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Published Every Two Weeks On Recycled Paper • Volume 12, Number 21 • March 21, 1998 • FREE

Gay PAC forms to unseat the "Gang of Five"

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

CHARLOTTE—A crowd of approximately 120 gathered in the Mecklenburg County Board of Elections building on March 9 to learn about Charlotte's newest gay, political organization, Mecklenburg Gay and Lesbian Political Action Committee (MeckGLPAC). Co-chairs Susan Shackelford and Phil Wells facilitated the nearly two-hour meeting, outlining the PAC's needs and goals, assisted by others who are leading the group's voter registration and education efforts.

Formed in December 1997, in the wake of Charlotte Pride Alliance's implosion due to contentious infighting, MeckGLPAC hopes to succeed by keeping bureaucracy to a minimum. To stop the bruising debates before they begin, the PAC's founders have decided that there won't be any bylaws and no official board of directors (although MeckGLPAC does have a treasurer as required by law). Wells stated that, currently, there is a coalition of "probably 20 to 25 people" supervising the group, but they are not organized in any official capacity.

While a PAC's basic function is to raise money for distribution to supportive candidates, Wells said that MeckGLPAC's primary

goal, at this early stage, is to successfully organize a voter initiative to unseat the "Gang of Five," focusing on County Commissioners Joel Carter (R-District 1), George Higgins (R-District 5) and Bill James (R-District 6).

The details of the campaign were outlined at the meeting and encompass three main components: 1) focus on the primaries rather than the general elections; 2) encourage Democrats in Districts 1, 5 and 6 to register as "Republican" or "Unaffiliated" so they can vote in the Republican primary; and 3) get gay and lesbian voters to go to the polls.

To accomplish these tasks, two teams have been assembled to spearhead voter registration and education outreach programs. The first team, led by Tom Bell, will work to reach Mecklenburg's voting-age gays and lesbians and ensure that they are registered to participate in the May 5 primaries. Additionally, they will help registered Democrats change their party affiliations before the April 10 deadline. (These can be changed back after the primary.)

The education committee, according to Wells, will be responsible for "taking the March 9 meeting on the road." At gay and lesbian events and house parties (especially in Districts 1, 5 and 6), Fran Rosch and MeckGLPAC vol-

unteers will explain the importance of participating in the primaries (a time when voter turnout is typically low) emphasizing the need to vote in the Republican primaries (when the targeted Commissioners will be most vulnerable).

In addition to these efforts, other areas of focus for MeckGLPAC will be providing volunteers to assist with the campaigns of supportive candidates; encouraging gays and lesbians to donate money to the campaigns of these candidates and the PAC; organizing a transportation pool to ferry voters to the polls on election day; developing a phone tree to disseminate information; and distributing candidate yard signs for gays and lesbians to display.

Contributions to MeckGLPAC should be made out to "Meck G&L PAC." Due to federal elections laws, PACs are required to identify donors who give more than \$99.99 during the calendar year.

For more information on MeckGLPAC, or to inquire about volunteer opportunities, contact PO Box 18804, Charlotte NC 28218; (704) 553-7906; e-mail: Meckglpac@geocities.com. Be sure to give your name, address and phone number. Visit MeckGLPAC's website at www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/6163/meckglpac.htm. ▼



Kate Winslet convinced gay icon Leonardo DiCaprio to come aboard in *Titanic* (no small feat, we say) but will she surface at the Oscars? As always, "Q-Culture" has the scoop. See page 20 for our predictions.

Alaska court rules for same-sex marriage rights

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

JUNEAU, AK—On February 27, a judge in Alaska ruled that the state must show a compelling reason why same-sex marriage should be illegal or else give gays and lesbians equal marriage rights.

The case was brought by Jay Brause and Gene Dugan of Anchorage, life partners for nearly 20 years, to challenge a 1996 state law banning same-sex marriage. The couple's attorney, Bob Wagstaff, argued that the law violates the Alaska Constitution.

Alaska Superior Court Judge Peter Michalski agreed. He stated that choosing a partner is a fundamental right. "Whether the decision results in a traditional choice or the choice Brause and Dugan seek to have recognized...the same Constitution protects both," Michalski wrote in his 13-page decision.

"It is the duty of the court to do more than merely assume that marriage is only, and must only be, what most are familiar with," he asserted. "In some parts of our nation, mere acceptance of the familiar would have left segre-

gation in place."

