

Q Notes

The Carolinas' Most Comprehensive Gay & Lesbian Newspaper

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to stop animal testing Page 10

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A friend of the gay community? Yes, for Scher!

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

Mecklenburg County Commissioner Lloyd Scher (D-District 4), 46, is the Inspector Columbo of Charlotte's public servant set. His disheveled appearance — which perpetually leads one to think he rolled out of bed just in time to make this or that meeting — belies his clear understanding of the issues. The tuft of hair that juts from the front of his head — always at an impossible angle — covers what is arguably the sharpest mind in municipal politics.

Scher's leadership abilities, honed over three Commission terms, have been sorely tested these past two months as he has fought the "Gang of Five" for control of "the soul of this community" — as he terms it. Since five of Mecklenburg's nine commissioners voted to defund the Arts & Science Council (ASC) on April 1, stemming from portrayals of homosexuality in local works, Scher has been locked in a high-profile, occasionally bruising, battle with his anti-gay colleagues.

One result of this stand has been the celebratory reception Scher has received from the gay and lesbian community. At one recent Commission meeting, he was greeted with spontaneous, rousing applause from supporters of the Charlotte Pride Alliance as he entered the chamber.

Q-Notes wanted to get Scher's take on his new-found role of gay community hero and hear his report from the front, so we arranged to join him at his home for a Sunday-afternoon interview. Although he was candid and amiable — almost folksy — Scher maintained an air of studied concentration that left a strong impression on this writer.

Q-Notes: *Looking back to the first meetings of this current County Commission, did you have any idea that you would eventually be dealing with something like the defunding of the Arts & Science Council due to homosexual themes and characters?*

Lloyd Scher: Not Arts & Science, but I felt like we were going to deal with some kind of sexual issue because of the nature of some of the pre-election stuff that had occurred. So, yeah, I did see a possibility of some things coming up.

Q-Notes: *Especially given your Jewish heritage, did Commissioner Hoyle Martin's infamous statement that he would like to "shove gays off the face of the Earth" connect the ASC resolution to some deeper level of prejudice for you?*



Commissioner Lloyd Scher

LS: Yes. If one statement bothered me, it was that one. I'm also bothered by the reaction that I took. I should have spoken out at that meeting — that was our December meeting — and I didn't because I'd already had an agreement that Hoyle would vote against [Bill James'] original motion. But even after that, when he made that statement, I should have just said, "To heck with the vote," and chastised him for that comment. But the vote was more important at the time because I was hoping to hold it in line that we would never be faced with the issues we are now. But if I knew then what I know now, I would have chastised him for that quote.

Q-Notes: *Was it a conscious decision on your part to become the Commission's opposition leader to the Arts resolution?*

LS: No. I don't even sense myself as a leader in that regard. I just think anytime there's injustice, it's my responsibility. Unlike other Commissioners, I leave my Bible at the door and I wrap myself in the Constitution. That's what I'm sworn to uphold and defend; that's what I served in the service for. The Constitution allows freedom of expression and freedom of religion and freedom of speech — freedom to do what we want to do in this society and that's the way I look at it.

Q-Notes: *In some ways, the gay community has turned you into a quasi-patron saint since the vote. What do you think about that?*

LS: I'm embarrassed; I never looked at myself as being a... it's hard to be a Jewish saint [laughs]. In all seriousness, I'm glad that they feel they have someone they can come to. They deserve as much representation as anybody else. And maybe, in some ways, it's also something I'm a little upset with myself about in that when

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"Gang of Five" targets gays again

by Dan Van Mourik
Q-Notes Staff

CHARLOTTE—By a vote of 5-4, the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners passed an amendment to part B of the April 1 resolution which defunded the Arts & Science Council due to funding of groups that portrayed homosexual themes. The amendment to part B requires county-funded agencies to notify parents before speaking to children under the age of 18 about sex, pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases. Agencies will also have to advise children of North Carolina's sodomy law when talking about sex.

The amendment was proposed by Hoyle Martin (D-District 2), who also proposed the original resolution on April 1, and supported by the same four commissioners who supported the April 1 resolution — Tom Bush (R-At-Large), Joel Carter (R-District 1), George Higgins (R-District 5) and Bill James (R-District 6). Again, this move is seen as an attempt to prevent counselors from addressing the issue of homosexuality.

Proponents and opponents to the amendment were each given a total of 15 minutes to address the commissioners. While only one person spoke in favor of the amendment, over a dozen had signed up to speak against it. The time limit, however, allowed only seven. One opponent asked Martin to apologize for his

statement that all gays should be "shoved off the face of the earth." Martin did not apologize.

In addition to several speakers from the gay community, a psychiatrist and a doctor also expressed their deep concerns over the new rules.

During the discussions by the commissioners, Hoyle Martin viciously attacked both Lloyd Scher (D-District 4) and Darrell Williams (D-District 3) for their opposition to his amendment. Chairman Parks Helms (D-At-Large) stepped in to stop the assault.

Commissioner Becky Carney (D-At-Large) made a proposal to rescind the April 1 resolution, but it was quickly defeated.

