

Opinion

Don't judge a book by its cover

by Rev. Candace Chellew-Hodges



My partner Wanda and I volunteered our time recently to talk with people at the state fair about the upcoming amendment to the S.C. constitution that would discriminate against same-sex couples. I had my reservations about volunteering for the South Carolina Equality Coalition booth but within our first 15 minutes we had at least four positive interactions with people.

I would say that 99 percent of our conversations through the night were extremely positive. I learned in those four hours not to judge book by its cover — ever. One grizzled man in well-worn blue jeans and a T-shirt almost ran up to the booth, grabbed a few of the free rainbow bracelets we were giving away and asked, "May I have these?"

"Sure," I said, "but you have to hear my pitch."

He smiled broadly, "I don't have to hear your pitch, two of my family members are gay and I'll vote against anything that hurts them." I wanted to hug him.

Then, two African-American sisters

poked through the bracelets and chatted with me. One was the mother of a 26-year-old lesbian — the other the adoring aunt. "I don't want my daughter to face any discrimination," the mom told me — the aunt emphatically agreed.

One white couple with the appropriate 2.5 children stopped to chat and thought the amendment was a terrible idea — they said they'd certainly vote no.

A man with a military haircut stopped by with his three kids and wife in tow and was adamant about voting against the amendment. He was angry over Westboro Baptist Church leader Fred Phelps and his recent protests of the funerals of soldiers killed in Iraq. Phelps is the Topeka, Kan., minister known for his protests of gay and lesbian events. This man was all for fairness — for us and for soldiers.

What occurred to me during our night at the fair was the absolute importance for gay and lesbian people in this state to come out — to their bosses, their families, their pastors and their friends. A majority of the positive comments we heard were from people who either had family members or friends who were gay.

ACT UP's old slogan came to mind — "silence equals death" — in South Carolina silence from our community could well mean the death of equality for our relationships. What I learned is that South Carolinians, when given a chance to understand our lives will overwhelmingly support our rights. But they'll only get to know us if we come out and speak up.

MeckPAC Voter Guide 2005

Charlotte Mayor, City Council & School Board

The Mecklenburg Gay and Lesbian Political Action Committee (MeckPAC) is a nonpartisan political organization. Candidates are evaluated on their responses to a questionnaire and other criteria, including past performance. MeckPAC's ratings do not take into account where the candidate may stand on issues other than those directly related to MeckPAC's concerns.

Mayor:

Craig Madans — Endorsed
Pat McCrory — Warning

City Council:

At-Large (choose up to 4)

Darrell Bonapart — Endorsed
Susan Burgess — Receptive
David Erdman — Receptive
Anthony Foxx — Non-committal
John Lassiter — Refused to Respond
Pat Mumford — Non-committal
John Tabor — Refused to Respond
Lynn Wheeler — Refused to Respond

District 7

Nicholas Heath — Endorsed
Don Lochman — Warning

School Board

(all races are nonpartisan):

District 1

Larry Gavreau — Warning
Rhonda Lennon — Refused to Respond

District 2

Mukul Datta — Endorsed

Donna Dawson — Endorsed
Sheila Ann Johnson — Non-committal
Wilma Leake — Receptive

District 3

Jaye Maxx Alexander — Warning
Dwayne Collins — Refused to Respond
George Dunlap — Endorsed
Lucille Puckett — Recommended

District 4

Clarence Puckett — Warning
Peter Sidebotton — Endorsed
Mark Sims — Recommended
Tom Tate — Endorsed

District 5

Molly Griffin — Refused to Respond
Ellen Loflin — Receptive

District 6

Larry Bumgarner — Receptive
Liz Downing — Refused to Respond
Ken Gjertsen — Refused to Respond

Ratings:

Endorsed: MeckPAC strongly encourages you to vote for this candidate.

Recommended: This candidate met some but not all of the criteria for an endorsement.

Receptive: This candidate's responses indicated openness to further contacts.

Non-committal: This candidate was unwilling to respond concretely to MeckPAC's policy concerns.

Warning: Based on their positions on LGBT issues, MeckPAC does not support this candidate.

Refused to Respond: This candidate did not respond to MeckPAC's questionnaire or to other contacts.

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