

Q Notes

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Group asks for boycott of NC by film industry

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

RUTHERFORD COUNTY, NC—A grassroots organization called Citizens Against Discrimination (CAD) has formed to spearhead a boycott of NC by the film industry, due to the recent passage of several anti-gay resolutions in the western portion of the state.

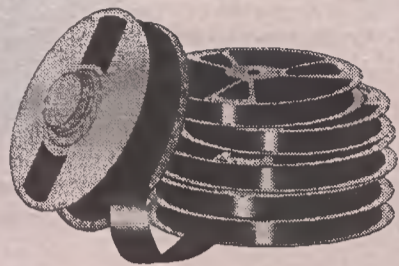
The Rutherford County Council was the first to pass a resolution labelling homosexuality "incompatible with community standards," but four others have now taken a similar stance. They are Cherokee, Jackson, Madison and Northampton Counties.

To pressure these local governments into repealing their resolutions, and stop others from enacting more, CAD is asking the film industry to steer clear of the region and show locals just how great the costs of prejudice can be.

Charles Merrill, the openly gay founder of CAD, has been in contact with Barry Diller, founder of cable giant QVC and one of the most powerful figures in the entertainment industry, about the boycott and says that the mogul may be willing to help.

Merrill says he formed Citizens Against Discrimination because of his own difficult path to acceptance of his sexual orientation. "I'm trying to make things better for the next generation. I don't want them to go through what I went through.... When all these counties started passing anti-gay resolutions, I said 'somebody's got to do something,' and decided to begin right here in my own front yard."

If the ad hoc group successfully organizes its campaign to blackball the state, the mountain region — where the measures are clustered — will be one of the hardest hit.



Since the middle 1980s, the western portion of NC has played host to such hit films as *Dirty Dancing* and *The Last of the Mohicans*. The latter film was especially important to the area — not only did the production pour money into the local economy, but its breathtaking scenery was a nationwide promotional pitch for Appalachian tourism. According to Mary Jaeger-Gale, marketing consultant for Chimney Rock Park, attendance there increased by 20 percent the summer following the motion picture's theatrical release and questionnaires revealed that many visitors came because they had seen *Mohicans*.

Apart from the ban, Merrill's real dream is to have a popular country music figure, whom locals admire, deliver a message of tolerance at a rally. "If Dolly Parton or Garth Brooks came out that these resolutions are wrong, they'd listen to them." These particular superstars are on Merrill's wish list because they have been vocal about their support for gays and lesbians in the past. Parton's manager and business partner Sandy Gallin is openly gay and Brooks' sister is openly lesbian.

Pending the acquisition of permits, Citizens Against Discrimination are also tentatively organizing a peaceful march and rally at Lake Lure in Rutherford County, scheduled to take place October 27 at 2:00pm. Citizens Against Discrimination would like all local residents to participate in the rally. "We're hoping a big crowd will come and show their support. We're all targets of the religious right," said Merrill.

For information about Citizens Against Discrimination, write PO Box 519, Edneyville, NC 28727 or call (704) 685-7666. ▼

NC Campaign '96 ups the ante in critical Senate race

by David Jones
Q-Notes Staff

RALEIGH—The landscape of North Carolina gay and lesbian political activism changed with the opening of the NC Campaign '96 office. The Campaign is a project to defeat Jesse Helms, managed by North Carolinians and sponsored by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the country's largest lesbian and gay political organization. The project was officially launched on August 6 with a visit by HRC's executive director, Elizabeth Birch.

Where gay political groups once operated mostly out of cramped and borrowed space, Campaign '96 is located in a professional office complex in Research Triangle Park, surrounded by the offices of dentists, realtors and engineering firms. There is no mistaking who is there, however. The HRC equal-rights logo is prominent in one ground-floor window and a huge "Stop Helms" poster stares out through the front window. Inside, the five-room suite is bright, clean and organized: conference tables arrayed with telephones, stacks of campaign literature, flow-charts and calendars, volunteer rosters, computers and copiers.

Mitch Foushee, the campaign manager, greets a visitor graciously and quickly gets down to business, sitting in a quiet office for an interview while the campaign's field director, Mark Donahue of Carrboro, and two volunteers keep a room across the hall buzzing with

plans for an organizing trip to Charlotte.

Foushee says he returned to his native North Carolina to teach after several years working in Washington, DC for US Senator Jeff Bingham (D-NM). While he was still in Washington, a friend, Durham's Michael Armentrout, a member of HRC's board and chair of NC Campaign '96, started recruiting him to get involved in the 1996 election in some way. After Foushee arrived back home in North Carolina, it didn't take long for him to realize that working full time on the election was something he had to do. "When I was a student at UNC in Chapel Hill, I'd always watch Jesse Helms' *View Point* (TV editorial broadcasts) just because they were so outrageous," then, with a big grin he continues, "but it never occurred to me then that one day I'd be managing a campaign to unseat him."

