

# National stage

**As activists head to a national march in D.C. this October, Carolinas leaders respond to a call for federally-focused strategy for equality**

by Matt Comer . Q-Notes staff

Sitting in a coffee shop in Pittsburgh, Penn., during the weekend of the nation's largest gathering of progressive bloggers and citizen journalists, 27-year-old Kip Williams looks more like a laidback San Francisco hippie, than a man charged with the monumental task of pulling together a national network of activists in all 435 congressional districts.

But as he speaks, a leader filled with passion and vision breaks through the image presented by Whis hip, grunge look: baggy jeans, a ragged button-up shirt and a carefree iPod headphone-wearing personality.

"We are broken and divided right now," Williams told *Q-Notes*, commenting on the state of LGBT community affairs in the face of a splintering debate on the National Equality March his group has planned for Oct. 11, 2009.

As director of Equality Across America, a new national organizing network springing from the passage of California's Prop. 8, Williams is moving full-steam-ahead on plans to bring thousands of activists to the nation's capital.

The initial call for the October march —

made by longtime activist David Mixner and later picked up by grassroots and national activists including AIDS Quilt founder Cleve Jones — sparked a frenzied debate among LGBT advocates and community members across the nation.

The march has come under intense scrutiny and criticism — traditional LGBT media outlets and bloggers have hounded Jones and other organizers. Some bloggers have issued statements against the march, urging their readers not to attend. The criticisms are always the same: limited resources for individuals and organizations during a bad economy, a top-down leadership rather than grassroots action and bad timing without enough time to adequately plan.

In the face of the criticism, Williams stands strong. "In order to move forward we're called to a higher place," he said. "We'll have to get past a lot of the finger-pointing and infighting and work together as friends and partners in a movement."

When activists, community members and politicians gathered in Washington, D.C., for

the Millennium March in 2000, not one state had yet approved marriage equality for same-sex couples. The Supreme Court had yet to hand down its decision overturning sodomy laws. In rural Southern and Mid-Western states, safe schools policies and gay-straight student organizations were still developing and had yet to take a foothold.

Yet, despite the progress, organizers with Equality Across America feel we haven't moved far enough, and fear the current Democratic leadership might be backing down on the promises they gave the community before the 2008 election. Equality Across America hopes its National Equality March will send a message and inspire change.

Jones, a protégé of openly gay elected official Harvey Milk and portrayed by actor Emile Hirsch in last year's landmark film about the assassinated leader, says our community has great momentum that can't be wasted.

"We've got the Stonewall generation working with the Facebook generation on this march," Jones told *Q-Notes* in an interview via telephone. "We're dealing with a

very historic moment the likes of which we have not seen before. I've been around for a long time and I have never seen anything like what we have today."

Reports in the LGBT media and blogosphere have consistently placed the leadership onus on Jones. Although he has been front and center representing the movement, he's quick to dismiss the leadership label.

"I'm not the leader of the march," he said. "I'm just one of over 80 people, a great group of people all over the country."

Equality Across America says the aim of their National Equality March is simple: "Equal protection in all matters governed by civil law in all 50 states."

To achieve that national equality, Jones believes it is time to change strategy.

"I think the old strategy of fighting state-by-state, county-by-county, city-by-city is a failed strategy," he said. "The time has come to focus on federal action."

Ian Palmquist, executive director of the statewide Equality North Carolina, disagrees.

see **Local Leaders** on 6

## KEFFER SELECT

Conveniently located at 13517 Statesville Road in Huntersville, North Carolina, *Keffer Select* provides the finest selection of luxury pre-owned vehicles. You can click the Inventory button in the menu bar on our website to see everything we have to offer, or you can click one of the pictures to browse our BMW, Mercedes, or other various vehicles in stock. Regardless of what you're looking for, we're here to make your next vehicle purchase the easiest you've ever made.



*"...We aim to make your car buying experience as easy and enjoyable as possible. We offer quality vehicles and the highest levels of customer service and satisfaction."*

**866.648.6814**

13517 Statesville Road  
Huntersville, NC 28078

Ask for Rolland for further information when you call in or stop by our showroom.

To find out more about us, visit us online at:

**[www.kefferselect.com](http://www.kefferselect.com)**

