

QNotes

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Another roller coaster year for civil rights

by Dan Van Mourik
Q-Notes Staff

In what has become a familiar scenario for the GLBT community, 1997 was another year of victories and defeats in the struggle for gay equality.

Perhaps topping every other story during 1997 is the coming out of Ellen Morgan on ABC's sitcom *Ellen*. Series star Ellen DeGeneres came out as well and has been heralded as television's first "leading lesbian." After the coming out episode aired on April 30, DeGeneres and her partner, actress Anne Heche, have been covered by the media more than any other stars in Hollywood. It was a risky career move for both of them, but it doesn't seem to have affected them in a negative way and they have become role models for many gays and lesbians still in the closet.

National

The year started off on a positive note with the Lesbian and Gay Bands of America invited to perform during pre-parade festivities along the 1997 Presidential Inaugural Parade route. But Clinton was not quite that inclusive nor supportive through the rest of the year. Also in January, his administration took a stand against the medical use of marijuana, considered essential by many AIDS patients to ease the side effects associated with some drugs and treatments, and his budget compromise gutted \$18 million from Medicaid, much of that affecting those with HIV/AIDS. Still, it was not all bad news from Washington. Clinton was the first-ever, sitting president to personally address a GLBT organization (Human Rights Campaign) and Vice President Al Gore held several White House meetings (as did Clinton) with us and always spoke favorably about our community.

A total of 248 gay-related bills were introduced in 49 statehouses during 1997. An annual survey by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force has labeled 120 of those bills as favorable to the gay community with the remaining 128 considered gay-hostile. Of the 43 bills passed, 24 were considered favorable. Of the 19 "unfavorable" bills passed, six involved mandatory HIV/AIDS testing or disclosure of the results to state agencies. Ten banned same-sex marriages. Of the 24 "favorable" bills, eight involved HIV/AIDS discrimination, education and care. Maine and New Hampshire banned discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. New York and Hawaii passed domestic-partnership laws. Five states included gays in hate-crime laws.

But hate crimes didn't go away in 1997 in spite of sexual orientation being added to the list of hate crime categories in several states and President Clinton's introduction of the Hate Crimes Prevention Act. For example, in February alone, a pipe bomb exploded at The Otherside Lounge, a popular lesbian nightclub in Atlanta, seriously injuring five patrons; and two men were shot while they sat in their car in the parking lot at Scorpio Lounge in Charlotte.

In June, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act was reintroduced in Congress and hearings began in October. The Act would add sexual orientation to the list of protected discrimination classes, but there was no vote on it in 1997.

Q-Notes first reported the nationwide manhunt for Andrew Cunanan in May 1997, but it took the murder of gay fashion designer Gianni Versace in South Beach, FL in July to find him. Versace was the fifth in a string of



slayings attributed to Cunanan, but there was no arrest nor trial because Cunanan was found dead (an apparent suicide) in a houseboat eight days after Versace's murder. However, police are not pursuing any other suspects in any of the slayings.

While there was little movement on the Hawaii marriage case, the state did enact a "reciprocal beneficiaries" bill, extending to gay and lesbian couples, as well as other pairs of adults who cannot legally marry, about 60 benefits then enjoyed by married couples only.

President Clinton appointed Virginia Apuzzo as an assistant to the president on October 1. Apuzzo is the first openly gay official ever to serve in the federal government. Clinton's appointment of openly gay James Hormel as Ambassador to Luxembourg has been stalled in the Senate until 1998.

As a result of the November elections, we now have approximately 130 openly gay elected officials across the country.

Regional

In January, Governor David Beasley of South Carolina temporarily halted the distribution of condoms by the SC State Health Department based on moral questions he had about homosexuality. The ban lasted only two weeks when a compromise was reached.

After a seven-year legal struggle, anonymous HIV testing at local health departments ended in North Carolina.

Debating homosexuality became the hot topic in Charlotte for nearly all of 1997 with very few positive results. At their April 1 meeting, the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners voted 5-4 to eliminate funding of the Arts & Science Council primarily based on objections to gay-themed plays such as *Angels In America*. In June, the "Gang of Five" (four Republicans and one Democrat) continued their attack on the GLBT community by severely hampering the abilities of youth counselors to discuss homosexuality at all county-funded agencies. And in December, the "Gang of Five" ousted chairman Parks Helms, replacing him with one of their own, Republican At-Large Commissioner Tom Bush. Bush then appointed another "Gang of Five" member, Bill James, to a seat on the board of the Arts & Science Council.

In a similar move to that taken in Mecklenburg County, Guilford County NC commissioners voted 6-5 not to fund the United Arts Council of Greensboro nor the High Point Area Arts Council after a May performance of the gay-themed play *La Cage Aux Folles* by the Community Theatre of Greensboro.

