

# north & south CAROLINA Q Notes

noted . notable . noteworthy GLBT issues

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PO Box 221841 • Charlotte, NC 28222

704.531.9988

704.531.1361 FAX

www.q-notes.com

Publisher: Jim Yarbrough

Editor . Art Director: Leah D. Seepsenwol  
editor@q-notes.com

Associate Editor: Brian M. Myer  
editor2@q-notes.com

Feature Editor: Lainey Millen  
assoceditor@q-notes.com

Administrative Assist: Christopher Siddons  
info@q-notes.com

Graphic Design Production: Lainey Millen  
production@q-notes.com

Ad Sales NC/SC

Jim Yarbrough, Corporate 704.531.9988  
publisher@q-notes.com

Brent James, SC and Western NC:  
adrep@q-notes.com 704.531.9988

Ad Sales . National: 212.242.6863  
Rivendell Marketing Co, Inc.

## GLBTQ Switchboards

For meetings, or guidance contact the GLBTQ Switchboard in your area:

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Raleigh 919-821-0055  
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### contributing writers

Lou Chibbaro Jr., Bo Dean/OutWilmington, J. Lynn Davidson, Bob Egelko, Kent Fisher, Kelly Gilmer, Kevin Isom, Robert Kirby, Charlene Lichtenstein, Ed Madden, Miss Della, Brian Myer, Mark Pitsch, Leslie Robinson, Anthony Romero, Michelle Scott, Mark Schultz, Leah D. Seepsenwol, Charlie Smith, Trinity

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## BENEFITS from page 1

Mecklenburg County for the same changes. But like Durham, will focus on the city first.

### The benefit far outweighs cost

Mayor Pat McCrory is worried about the cost. The city faces an estimated \$11 million deficit in its 2003-04 budget.

Charlotte is in debt and this issue is not the arena issue, after all. "We can't afford it," McCrory said. "With a big deficit, any additional cost is too much."

National studies indicate most cities and companies that put the benefits in place have seen their costs rise less than 1 percent.

And in North Carolina's three cities and locally headquartered corporations, there has been little measurable increase.

"Wachovia began offering medical and dental benefits to both same-sex and opposite-sex domestic partners in 2001 and it had 'no material impact' on the company's benefits costs, said spokeswoman Arati Randolph" to the <Observer.>

### Value for value

To qualify, couples must certify they have lived together for at least six months and intend to do so indefinitely, among other criteria, she said.

"We want to be able to attract and retain the very best talent, and part of that is making sure our benefits are competitive and attractive," Randolph said. "The other piece is that one of our values is respecting and valuing the individual."

There is no indication yet as to how many of Charlotte's 5800 city employees would sign up to receive the benefits. One of every eight couples is a same-sex variety, according to the 2000 Census which also reported 5.4% of all Charlotte households are occupied by unmarried couples.

### Durham city, but not county

Only 10 of Durham's 2000 employees

enrolled their partners when the change took effect Jan. 1, said benefits manager Michael McGinni — adding about \$15,000 to the \$11 million the city pays annually in health insurance costs.

Durham County employees tried to persuade the county to follow suit last month. Commissioners bowed to an 1805 state law forbidding "fornication and cohabitation." Their city attorney advised assigning the benefit would put them in violation of that antiquated law.

NC Rep. Paul Luebke, D-Durham, claiming the Durham County attorney's interpretation of the law is wrong, introduced a bill prohibiting the use of the 1805 law to deny domestic partner benefits.

Chapel Hill and Carrboro successfully thwarted an attempt by the NC Foundation for Individual Rights, a conservative group, to repeal the benefits awards when an Orange County judge ruled against the Foundation in 2000.

The NC Family Policy Council, a conservative nonprofit in Raleigh, will join the Foundation in its fight to defeat the bill.

"We have fornication and adultery laws here that criminalize sexual activity outside marriage," said Research Director Stephen Daniels, to the <Observer>. "Granting benefits to unmarried couples gives them legitimization."

A gay unidentified city employee said he never experienced a hostile environment at the city but it would be nice for city leaders to send the message that he and other homosexual employees are valued.

"We want to know that the benefits we get are equal to everyone else's," he said. "It's an issue of fairness."

info: ActionAlert page 11

## SAFE from page 1

coming out, responding to homophobia, religion and other issues.

"Before this program, I could hide the fact that I was an ally," said Bianca Briola, a Duke admissions officer and 2002 graduate who has been trained to teach faculty and students how to become SAFE members. "Now, I really have to take personal responsibility for my beliefs. The SAFE program provides a formal structure for students to have some sort of support. Having the sign on my door invites conversation."

The DVD was produced by Poynter and the LGBT center, with grants and funding

from the American College Personnel Association Educational Leadership Foundation, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators Foundation, the Duke Mack Campus Life Fund and the Duke University Division of Student Affairs.

The DVD is free for interested institutions. It can be previewed and ordered online

### info:

http://lgbt.studentaffairs.duke.edu/safe.html.  
Kerry Poynter: kpoynter@duke.edu 919-684-6607

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## action!alert . HRC

### Amend Family & Medical Leave Act

include domestic partners and other family members.

**take action online!**  
free fax to your US Rep  
http://hrc.grassroots.com/domesticpartners/urgefml

On March 25, Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) introduced H.R.430, the Family and Medical Leave Inclusion Act, amending the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act to