

Support group for gay and lesbian teenagers formed

By Richard J. Dalton Jr.
Staff Writer

Anti-gay vandalism at Chapel Hill High School this past May prompted a teacher to start a support group for gay students in December and could also bolster support for inclusion of sexual orientation in the school's multicultural curriculum, according to a school board member.

In May, anti-gay graffiti directed at English teacher David Bruton was painted on 10 buses, school officials said.

Vandals also threw a dead opossum into the teacher's classroom.

In response, teachers walked out and held hands in solidarity, according to Noah Kotch, editor-in-chief of the school newspaper, *The Proconian*.

Last year, Chapel Hill-Carrboro School Board member Ted Parrish proposed including sexual orientation in Chapel Hill High School's multicultural curriculum, but it was voted down by a substantial majority.

Parrish said the incidents of vandalism might increase support for inclusion of sexual orientation in the

multicultural curriculum.

"I think (the multicultural curriculum) got a real jolt last year when the thing happened with the bus and all that foolishness," he said.

Kotch said the incident prompted discussion concerning homosexuality at the school and led Bruton to start a support group for gay students.

Students interested in joining the support group were told during a school assembly that they could confidentially contact the group's advisers.

Some gay teenagers belong to Out-right, a gay support group independent

of the high school, but this is the first school-sponsored group, Kotch said.

"There's no school club that deals with (homosexuality)," he said.

Gay and lesbian students need to know that there are other gays and lesbians in the high school and that "they are not freaks," Kotch said.

School board member Sue Baker said, "Those evolving a sexual identity should not face the questions themselves."

"I'm very much in support of a group," she added. "We can develop an atmosphere of acceptance."

"No one has to agree with other

peoples' choices or lifestyles, but we must have an attitude of acceptance for those lifestyles or choices," Baker said.

Kotch said the group was not only for gay and lesbian students but also for students interested in homosexuality or for those who had gay or lesbian parents or friends.

He said there had been little negative reaction to the group from parents. "Chapel Hill is a pretty progressive place," he said.

Parrish said, "I can't imagine anyone saying it would promote homosexuality."

But town council member Joe Herzenberg said he expected some opposition to the group.

"Anytime you make progress, there is a backlash," he said.

"(The group) is a great idea," Herzenberg said. "I've been aware of the need for this type of thing for 10 years."

Herzenberg said that in 1981 or 1982 there was an editorial in *The Proconian* calling for a gay support group to be established.

Bruton could not be reached for comment.

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had no business staff and had not kept adequate financial records.

"The printing bill was over about \$900," Hunter said. "The printing bill was paid prior to the freeze, and the phone bill is in the process of being taken care of. But they have yet to appoint a treasurer, and the Phoenix doesn't appear to generate any funds."

Paces said the printing bill to Village Printing was left over from this past spring, when the Phoenix broke from a joint operating agreement with *The Daily Tar Heel* in which the DTH agreed to handle business and advertising for the newsmagazine. The DTH and the Phoenix entered into the agreement in November 1991, and the Phoenix broke away in March 1992.

DTH General Manager Kevin Schwartz said he had advised the Phoenix not to print another issue last spring. "They printed an extra issue when there were not funds and incurred the bill," Schwartz said.

But Paces said she did not know whether the Phoenix was responsible for the printing bill from the extra issue. "We kept getting printing bills, and nobody knew who was responsible."

Paces said the phone bill was generated during the summer when an unidentified person had used the phone in the Phoenix office. Several student organizations use the computer system in the Phoenix office, including the Cellar Door and the Black Ink.

But Tuck said he was not sympathetic. "There were a lot of calls made over the summer," Tuck said, "but it was (the Phoenix's) responsibility to put a lock on the phone."

The Phoenix also had not applied to be recognized as a student organization by the Office of Student Affairs as of late last semester, Hunter said. An organization must be recognized by the Office of Student Affairs to receive student activities funds.

"It's the responsibility of the organization to fix it," Hunter said. "Their funds cannot be unfrozen until they have University recognition."

But Paces said the Phoenix was a recognized student organization. "I don't know what he's saying about our not being an official student organization," she said.

The most recent listing of University-recognized organizations does not include the Phoenix.

Hunter said the biggest problem with the Phoenix was that the organization had no structured business staff and didn't generate its own revenue.

"(The Phoenix) doesn't have even a semblance of any structure," he said. "If they're allowed to operate under the present system of organization — which is none — student government will have to bail them out."

Paces said the Phoenix planned to hire a business manager. She also said the Phoenix planned to try to generate revenue.

Paces said she hoped to use the remaining funds to print as many issues as possible. "We're working on building (a staff), and we'll start fresh next year."

Tuck said the Finance Committee would meet Thursday to decide whether to continue to stop all student activities funds to the Phoenix, or to take further action.

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