While the GLBT community is becoming more visible, with increased attendance at both NC and SC Pride celebrations in 1997, there remains a significant number of us still in the closet. For example, Mitchell County NC Sheriff Vernon Bishop admitted ordering deputies to illegally intercept a high school football

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Gay doctors' association creates national lesbian health position

by Sue Rochman
Special to Q-Notes

SAN FRANCISCO—Underscoring its commitment to advancing the field of lesbian health, the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association (GLMA), a San Francisco-based national medical association, has hired the first full-time national advocate for lesbian health.

Grace Flannery, a long-time executive in the non-profit sector, joined GLMA last month as Director of the Lesbian Health Fund (LHF)—the only dedicated source of funding for lesbian health research in the world.

Flannery will oversee all aspects of LHF, but one of her primary objectives will be to increase the funding LHF makes available to researchers.

"GLMA's ability to create this position is a significant marker in the historical development of the field of lesbian health," said GLMA President Michael Horberg, MD, a San Francisco Bay Area internist. "Grace Flannery's skills and expertise will allow GLMA to increase the funds available for lesbian health research as well as increase awareness among researchers of this funding source."

Flannery brings more than 16 years of fundraising experience to LHF. Her previous

positions include program director for the Horizons Foundation and endowment director for the Vanguard Public Foundation.

"The Gay and Lesbian Medical Association and the Lesbian Health Fund have drawn necessary attention to the field of lesbian health," said Flannery. "There is so much that still needs to be learned about lesbian health issues, and I'm pleased to have this opportunity to play a part in increasing the knowledge of lesbians and health practitioners alike about lesbian health care."

LHF-funded researchers are currently addressing a wide-range of lesbian health issues such as how to improve lesbian and bisexual women's access to gynecological services, alternative insemination methods used by lesbians, and risk factors for osteoporosis and bone density in lesbians. LHF has also funded projects to determine the best methods to educate health workers about lesbian health needs and to teach lesbians themselves about lesbian health issues.

"For all underserved communities, research is the cornerstone of sound medical practices and public health policy," said GLMA Director of Public Policy Marj Plumb, a long-time lesbian health advocate. "This position will play

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Candace speaks out in Charlotte

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

CHARLOTTE—The world's second most famous Gingrich addressed an attentive audience December 19 during a special meeting of the Charlotte Business Guild, a networking and support organization for GLBT business owners.

Candace Gingrich, Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich's openly lesbian sister and a national spokesperson for the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), shared her coming out story and discussed her relationships with her arch-conservative sibling and other family members during an entertaining 45-minute presentation.

Gingrich opened by recounting that she knew she was "different" at an early age, but didn't understand her feelings until she was older. She said that like many young lesbians, she had her first major crush at camp and came to fully accept her sexual orientation at college (after being exposed to a group of well-adjusted lesbians on the women's rugby squad).

She recalled coming out to her mom—who "found" a copy of the school's lesbian newsletter that Candace had stashed between the mattresses of her bed—and not having to come out to other relatives because mom was "nice enough to inform the rest of the family."

During this same period, Candace Gingrich had the only face-to-face discussion about homosexuality with her older brother that has ever occurred between the two. Surprisingly, it was short and (basically) supportive: "He told me that it was my life and I had the right to live it the way I wanted to," she recalled.

Since joining HRC in 1995, she has only raised the subject on two other occasions—both via fax and after hearing about anti-gay statements from the Speaker. Neither correspondence generated a reply.

If it seems odd that an employee of the

nation's most powerful gay rights organization isn't knocking down her homophobic brother's Capitol Hill door with regularity, Gingrich said that it's important to keep in mind her relationship with Newt—or, to be more precise, lack thereof. "You have to remember that when I came out, Newt was already a Republican Congressman from Georgia. He became the Speaker of the House in 1984. He married, had kids and moved to Georgia [from Pennsylvania] before I was even born. We only saw each other a couple of times a year."

Because of their geographical and emotional distance, Gingrich says that she really doesn't know if her brother's views on homosexuality are based on his true feelings or political expediency. But she conceded that it is becoming more difficult to check her HRC hat at the door before Thanksgiving dinner. For the sake of her parents and two sisters, she tries. "[The conflicting ideologies] have been the hardest for my mom; she just wants everyone to get along. My family is conservative and Republican, but they are supportive of me. We don't talk about a lot of this stuff, though."

Gingrich said that one of the best things—from an activist standpoint—about having Newt for a brother is the fact that he inherently challenges the notion that gays and lesbians are produced by dysfunctional homes, since he was raised by the same parents as she.

After her closing remarks, Gingrich took a few questions from the audience and signed copies of her autobiography. She noted that this visit marked her third trip to Charlotte. (She spoke at UNC-Charlotte "a few years ago"—and was protested by the young Republicans group—and attended the NCAA Women's Final Four basketball competition last spring.) Gingrich praised the Business Guild for sending a message to GLBT youth that "being gay is a beginning and not an ending." ▼



Candace Gingrich