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Asheville clashes over gay marriage

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Baptist Church told gays and lesbians that their sin was indeed heinous — but it could be forgiven.

Dykes' babble was of little consequence or interest to protesters — as they returned his statements with shouts of "Separate church and state" and "It's our nation too."

Tensions begin to rise when an Asheville police officer came to the front of the crowd and announced that the only way LGBT activists could stay was to be silent. "Otherwise, you will have to be moved across the street," he reprimanded.

His instructions were mostly ignored, but it wasn't long before other forms of public protest began to manifest: two lesbians began kissing passionately, amidst cheers from the crowd, followed by a gay man kissing two different men. By now the mostly Baptist audience began shielding their children's eyes and looking away in disgust at the public displays of affection.

Interim Police Chief Ross Robinson told gay activists and supporters to move across the street — and that resistance would lead to arrest.

A line of 35 officers and sheriffs surrounded the protesters, as they were forced slowly towards the street. A handful of protesters initially refused to move, but were coerced by a local activist. "This is not worth it. It's not the way to further the cause," the unidentified individual said. "Just listen to the police and do as you are told."

As the masses of people were squeezed onto the sidewalk and into the street where traffic was moving, the police apparently decided it was time to move.

One young man was wrestled to the

ground by four officers — for doing nothing more than not moving fast enough. Some protesters broke through the line of officers



Members of the Swannanoa Valley Independent Missionary Baptist Church descended upon downtown Asheville for a 'Sanctity of Marriage' rally Mar. 6.

and were quickly apprehended. Another teenage boy shouted something to the officers and was taken down violently.

The remaining protesters were shunted away from the City County Plaza, across Spruce St. to a small grass island, where they remained surrounded by police. Despite the arrests, gay and lesbian supportive picketers continued to protest throughout the remainder of the event, chanting, "We're here. We're queer. We won't disappear." A handful of young men possibly affiliated with the Radical Faeries movement staged a gay revival, complete with dancing, singing and shouting, followed by mock gay weddings, with several men dressed in full or partial wedding gowns.

A University of North Carolina student on hand for the protest was confused as to why the "Sanctity of Marriage" organizers — the Swannanoa Valley Independent Missionary Baptist Church, — staged the event in Asheville. "Sanctity of Marriage supporters came to Asheville deliberately to cause controversy," said Lindsey Duchac. "Why didn't they stage the rally in their own hometowns, just outside of Asheville? They came here to make us mad. It worked."

Of the eleven who were arrested, most were charged with misdemeanor second-degree trespassing. Two activists were charged with resisting arrest, and two others with creating a public disturbance. All were instructed to appear in court on Apr. 5.

stuart williams

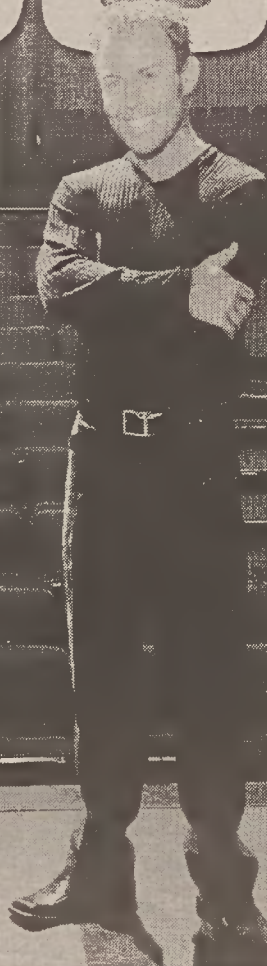
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