

The 2001 festival opened to the public at 11:00 am and was in full swing by noon. According to the official estimate, between 4000 and 6000 attendees strolled through the vendor booths, planted themselves in front of the stage or boogied under the dance tent at some point during the day.

"[W]e couldn't be more pleased," asserted Charlotte Pride Director Jeff Schmehl. "We've had numerous comments from vendors, performers, speakers, and festival attendees that this ranks among ... the best organized festivals."

Representatives of G&L Bank, a Pride sponsor and vendor, reported that they had their best response ever at a Pride celebration, opening over 100 new accounts. Thanks to a new funding program that G&L Bank debuted during the festival, each of those openings generated a \$25 donation for Charlotte Pride or Time Out Youth.

White Rabbit Books & Things employee Dan Van Mourik stated that business was brisk at his company's table, as well. Folks sifted through items such as rainbow-colored notepads,

cigarette lighters and bumper stickers with many settling on a purchase before moving on.

Vendors offering cold beverages and frozen treats also had customers lined up all day as the temperature hovered in the upper 80s.

On stage, Charlotte's new GLBT cheerleading squad, the Queen City's Royal Court, opened a full day of performances and guest speakers with a rollicking, energetic set. They were followed by a slate of vocalists, comedians, political activists, female impersonators, country line dancers and faith leaders. National recording artists Jade Esteban Estrada and Phranc were the festival headliners and each was enthusiastically received despite the fact that their respective catalogs were relatively unknown by the crowd.



Mandy Carter, Concetta Caliendo and Ginger Walker (l-r) sport North Carolina Democrat t-shirts.

Over at the dance tent, turntable artists Lin Benfield, Richie Rich and Andy Kastanas kept the beats swirling and the queens twirling all afternoon long. In fact, the response was so strong that the dance tent was kept going nearly an hour longer than originally planned. Like the other aspects of the festival, folks just didn't want it to end.

Looking ahead, it appears that Charlotte's GLBT community has matured to the point that a festival of this scope and quality is possible every year. "This will be an annual thing. We will be adding board members — probably in July — and looking at ways to improve Charlotte Pride. This might include lengthening the hours [of the festival] and laying out the park differently. It probably will be held in Marshall Park next year," stated Schmehl. He added that next year's festival planning would begin with seed money gleaned from this one. "Money is still coming in. A couple of bars who did fundraisers for us still have money to send in so we're going to make out with a little extra for next year." ▼

Proud music of the night

by Clay Ollis
Q-Notes Staff

One Voice, Charlotte's GLBT Affirming Chorus, delivered proud performances May 4 and 5 at the Visulite Theater in Charlotte.

As usual, the group showed off its broad range of stylistic abilities (though I personally missed the more formal — read: uppity — music) and its abundance of solo-quality voices.

In addition to the full chorus and the small ensemble Sotto Voce, the program featured a generous supply of quality solo voices including at least two exceptional Sopranos (one of whom acted the perfect prima-dona by her rendition of *People Will Say We're in Love* narcissistically sung to a mirror) and a luscious Bass singing *Music of the Night* (which requires a range like Mariah Carey a few octaves lower) as well as duets and trios.

This show also showcased the annual awards given by the chorus to singers and non-singers who have given exceptional time, talent, and resources to the chorus to make sure that the show goes on. Rather than risk leaving someone out, I'll simply say, "Congratu-

lations, one and all."

Additionally, a special presentation was made to former Co-Artistic Director Kathryn Mahan, who stepped down from the podium this spring to concentrate on fundraising and all the other non-musical tasks that are necessary to the success of the chorus. Clearly, she loves the chorus as much as they love her, so when she comes looking for support, be generous.

There were also those touches of theatrics which One Voice audiences have come to love. All I'll tell you is that they ranged from white gloves in black light to a red-feather boa any drag queen would die for. (But it also looked luscious on a certain petite femme-fatale in *Don't Tell Mama*.)

One of the most touching moments of the show was the duet by Samis Rose and Jerry Brett (whose recent CD I just heard) of *May I Have This Dance*. The song was dedicated by chorus member Linda Lawyer to her partner on their anniversary.

But I've decided I'm not going to the next Cabaret unless I'm in love, or unless John Quillan promises to offer a few lonely-heart songs amid all the love for a lifetime. ▼

Thanks, Bill!

Charlotte Pride received some unexpected publicity in the days leading up to the festival when anti-gay Mecklenburg County Commissioner Bill James spoke out against Mayor Pat McCrory's decision to issue a letter welcoming participants.

