

Notes

Lip
Schtick

...Page 10

Girl
Talk

...Page 12

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New group forms in NC Triad area

by Susan Tedder
Q-Notes staff

GREENSBORO—A new group has formed in the Triad to better address the issues confronting the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender community in that area. The Triad Advocacy Network (TAN) is the result of months of planning and need-assessment by community leaders.

TAN's stated mission is: "To be social and political advocates for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered community," and the current structuring of the organization offers a variety of committees — voter education, media, research, advocacy, and membership — to attack these arenas from differing points of view.

These committees are already hard at work preparing the way for the 1996 election year. The voter education committee is gathering information about local elections in the Triad, and the currently declared or incumbent candidates. A summary of their findings will be compiled and released to other organizations in the area. This committee is also responsible for voter registration drives of gay and gay-friendly persons. The media committee is working with local TV and print media to develop contacts, a positive rapport, and to offer themselves as sources for issues that may arise at any time. TAN wants to insure that its voice is heard when community questions arise. The research committee is compiling a list of persons who have expertise in areas of interest to the L/G/B/T community for information and potential speaking engagements. The advocacy committee is developing a directory of persons, agencies and organizations that will be needed to get TAN's issues and concerns addressed. The membership committee is seeking new organizations and individuals to join their work.

Jeff Lawson, vice-president and one of the co-founders of TAN, mentioned many of the organization's current and on-going projects, such as the survey of candidates that took place before the last election that resulted in a voter guide, and a letter writing campaign to address issues such as the recent education hearings, and supporting the Walt Disney Company on their positive stance on gay concerns. "Every letter we send," Lawson noted, "represents that many more people who can't write one themselves."

Lawson, who is active in NC Pride PAC, Human Rights Campaign, and the Triad Business Guild, feels very positive about where TAN is headed. "I am extremely excited that the gay and lesbian community in the Triad is

Continued on page 26

Viatical companies come under scrutiny in NC

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

RALEIGH—The North Carolina Department of Insurance held a public hearing December 6 to discuss proposed legislation which would regulate the operations of viatical agencies who conduct business in the state. Viatical settlement proponents are concerned that if state restrictions are too stringent, they may end up hurting the terminally ill citizens they are being designed to protect by driving companies away.

The viatical industry is relatively new, but its growth has been phenomenal — spurred on by the AIDS crisis — to the point that it has become a \$300 million enterprise.

When viaticals first appeared, many

thought the concept was morbid — a viatical company purchases a terminally ill person's life insurance policy for a percentage of the policy's value, then collects the full amount of the policy from the insurance company once the insured individual (viator) dies — but opinions have changed dramatically as increasing numbers of people have found financial security through these arrangements.

The percentage that a policyholder will receive from a viatical company is directly tied to their life expectancy. Specifically, the closer they are to death, the more money they are likely to receive. The NC Department of Insurance, under the direction of the General Assembly and the state Commissioner of Insurance Jim Long, is considering setting mini-

mum payouts for various life expectancy levels.

For example, the state might decide that viatical companies must offer a minimum of 60 percent of a policy's value to someone with a two-year life expectancy and 70 percent to someone with a one-year life expectancy (these figures are simply for illustration). Difficulties will arise when viatical agencies aren't willing to meet these minimums. For instance, a woman who has been told she has two years to live may need to sell her insurance policy to be financially stable through her progressing illness. If the woman can't find a viatical company who is willing to meet the state's minimum payout, she will not

Continued on page 16

Arrest gets NGLTF's attention

by Susan Tedder
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MEDFORD, OR—Law enforcement agents arrested Robert Acremant, 27, for the December 4 "execution style" murders of Roxanne Ellis and Michele Abdill, an openly lesbian couple.

Ellis and Abdill were very visible in the local gay community, fought avidly against Oregon's anti-gay initiatives, worked with the local chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) and were active in their church. The victims' bound and gagged bodies were found in the back of their pick-up truck three days after they disappeared.

"Given the pattern of anti-gay harassment and violence that occurs in the wake of Radical Right sponsored anti-gay initiatives, we are extremely concerned and suspicious about the motive behind the brutal killing of Roxanne Ellis and Michelle Abdill," stated Scot Nakagawa, Portland-based Field Director for the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF).

Individuals close to Acremant, an Air Force veteran with a master's degree in business administration, claim the killings were not hate motivated but were the result of a "botched robbery." Relatives of the slain women say they don't believe it.

Local authorities are still trying to piece together the details of the murder and the

motive behind Acremant's actions.