This amendment will only apply to county-funded agencies and there is an exclusion for doctors who are protected under confidentiality laws. Other exceptions would be made for counselors who fear for the youth's safety if parents are notified, but they would have to obtain permission from the county health director before they could talk to the youth.

With approximately 50 agencies which could be affected by this amendment, County Manager Jerry Fox asked that implementation be delayed by 60 days so they could notify all agencies and arrange new contracts should agencies choose not to abide by the new rules. "I don't think that's acceptable," Martin said. "It's time we moved on." ▼

Forging a more colorful outreach

by Gene Poteat
Q-Notes Staff

"There's nothing for us to do in Charlotte — Let's go to Atlanta or something..." These are words Pam Pompey, co-chair of the OutCharlotte '97 OutReach Committee, hears often. "I hear it all the time," she says, "from people of color in the Charlotte area's gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender [GLBT] community who feel that they are not being included." OutCharlotte, which produces an annual festival celebrating the GLBT community, hopes to change that.

"The GLBT community has the same racial make-up as the greater community as a whole," says OutCharlotte '97's Festival Steering Committee's co-chair Elizabeth Pruitt. "We are racially divided. Just as there is a great deal of division in the straight community, so is there in our community. We [at OutCharlotte] are trying to be inclusive of race and gender, inclusive of all of us."

"Any community is made up of segments; college students, professionals, neighborhoods, etc.," says Pompey. "People of color in the GLBT community don't have a unified voice. I don't think any one has stepped up to represent this group of people. OutCharlotte is doing a great job of including us." Toward that end, the group's 15-member OutReach Committee has begun a newsletter targeting people of color.

"Pam and Erik [OutReach co-chair Erik Norman] have put together a kind of cover page for our newsletter as an initial effort," declares Pruitt, adding, "reaching out is really, really hard. People don't want to talk about race issues." Pruitt feels that political correctness keeps people silent; they are afraid of offending people of color.

"We want to educate everyone, to create dialogues," says Norman. "The OutReach Committee wants to create dialogues between men and women, between the young and old and between the different races. We need to educate ourselves [the GLBT community] so we can educate others and if you are in the conversation, you can educate."

Both Norman and Pompey feel their efforts

are an attempt to dismiss stereotypes and myths and create a unified voice for the entire GLBT community. "Issues such as Charlotte's recent debate over arts funding affect all of us in the GLBT community, including people of color," says Pompey, who wants to see everyone actively involved. "Our outreach doesn't just include people of color; we are trying to make sure that the bisexual and transgender community is also included, too."

Pruitt sees the efforts of the OutReach Committee as part of OutCharlotte's basic mission. "First of all," she says, "we hope there will be individual growth. I know I have learned a lot already just by knowing Pam and Erik." Pruitt says that to a large degree people of color have a different set of issues regarding homophobia, but adds, "we all have some experiences in common. We hope our efforts will help bridge the gaps within the GLBT community by not only bringing people into [active participation] in our organization, but also to get people involved in other organizations and activities."

"We thought the newsletter would be a good starting place," she says, "because we already knew that a large number of people of color go to the clubs, are on college campuses or other places where other gay news publications are usually available. People are used to getting information about the community that way."

"As far as I know," Pompey notes, "there is no other similar local newsletter, no formal way for us [people of color], men and women, to network or socialize as a group." She describes the current OutReach Committee, which began working on the '97 celebration this past January, as a "family" and hopes that this spirit of working together will extend to all the GLBT community.

"We are not really looking to have a major publication; we are looking to reach out," says Pompey. "For now, we want to keep it simple, more of a flyer." She and Norman are looking for stories, items of concern and events that may be of interest, or, as Pompey says, "any information surrounding people of color that someone wants to share."

Care to share? Call OutCharlotte '97 at (704) 563-2699. ▼

Media offers Day of Compassion

by Richard Jennings
Special to Q-Notes

LOS ANGELES—The Fifth Annual Day of Compassion scheduled for Friday June 20 will include a powerful lineup of television programming as well as a significant presence on the Internet. Day of Compassion is an international media event designed to model compassion and support for people affected by HIV/AIDS. Last year, the event helped to generate over 80,000 calls to the National AIDS Hotline — more than any other AIDS-related event or news story since the beginning of the epidemic.

For the first time this year, Internet service providers and search engines will join network and cable programmers to highlight AIDS compassion, awareness and hope. The list of participating Internet companies already signed on

includes America Online, CompuServe, Prodigy, Yahoo! and Infoseek. A web page containing regular updates on participating shows, photos, PSAs and other ways to participate is featured on Hollywood Supports' web site: www.hsupports.org.

Oprah! and *The Rosie O'Donnell Show* will join a host of other daytime talk shows that are either producing new episodes, updating previous shows or rerunning prior AIDS-themed episodes. The list of talk shows whose participation has been confirmed to date includes *Sally Jessy Raphael*, *The Jenny Jones Show*, *Leeza*, *Montel Williams*, *Geraldo* and *Maury Povich*.

Daytime dramas participating this year include *Days of Our Lives*, *General Hospital*, *One Life to Live*, *Port Charles*, *The Bold and the Beautiful*. See COMPASSION on page 25