When asked what NC Campaign '96 will be doing, Foushee gets very serious and starts ticking off the parts of the project, pausing now and then to say that he can't discuss some of the specific details because, "I'm not interested in telling Helms how we're going to do it."

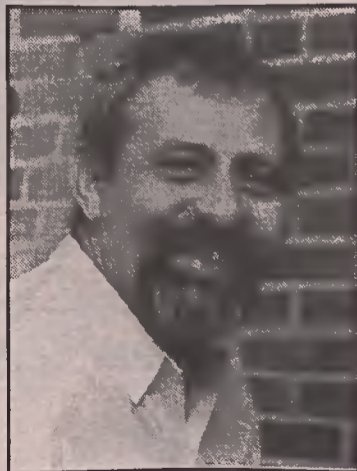
What the Campaign will try to do is no secret, however: identify, educate and motivate swing voters. Recent polls show Helms and Harvey Gantt, the Democratic nominee, about even with around 7 percent of voters undecided. There are reportedly some 687,000 new voters
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ASO director resigns post

by Eagle White
Q-Notes Staff

Raleigh's AIDS Service Agency (ASA) received some tough news to end the summer — Executive Director Cullen Gurganus has resigned his position with the agency. In early September, Gurganus will tackle a new professional challenge as Director of COMMUNITY SHARES, a Durham organization which oversees fundraising for 18 non-profit organizations. For Gurganus, the new position will be the latest chapter in what has been a varied and fascinating life marked by great huge personal transitions and great successes.

Gurganus' early life seems at odds with his present position as an active member of the gay community and advocate for persons with HIV/AIDS. His father was a minister in the Pentecostal Holiness faith, a religious denomination not known for its tolerance of gays. Gurganus grew up very involved with the church and its liberal doses of fundamentalism. He says, "I remember that as I grew up, I always knew I would be a minister." After a high school education at a fundamentalist theological academy, Gurganus worked for a summer as a Pentecostal Holiness missionary in Nova



Cullen Gurganus

Photo: S. Aubuchon

Scotia. He then continued his education at two Bible colleges and married in the early 1970s. He left school in preparation for the birth of his daughter. He stayed in the Pentecostal church, first working as a youth minister, and later as a fully ordained minister in the evangelical faith. After the birth of his child,

Gurganus and his family made plans to go to Buenos Aires as missionaries — yet Gurganus was struggling with his own sexual orientation.

Gurganus shakes his head while recalling his inner turmoil at the time. "Here I am, going to a foreign country to help people with their lives," he says, "when I don't know myself."

Gurganus never made the trip. Instead, he began the difficult process of coming out. "In the mid-70s," he says, "I left my wife, the church, and everything I had known." He credits several gay friends with helping him deal with his own gay issues at the time — no small feat for the man who had been voted "most inspirational" at a fundamentalist camp earlier in his life. For the next 12 years, Gurganus worked in the restaurant industry. By the mid-80s, he had lived in Virginia, Cali-
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NC health officials endorse new home HIV test kits

by David Jones
Q-Notes Staff

RALEIGH—North Carolina's AIDS Advisory Council voted on August 9 to recommend that the state not take any action which would interfere with the distribution and use of home HIV test kits. The resolution was adopted after NC State Health Director Ron Levine met with several AIDS groups to get their advice. The groups included the HIV/AIDS Alliance, a lobbying organization, the Minority AIDS and Health Advisory Coalition, Minority Health Council and the executive committee of the AIDS Advisory Council.

In a written summary of those meetings for the full Council, the state health department outlined a number of concerns about home tests, mainly pertaining to the quality of pre- and post-test counseling. There seemed to be a consensus, however, that the tests would enter North Carolina whether the state sought to ban them or not, and that they would reach some people at high risk of HIV infection who were not being tested.

Members at the Council meeting were surprised to read that the state planned to "restrict licensure" of the tests unless changes were made in the telephone counseling procedures that the two US Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved companies plan to offer. (Four more tests are said to be pending approval by the FDA.) North Carolina health officials have repeatedly expressed concerns about home testing because it is anonymous and prevents the state from obtaining the names of sex and needle partners of those who test positive.

When the resolution was introduced, many Council members voiced their desire to work

with both the state and the tests' manufacturers to improve the quality of counseling, but they did not want the state to block the use of the tests in the interim. Assistant health director Chris Hoke said that officials would support the resolution as long as it did not prevent the state from seeking to improve the content of counseling, including securing formal FDA requirements to include additional information. The Council then passed the resolution unanimously. Several health department officials later told the *Raleigh News & Observer* that the state would not take action to block sale of the home tests in North Carolina. ▼



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Photo: Albert Sanchez