Although Medford Police Chief Ray Shipley says there is little evidence to support either robbery or gay bashing as a motive for the killings, statements recently made by Acremant lend credence to the hate crime theory.

In press interviews, Acremant said the sexual orientation of the victims had nothing



NGLTF Executive Director Melinda Paras called on Attorney General Janet Reno and the Department of Justice to become involved with the murder case.

to do with the murders, but then went on to say that the fact they were lesbians "made it easier [to kill them] because I don't like them."

In one alleged statement, Acremant made his disdain for lesbians even more explicit: "[i]t kind of made me sick to my stomach that she [Ellis] was someone's grandma."

"Mr. Acremant's reported comments... have increased the concerns about the possibility of these murders being a hate crime," said Melinda Paras, Executive Director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Paras called on Attorney General Janet Reno and the Department of Justice to become involved with the case and begin a process of recognizing the connection between hate crimes and anti-gay legislative efforts and take preventative action whenever possible.

Housing agency closing its doors

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

CHARLOTTE—The Brothers Foundation, the only agency in the city solely focused on providing housing for people living with HIV or AIDS, will cease operation on January 18 by a unanimous vote of the group's board.

The move is a cost-cutting measure designed to slash almost \$100,000 in administrative overhead — such as rent and salaries — but shouldn't affect the two housing programs currently being instituted since both are independent projects.

Board chair Debbie Hirsch says that folding the agency is the only fiscally responsible action. "Our babies [The Havens and Taylor Home] no longer need us. Both received HUD [Department of Housing and Urban Development] 811 grants which are only given to self-sufficient organizations. So the programs had to have their own boards of directors, bylaws, and 501(c)3 status. It would have been financially irresponsible of us to continue to raise money just to cover the administration of The Brothers Foundation — the umbrella organization — when both of our programs were completely free-standing."

The group launched The Havens, a 24-unit housing complex now under construction, last year with a \$2 million grant from HUD. Taylor Home, which has never broken ground due to a standoff between the federal government and the Charlotte City Council over the proposed location of the facility, received HUD money among other funding sources.

One program that probably will be affected under the reorganization is Fieldstone House. It was the Foundation's first group home and currently houses three people — although it was designed for six. Hirsch calls the venture a "financially inefficient proposition," and says that the current residents may be moved to The Havens when it opens in June.

If Fieldstone closes, it will be the second Foundation project to do so. The Living Center, an adult day-care center, shut down in September due to a lack of use.

Hirsch says she understands that people are concerned about the loss of The Brothers Foundation, but wants them to try and see the necessity of the situation. "People are bound to be confused and automatically assume the worst. I think we are conditioned in this country to believe that charitable organizations have to have large administrative wings. In this case, it's just not true. Our programs don't need us anymore — but they will certainly continue on without us."

Pride PAC prepares for upcoming election year

RALEIGH—On Saturday, December 2, North Carolina Pride Political Action Committee for Lesbian and Gay Equality (NC Pride PAC), a four-year-old organization dedicated to improving the lives of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals through the electoral process, elected nine new board members, broadening the organization's statewide representation and leadership.

The board also elected co-chairs and a vice chair to lead NC Pride PAC in 1996. Co-chairs Susan Shackelford and Sue DuChanois, both of Charlotte, and Vice Chair Michael Armentrout, of Durham, plan to continue making the group a player in General Assembly and other state races.

"NC Pride PAC is prepared to come out strong for the 1996 elections with its 'I Vote With Pride' campaign to involve gay, lesbian and bisexual voters in every part of the electoral process," DuChanois says. "1996 represents an opportunity to create a General Assembly that represents, and respects, the lesbian, gay and bisexual community of North Carolina."

Adds Shackelford, "Having a board that looks like North Carolina is a goal of NC Pride PAC. These terrific additions to the board bring us that much closer to that goal and will make it easier to register, and organize, new lesbian, gay and bisexual voters

from across the state."

The nine new Board members were unanimously elected and are as follows: Wynn Bone (Wilson); Mandy Carter (Durham); Marty Daughtry (Greenville); David Ferebee (Charlotte); Jeff Lawson (Greensboro); Todd Hultman (Durham); Cullen Gurganus (Middlesex); Eliza Taylor (Greensboro); and Larry Tilson (Charlotte).

NC Pride PAC is preparing an orientation for new board members as well as a strategy session to bring all 1996 board members together to prepare for the "I Vote With Pride" campaign and the upcoming endorsement process.