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Powerful law firm takes pro-gay stance

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

MONTGOMERY, AL—In order to take a powerful stand on anti-gay hate crimes, one of the South's most influential civil rights institutions has agreed to represent gay-bashing victim Crae Pridgen in a civil suit against three marines who assaulted him.

For the first time in its ten year history, the Southern Poverty Law Center, a non-profit, groundbreaking firm in the fight for racial equality, will prosecute a social justice case dealing with sexual orientation.

In a written statement, Morris Dees, the Law Center's Chief Trial Counsel, said, "Hate crimes plague our nation. When individuals are at risk solely because of their race, sex, ethnic background, or sexual orientation, all

of us are in danger."

Pridgen, 28, said that he decided to approach the Center after appearing with Dees on a CNN broadcast about hate crimes. "I was very impressed with the things he had done with the Ku Klux Klan, I mean as far as prosecuting them, so I got hold of the Law Center's phone number and asked Morris Dees to call me. He [did] and I told him that I was receiving numbers and numbers of phone calls from attorneys across the country wanting to represent me, and I was real leery. I said that since he was on the interview with me, I was very interested in the Law Center and what their cause was."

According to Pridgen, Dees sent him a packet of information on the history of the Center and a videocassette detailing some of

its precedent-setting cases.

Pridgen determined from the material that the firm possessed the type of civil rights vision he was searching for. "I was very impressed with them. Their reputation is very well known all across the country, and they are very interested in gay rights. I felt like they would be the best as far as getting a principle across."

In a telephone interview, the Law Center's Legal Director, Richard Cohen, confirmed that Pridgen's case was the first specifically "gay" suit the Center had handled. But he hastened to add that the organization had been working to eradicate anti-gay violence for quite some time. "We have been tracking crimes against gays and lesbians for many years and report them regularly. We see them

as one of the most important hate crimes. Gay people are more likely to be victimized by hate crimes than any other group in our society, whether that be racial groups, ethnic groups or groups defined by their religion, so we consider them to be an extremely serious problem. This is the first court case we've brought aimed specifically at it, but we have engaged in a variety of public education programs - including education programs directed toward law enforcement."

The Center's reliance on education, coupled with its representation of Crae Pridgen, prompted Cohen to send a letter to U.S. Secretary of Defense Les Aspin on March 15, 1992 wherein he addressed the problems of, and possible solutions to, the violence
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Lesbian Avengers co-founder Doris Taylor on the Duke University campus

Are you being served by CPT?

by Robin Church
Special to Q-Notes

CHAPEL HILL—In its quest for quality and non-discriminatory entertainment, the gay community has made a phenomenal amount of progress in the past decade. But that progress has not been achieved without substantial effort and determination. And it also has not been so great that even a single step backward won't have far-reaching ramifications. That is why it is particularly disheartening that the North Carolina Center for Public Television (CPT) has decided to stop airing *In The Life*, a gay variety series.

It is also the reason that two local gay and lesbian activist organizations are taking the state's public television system to task. During the past month, the Alamance Gay and Lesbian Alliance (AGLA) and the newly formed Lesbian Avengers have been making their objections known via letter, telephone and check.

In The Life, produced by WNYC in New York, is broadcast by over 45 public television stations nationwide. It is a program created by, for and about gays and lesbians. Each half-hour show features musical guests, comedians, actors and actresses from the community. Even though reviewers have cited the program as being humorous, educational,

honest and informative, only four episodes were shown in North Carolina before the series was discontinued. AGLA president Chris Ingle was upset when he learned that the show was being cancelled. But he became indignant when he learned that CPT was planning to air an hour-and-a-half marathon of *Are You Being Served?* during its March fund-raising drive. *Are You Being Served?* is a British comedy set in a department store which features a stereotypically gay male sales clerk. Ingle said that the show reinforces negative images of gays while *In The Life* offers honest portrayals. "*In The Life* provides a positive, educational and realistic role-model as well as providing quality entertainment. *Are You Being Served?* not only degrades us, but shows our younger generation a negative gay stereotype being depicted as reality," Ingle said.

To fight this situation, Ingle joined with Durham's Lesbian Avengers to organize a campaign geared toward achieving "realistic images in public broadcasting." The groups began with a phone zap of CPT on March 16 from 6-8pm. Members called the pledge numbers continuously during that time and expressed their disappointment in the station. This tied up phone lines and operators result-

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Raleigh City Council votes to play it safe

by Dan Van Mourik
Q-Notes Staff

RALEIGH—As was speculated by Mike Nelson, Executive Director of the NC Pride PAC, in last month's *Q-Notes*, two proposals regarding discrimination based on age and sexual orientation were brought before the Raleigh City Council on March 16. One proposal would extend anti-discrimination protection to all Raleigh citizens and would require a change to the city's charter. The second would be a non-binding resolution to encourage businesses to include age and sexual orientation in their anti-discrimination policies and would require the City Manager to appoint a department to accept complaints.

The Committee on Law and Finance unanimously recommended the charter change proposal which did not come easy according to Mary Watson Nooe, chair of the committee. When Nooe initially proposed the change before the full council, no one would second

her motion. They instead sent the proposal into committee. It was there that the second recommendation was formulated. Even with only three members on the committee, it took three lengthy and sometimes heated meetings before they were prepared to make their presentation to the council.

The City Council voted 4-4 on the charter change proposal, defeating it since five votes are required for passage. The second proposal was passed unanimously.

According to Nooe, one reason offered for the defeat was the shaky relationship between the Raleigh City Council and the NC General Assembly, the council deciding they did not want to be controversial. The council felt it was "more important to maintain a good relationship," Nooe said.

In her effort to obtain passage, Nooe used an economic development approach. However, the council argued that businesses would suffer increased expense if they were accused
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Nominations sought for annual Q-Notes awards

CHARLOTTE—Nominations are currently being accepted for this year's *Q-Notes* OUT!Bound Award and Mark Drum Memorial Award, to be presented by *Q-Notes* in June. This year will be the second time the annual awards have been presented.

The Mark Drum Memorial Award is given to recognize an individual who has done outstanding and exceptional work in the HIV/AIDS-affected community.

Mark Drum was a *Q-Notes* staff writer who chronicled his battle with the disease until his passing in May of 1991. We are honored to pay tribute to Mark and feel this award is our appreciation in action.

The *Q-Notes* OUT!Bound Award is presented to someone who has made a significant impact on the lesbian and gay community in North and/or South Carolina. This person will have made a viable change through activism, lobbying, and community service.

Last year's Mark Drum Memorial Award and *Q-Notes* OUT!Bound Award went to Bill Edens and Darryl Logsdon, respectively. Edens is the executive director of

PALSS in Columbia, SC, and Logsdon is a gay activist in Charlotte.

If you or your community service organization know a person who should be considered for either prize, please write to us. Include in your letter a brief personal profile of the individual; a description of their work and performance; and the reasons why their contribution has been exceptional.

We are aware that hundreds of people in the gay and lesbian community are committed every day to extinguishing disease; suffering; bigotry; bashing; and discrimination, so choosing these recipients will be a difficult process.

The deadline for your submission is Saturday, May 15.

All applications will be given serious consideration by a nominating committee; finalists will be voted on by the entire staff.

Please make sure that you include your contact information, as we will be making further inquiry regarding finalists.

Send your submissions to *Q-Notes*, P.O. Box 221841, Charlotte, NC 28222.