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## EDITORIALS

### We have much to be proud of

As we anticipate North Carolina's annual Pride celebration, *Q-Notes* would like to take a few moments and remember some of the things that made us proud this past year.

- The fantastic Pride weekend in Charlotte last June. Hats off to the Local Organizing Committee for an empowering event.
- ACT UP/Triangle's herculean efforts to retain anonymous testing statewide.
- The establishment of scholarships at local universities for deserving gay youth.
- The formation of a new AIDS coalition to lobby for sane and humane bills in the General Assembly. The state had been without such a voice since the '91 legislative session.
- MCC Wilmington hosted the largest Gulf Lower Atlantic District conference ever.
- Gay attorneys organized as NC Gay and Lesbian Attorneys (NC-GALA).
- Queer stage productions flourished at both Manbites Dog Theater and innovative Theatre.
- Following Carrboro's lead, the Chapel Hill Town Council also approved domestic partnership registration this year.
- The Charlotte chapter of Lutherans Concerned hosted the organization's national conference to great acclaim last July.
- A group of out lesbians made their presence and concerns known this year while participating in a breast cancer conference in Greensboro.
- NC Pride PAC endorsed 38 candidates in the '94 primaries, a record number.
- The Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses convened its Leadership Conference in Charlotte last fall.
- The Greensboro chapter of The Names Project was one of the first groups to make use

of the city's newly renovated Coliseum when they staged a large quilt display there.

- Duke University extended domestic partner benefits to its employees.
- Collections! opened in Charlotte as a multi-purpose library and meeting space.
- Asheville hosted its first AIDS-Walk fundraiser, The Red Ribbon Walk/Run.
- The Brothers Foundation won a grant to build The Havens, a 24-unit apartment building for people living with AIDS, in Charlotte.
- Four community organizations in Raleigh pooled resources to form Coalition 807.
- The Chapel Hill-Carrboro School Board voted to include gays and lesbians in their diversity curriculum.
- Movies featuring gays and lesbians, such as *Go Fish!*, *Priest* and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, were successful at theaters across the state.
- For the first time, representatives of 11 gay and lesbian switchboards met in Charlotte for a day-long training seminar.
- Two African-American lesbians created Cedar Chest, a political awareness organization, to empower lesbians of color.
- NC Lesbian and Gay Pride amended its name to include the words "Bisexual and Transgender."

As impressive as this list is, these items only represent a fraction of the important work that was done this past year. There is so much more that could be here — only space restrictions kept us from filling this entire page.

As we gather this month in Durham, let's remember how much we have to be proud of. And let's all do our part to make the coming year as bountiful as the last one.

### Sunday in the park with Vice

Warmer weather has once again returned to the Carolinas, bringing with it all of the verdant things that make this area such a delightful place to live. Residents can spend their long afternoons picnicking, jogging, cycling, swimming or simply relaxing in sprawling parks.

Unless, of course, the city is Charlotte and the residents happen to be gay.

For some unexplained reason, good weather induces the Charlotte Police Department to send droves of vice officers into the Queen City's parks to root out gay men who might be tempted to react favorably to a proposition for an intimate liaison with a stranger. Weekly, in fact, men are arrested and charged with violating the state's archaic Crime Against Nature (CAN) laws merely for indicating that they *might* enjoy a sexual encounter with someone they don't know particularly well.

The Police Department contends that they are ridding the parks of men who go there to engage in public sex. If that were the case, we would have little to argue about. Few in the gay community endorse anonymous public sex, just as few straights would endorse public heterosexual sex, yet both communities acknowledge that these acts occur.

What troubles us is that gay men have been singled out for prosecution — the police admit that no female vice officers patrol the parks — and that virtually none of the men have been arrested for actually having sex, but rather for merely suggesting they may want to. If that sounds uncomfortably close to the Orwellian thought police, it ought to.

