

pride
CHARLOTTE

Special Event Section

Pride Charlotte set for August 25

Back at Gateway, event expected to be bigger and better

by Mark Smith

This year's theme for the Pride Charlotte celebration is "United for Equality." Now celebrating its second year as a project of The Lesbian and Gay Community Center, Pride '07 promises a week-long slate of events leading up to the big blow-out that will be held at Gateway Village in uptown Charlotte at the corner of Cedar and W. Trade Sts.

While this is only the second year Pride has been a project of The Center, LGBT pride celebrations in Charlotte date back to the summer of 1978 when an organization known as Queen City Quordinators produced the city's first Pride festival on a University of North Carolina-Charlotte athletic field.

Despite growth and gain by the city's LGBT community over the next eight years — former Charlotte Mayor Harvey Gantt showed up at Scorpio to campaign for office — the next Pride celebration didn't come along until 1986 when *Q-Notes* sponsored a community picnic at Bryant Park. That annual event continued through 1992, with others following: a 1993 Family Reunion at The VanLandingham Estate; the statewide 1994 North Carolina Pride march; and the OutCharlotte arts festival, which began in October 1995 and contin-

ued every year through 2002.

The year 2001 saw the kick-off of Charlotte Pride — held annually at the city's Marshall Park through 2005.

In 2006, Charlotte's LGBT community came to a crossroads — previous organizers of the festival were ready to hand off control and The Center — along with the aid of *Q-Notes* and a handful of civically-minded volunteers — were ready to step up to the plate.

What was once known as Charlotte Pride was totally revamped with new leadership, a new name and a new venue: Pride Charlotte kicked off for the first time at Gateway Village.

With record-breaking attendance (an estimated 6,000) and groundbreaking sponsorship (corporations like Bank of America, Wachovia and Food Lion came on board), Pride Charlotte '06 was heralded as the most successful Pride event to date for the region, attracting attendees from both Carolinas, Georgia, Tennessee, Washington, D.C. and beyond.

For 2007, organizers expect a crowd of 7,000 or more and have planned an exciting line-up of events in the days preceeding the Pride celebration.

See pages 16-18 for details of all the Pride Week events.

Saturday, August 25, is the big festival, starting at 11 a.m. and going to 7 p.m. Members of the LGBT community throughout

the southeast will converge on Gateway Center for a day's worth of fun that includes a record number of retail vendors, organizations, a dance tent, a kids corner and a great lineup of performers and speakers. Among the speakers: Mecklenburg County Commission Chair Jennifer Roberts, Charlotte Mayor pro-tem Susan Burgess and Elke Kennedy-Parker, the mother of slain S.C. gay youth Sean Kennedy.

Hosting the stage for the day will be Cooper Lawrence, a developmental psychologist and the host of her own nationally syndicated radio show, "The Cooper Lawrence Show," which airs weekdays on Dial Global, Monday through Friday, 7 p.m.-10 p.m. Cooper is also the author of "Been There, Done That, Kept The Jewelry," "CosmoGIRL's All About Guys" and her latest book due out January 2008, "Cult of Perfection: Make Peace With Your Inner Overachiever."

She appears regularly on CNN's "Showbiz

Tonight," FOX News Live and has been seen on "The Today Show," "CNN Presents," "Your World with Neil Cavuto," "Nancy Grace" and more.

Performers for the day include the LGBT chorale ensembles One Voice Chorus and the Unity Fellowship Choir, rockers Josh Zuckerman and Melissa Reaves, R&B performers Kat Williams and Jimmy Roland, acoustic fave Christy Snow (she'll also serve as a host along with Cooper Lawrence) and the all-female quartet The Near Misses.

Sponsors for this year's event are back strong as ever, with The Scorpio Lounge at the top of the heap as Presenting Sponsor. Other top sponsors include Bank of America, *Q-Notes*, Wachovia, Fluent Language Solutions, Food Lion, Velocity and US Airways. ▀

— For more information about dates, times, sponsors, sponsorship, volunteer opportunities and booth rentals, visit www.pridecharlotte.com.

Pride Charlotte's having a Ball: Carolinas' Most Wanted sought

Black, Latino subculture has a rich heritage'

by David Stout . Q-Notes staff

Most people have brushed against the edges of the underground social phenomenon known as Ball Culture exactly twice in their lives. The first time through "Vogue," Madonna's global hit from 1990 that celebrates the stylized dance most commonly associated with the largely black and Latino queer subculture, and similarly three years later with the song "Supermodel (You Better Work)."

The latter track, the debut single from gender-bending artist RuPaul, was only a moderate success on the pop charts, but it was influential in pop culture for bringing snatches of Ball-speak — "you better work, bitch," "fierce" "work the runway," etc. — into the vernacular.

But beyond the striking dance and the pithy parlance, what is Ball Culture? The answer begins in the 1930s when, according to Michael Cunningham, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of "The Hours," white gay men in NYC would gather in bars to hold drag fashion shows for prizes.

Due to racial divisions blacks were usually excluded, so by the '60s they were holding their own drag balls in Harlem. However, the

size and visibility of their gatherings and the outrageousness of their costumes soon surpassed anything their forebears had produced or probably even imagined. It became common for hundreds of gay and straight specta-



Legendary House mothers Dorian Corey (left) and Pepper LaBeija are featured in "Paris Is Burning," the fascinating Ball Culture documentary from 1990.

tors to fill the rented halls and lodges the competitions rapidly grew into.

The modern era of Ball Culture began in the latter half of the '70s when the first Houses emerged. They were a social response to the fact that poor black and brown people see pride on 18

Elke Kennedy inspires action

Sean's Last Wish works to build awareness and to encourage hate crimes protection

by Jack Kirven . Q-Notes staff

In the time since Sean Kennedy's murder in Greenville, S.C., a few short months ago, something has happened that was probably exactly what local homophobic bigots intended least: A grassroots movement empowering the very people those hatemongers seek to brutalize and silence. Despite (or perhaps because of) the tragedy and emotional trauma she has endured, Elke Kennedy has become a champion for change. She has participated in four vigils across South Carolina, attracting hundreds of participants, and she has composed letters to legislators. She has lobbied with Columbia Mayor Bob Coble and State Rep. Seth Whipper. Because of her efforts at securing media attention, her son's story was read into the *Congressional Record* by U.S. Sen.



Elke Kennedy (right) has become a dedicated spokesperson for equality.

Gordon Smith (R-OR) in support of hate crimes legislation expansion. Currently, she has an online presence for Sean's Last Wish Foundation, an organization that seeks to encourage equality, organ donation and political activism at www.seanslastwish.com.

Elke Kennedy resides in the Upstate region of South Carolina. A native of Germany, she still has family in Europe. On a recent visit she attended her mother's funeral. Sean had wanted

to attend, as well, but he realized he would be unable to because of his school and work schedule, so he sent a note in his place. Even in death, he reached out to a loved one — the note was buried, unopened, with Elke's mother. Inspired by her son's compassionate attitude, she advocates for equality, saying, "[Sean] was always there to stand up for other people or people that couldn't stand up for themselves, people that needed help. And I know that he's watching today and he's saying, 'You know what? Go Mom.'"

Kennedy brings her son's story to Pride Charlotte on Saturday, Aug. 25 at 3:50 p.m. ▀