

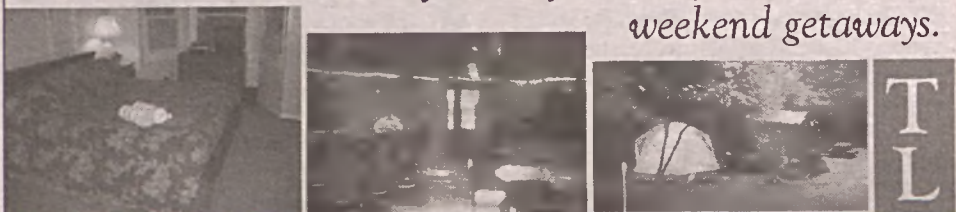


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## REGIONAL

### Carolina festivals expand

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different reasons.

"A regional festival is often capable of larger scale funding and events," he says. "A local Pride event is smaller and more intimate community bonding. I've attended Prides for many years, and I truly believe that both types have great merit and serve an ongoing need to unite on many levels."

Hensley says there is something special about having an event with local musicians, community workshops and local sponsors. "It's our Pride, and well...we're proud," he says. "It's a 21st century community doing some old-fashioned community building."

#### Balancing act

Echoing Hensley, Sams says local Prides are like "homecomings for our people" even at the statewide and regional levels. NC Pride Fest, he says, gives communities that are spread across a vast geographic area a chance to come together as a strong, unified voice at one time and in one place.

Where some see divisions between the various Prides, Sams sees increased resources for youth and those first coming out.

"No matter where in the state a Pride event takes place, they give an opportunity for us to share in each other, meet new people and have a great time," he says. "For some LGBTQ people, events like these are the first time they have a chance put their foot into the water, so to speak."

For these reasons, Sams says local organizing and statewide, regional organizing should not come at "the cost of divisions that happen within our own community."

Hall, who is partly responsible for logistics and fundraising for the Charlotte celebration, acknowledges that conflicting Pride festivals put a strain on sponsorships and attendance. However, he feels there are opportunities for these obstacles to be overcome.

"Invariably they will split some business sponsorship and may have reduced attendance if the two festivals are close together," he says. "But if they pull a larger local audience and more local support, they may be able to overcome the conflicts."

#### Collaboration the key

Unlike the Tar Heel state with its variety of local Prides, South Carolina only has one local festival. On July 12, for the first time in 10

years the LGBT community in Myrtle Beach will hold its own Pride celebration.

SC Pride attracts 6,000-7,000 revelers annually according to organizers. In recent years, SC Pride Movement has increased its outreach to local areas to build support for the statewide festival. Throughout the summer of 2008, the group is hosting a tour across the state.

Starting in Columbia and then making its way through Charleston, Myrtle Beach and other areas, the tour is meant to not only raise money for the statewide festivities, but also to generate local support and meet the folks SC Pride Movement seeks to serve year round.

"SC Pride seeks to include all the major organizations, bars, clubs and community centers in our events," says Wilson. At the same time, he adds, the group is supportive of local communities who wish to start their own Pride events.

Wilson says SC Pride is already a sponsor of the third annual South Carolina Black Pride, slated for June 25-29 in Columbia.

They're also looking for ways to be more supportive of the re-born Myrtle Beach event.

Wilson shrugs off any worries over waning support for state-level events.

"We don't think it will hurt SC Pride to have events at different times of the year around the state," he says. "The more chances for the GLBT community to show their pride and stand up for who we are, the better chances we have at making a difference in our state."

#### The beat goes on

No matter where they take place or who sponsors them, one thing is for sure: Pride festivals and the people who are united and empowered by them are not going away anytime soon.

Whether it's a local or statewide celebration, Prides help us reach our common goal of equality. As such, the responses of community organizers must be supportive.

For community members, state and local festivals serve varying purposes and meet different tastes. Some Pride-goers are looking for "down home," relaxed and family-friendly atmospheres. Others want colorful, out and loud affairs. With events dotted across the region, there's clearly no lack of choice when it comes to Pride season 2008. ▀

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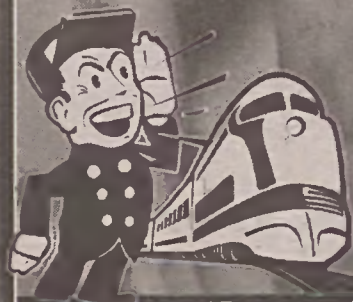
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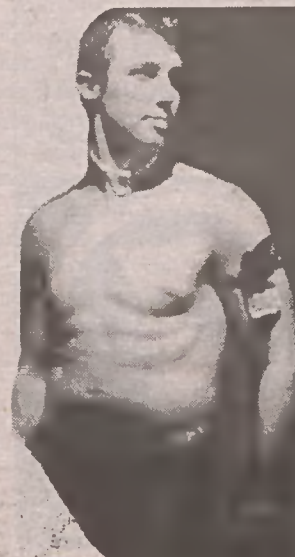
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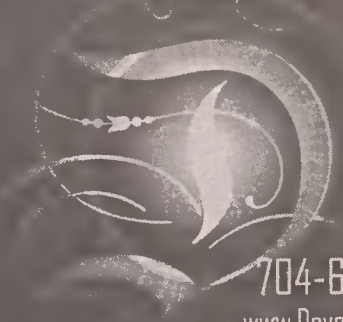
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