The arrest procedure goes something like this: a vice officer wanders the park in search of men who appear to be alone. Once he spots someone he thinks might be gay, he approaches

him and begins a friendly conversation which eventually turns to matters sexual, though not particularly specific. If the man seems to be at all interested — and what gay man isn't at least flattered when being flirted with by a young, good-looking jock — the officer moves in for the kill by asking, "What do you like to do," or something along those lines. If the man mentions a specific sex act he is immediately arrested. Notice there is no mention of where this supposed sex act would occur or even if it would involve the officer.

If that's not entrapment, we don't know what is. Furthermore, we find it difficult to believe that, if the "guilty" parties were heterosexual men approached by female officers, either the police department or the district attorney's office would expect their actions to stand up in court. Unfortunately, because of North Carolina's CAN laws, gay men could be successfully prosecuted in these situations — not for violating the law, but for conspiring to do so. Even so, the district attorney does not want to risk legal challenges to these arrests, so most men are offered deferred prosecution; that is, the state will drop the charges if the men are not arrested again for the same activity in a given time. Considering the terrible damage that could be done to a man's life if his arrest became public, most men opt for this venue.

What it all adds up to is this: the police department and the district attorney's office, no doubt under pressure from a handful of fundamentalists, are spending countless thousands of tax dollars to harass gay men who frequent public parks. Meanwhile, Charlotte was just ranked 19th among all US cities in violent crimes; it would seem as though the DA and the police would have better things to do with their time and our money.

## SPEAKING FOR MYSELF

A Personal Opinion

### Will help always be there?

by Ruth Derrow and Susan Dodd

(Part two of a three part series on community involvement)

The bottom line IS the bottom line. With the tidal wave of ultra-conservative, cut-funds-for-social-programs agenda storming the country these days, it's never been more true that "we have to take care of our own." The important fight against HIV and AIDS gets the vast majority of all fundraising dollars. Where does that leave everyone else? It leaves them struggling and on the verge of going out of business without your support. HIV/AIDS is an important fight, but not the only fight. That's why we need more of the community involved.

I find it really interesting that in Charlotte, THE BIG MONEY is raised at "see and be seen" parties where we can eat and drink enough to recoup our "contribution." Who's really making the contributions? Those donating the food, drink and entertainment to cover our good time. Just as it is in our politics, the special interest mentality of "what's in it for me" too often obscures what's good for the "whole."

On a recent trip to Charlotte, black activist Benjamin Chavis said, "Minorities are funding our oppressors." Perhaps those of us in the gay and lesbian community should think about the impact our own financial support has on our community. What has happened to us that most of the gay and lesbian community opt out when it comes to financially supporting programs, projects and businesses which make a real difference in the acceptance of gays and lesbians in this homophobic area?

Where you give your financial support is a direct expression of what you believe in. It has a dramatic affect on the ability of our gay and lesbian owned businesses to exist. We all talk about what we want available within our

community, but how many of us make a real effort to support those businesses and organizations who are already out there for us? Look in your checkbook and review where you have spent your money. Are you funding your oppressors?

A value-driven approach to how each of us spends our money would greatly benefit our businesses and organizations. Begin to think about businesses and organizations to which you currently contribute and help support financially. How many of these are gay/lesbian owned or gay/lesbian friendly? Each one of us needs to invest in our community on whatever scale we can.

In a value-driven approach to charitable contributions, measure the return on your investment by (a) the number of people who will directly benefit from the supported organization, (b) the long-term benefits to the community by keeping the organization alive, (c) does the organization reflect what is important to you, and (d) even if you will not get direct benefits, does the organization make a valuable contribution for the good of the "whole."

Talk is cheap. Economics is a powerful form of expression which can change the behavior of a money-driven society. There is a lot of talk about building a stronger community in Charlotte. As stated by William James, an American author and psychologist, "[T]he community stagnates without the impulse of the individual. The impulse dies away without the sympathy of the community." If we don't make an effort to financially support our community organizations and businesses, who will? They are willing to be here for us. They should be able to count on our support. Instead of "funding our oppressors," let's make a lasting difference by investing in our own community.

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