James argued to the local print and broadcast media that McCrory was supporting a felonious lifestyle — based on his interpretation of the state's sodomy prohibition. There was some concern that the negative press might result in an organized protest of the festival, but, in the end, it only seemed to raise awareness about it. Commissioner James didn't get an official "Thanks" in the festival Pride Guide, but he probably deserved it for helping spread the word. ▼



Letter

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we should talk about the facts.

Public policy is made by elected officials, ideally conscientious ones. As an elected official I'm sure you won't mind taking a look at some of the other laws that are no longer needed and getting them removed as well. Remember we live in an ever changing culture. Are you aware that it is illegal to sing off-key in the state of North Carolina?

In reference to your political view, Mr. James, don't kid yourself into thinking that elec-

tions are based on Republicans views or votes. I stand behind the statement of Charlotte Pride Organizer Jeff Schmehl: "We pay taxes in the community [and we] deserve the right to celebrate who we are."

And as a CHALLENGE, I am personally standing up to Mr. James and any one else who does not want to make Charlotte a more diverse city, elected or not! ▼

—Joseph L. Mercer
Charlotte

[Your letters are welcome and may be addressed to editor@q-notes.com or faxed to 704-531-1361. Letters may be edited for space or content.]

RAIN walkers are biggest givers ever

by LaMond Hart
Special to Q-Notes

The Regional Interfaith AIDS network's annual AIDS walk, held April 5 amid a host of other Charlotte Pride festivities, raised more money per walker than in any previous year.

The event began with a picnic lunch on the front lawn of the Great Aunt Stella Center, complete with an award for "Best Picnic Spread." Despite the fact that the walk had to be held later in the day this year, due to a host of other activities in Charlotte, over 250 people participated in the walk.

Elaine Rhodes, RAIN's development director, noted that the number of walkers was lower than previously — possibly due to the change in hour and/or the myriad of other activities taking place, but was pleased to report raising \$50 thousand dollars, about the same as last year and

considerably more per walker than ever before.

The walkers had the privilege of being addressed and encouraged by a national leader in the fight against AIDS, Dr. Joycelyn Elders, former Surgeon General. One attendee commented that Elders was "a very dynamic speaker" and seemed "well-received by the crowd." Elders has worked, in her words, "to change concern about social problems that affect health into commitment."

Elders also agreed to serve as the Honorary Chair for RAIN's corporate campaign, which was launched the day of the walk.

Individual and corporate donations support almost 80 Care Teams in 10 counties. Such sponsorships also support RAIN's HIV/AIDS prevention education programs.

For information on corporate sponsorships, call 704-372-7246 or email Elaineat RAIN@aol.com. ▼

The sweet smell of leather

by Jim Grigg
Special to Q-Notes

May 4 - 6 the Tradesmen Leather/Levi Club of Charlotte held their fifteenth anniversary celebration with Trademark XV: In Uniform — Don't Ask, Don't Tell. The event was proclaimed a landmark success!

Most noticeable to the over 150 people arriving at The Airport Sheraton was the Leather Pride Flag flying alongside the US and State flags at the hotel's entrance. Leather pride balloon arches and arrangements throughout the hotel made everyone feel right at home.

Trademark XV special weekend guest Wade Neff posed for pictures at the Brass Rail on Friday to raise money for The House of Mercy Hospice in Belmont. The record crowd spilled over into a specially expanded patio.

The Leather Cruise, open to both Trademark and Charlotte Pride attendees, featured leather and fetish wear, novelties, clothing and equipment from vendors from the Carolinas to Iowa. A healthy turnout of local shoppers indicated our city was long overdue for this type of opportunity.

Trademark XV was successfully integrated with Charlotte Pride, thanks to The Sheraton's free round trip shuttle service to Marshall Park. Pride participants stopped by The Tradesmen's booth throughout the day to show their support and get their tickets for Saturday night's An Officers Ball.

Saturday evening, a formal banquet began with the traditional Parade of Colors, featur-

ing representatives from 16 brother clubs following the Tradesmen's colors. Dinner was followed by a hilarious roast and comedy routine by New York comic Paul Williams. As 10:00 pm neared, police, fire and military uniforms were everywhere, signaling the start of the Officers Ball, with over 400 people in attendance.

On Sunday morning the Tradesmen presented a check for \$5000.00 to executive director Stan Patterson from The House Of



Wade Neff (l) helps make TradeMark XV a leather success!

Mercy AIDS hospice. This money was raised through proceeds of the Leather Cruise, Officer's Ball, and club night fundraisers throughout the year. ▼