John Gaguine, the assistant attorney general who argued the Alaska case, said the state will likely ask the State Supreme Court to review Michalski's decision. However, proving that there is a compelling interest in banning same-sex marriage may be difficult.

Michalski's decision is similar to a landmark 1993 court ruling in Hawaii which forced that state to justify its own stance against same-sex marriage. In 1996, a state circuit court rejected Hawaii's rationalization and the case is currently pending before the Hawaii State Supreme Court. It is widely speculated that the court will rule that banning same-sex marriage is unconstitutional.

"[Alaska] is going to have to have a very good justification," said Matt Coles, director of the Lesbian and Gay Rights Project of the American Civil Liberties Union in New York.

Wagstaff doesn't believe the state can muster any justification. "There really isn't any compelling reason," he said. "The state really has offered no reason other than 'That's politics' and 'That's what the Bible says.'"

State Senator Loren Leman, who sponsored the original same-sex marriage ban enacted by the Alaska Legislature, said he had little confidence in the State Supreme Court's willingness to overturn Michalski's decision. Leman stated that a constitutional amendment might be needed to overcome the judge's decision. "If judges can't read the Constitution any better than this, then we will clearly state it in the Constitution," he said.

On March 2, Leman began the effort to institute a constitutional ban by introducing an amendment to the Alaska Senate that reads: "Each marriage contract in this state may be entered into only by one man and one woman." If a two-thirds majority of the Legislature supports the measure, it will go before voters in November.

According to a preliminary survey, even if voters do get to have the final say in this matter, it may not achieve the result that Leman is hoping for. Local television station KJUD conducted an online poll around the question "Should Alaska recognize same sex marriages?" and 62 percent of respondents voted "yes." ▼

Youth survey results released

by Wanda Pico
Special to Q-Notes

SAN RAFAEL, CA—!OutProud!, the national coalition for GLBT youth, and *Oasis Magazine*, a monthly online magazine serving the same audience, recently announced the results of the first-ever survey of GLBT and questioning youth on the Internet. A summary report of responses from the survey, which included more than 150 questions and ran from August 15 through October 31, 1997, is now available to the public on the World Wide Web.

Early in 1997 !OutProud! and *Oasis* embarked on this ambitious project with the goal of understanding more about the youth communities they serve. The result was a survey which explored a wide range of issues in the lives of GLBT youth: school, coming out, sexual activity and health, the role of the media in forming self-image, harassment and suicide, religion and spirituality, community, relationships, and the future.

The findings

More than 2000 youth — the youngest 10 years old — responded. The average respondent was 18 years old; 78 percent of all respondents were male, 21 percent female, and 1 percent transgendered or "other." A few key findings of the survey include:

- The typical respondent first realized that they might be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender at 12 years of age, but it typically took them another three years before they accepted their orientation.

- Youth are coming out earlier than ever, telling their friends or family for the first time at 16 years old, on average; typically, they tell their best friend first and the response is overwhelmingly positive. The survey found 75 percent of all respondents have come out to at least one person.

- Youth are becoming sexually active at earlier ages, with the typical GLBT teen reporting their first sexual experience at 14 years of age. Although they believe that they are adequately informed on issues of safer sex, a significant

See SURVEY on page 22

Report shows anti-gay hate crimes rose in 1997

by Wanda Pico
Special to Q-Notes

NEW YORK—Earlier this month, the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP) released its annual report documenting the level of anti-GLBT and anti-HIV hate crimes committed during the previous year. The report reflected another increase in the amount of hate-motivated crimes perpetrated against people because of their sexual orientation or HIV status.

"Anti-Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, HIV Violence in 1997" documents a 2 percent rise in anti-GLBT/HIV violence across the country utilizing data collected by 14 national community-based programs recording anti-GLBT/HIV violence, with anecdotal information from

nine additional programs.

According to the US Department of Justice and other law enforcement agencies, there were double-digit decreases in violent crime reported nationally in 1997. In contrast, the NCAVP statistics indicate that hate-motivated violence continues to be a severe problem for the GLBT/HIV community. In fact, the GLBT/HIV community does not appear to be benefiting from the much publicized reduction in crime generally seen across the country.

Beyond the overall increase in the number of incidents, NCAVP documented an 83 percent rise in anti-GLBT/HIV violence occurring in police precincts and jails. Also, the number of reported offenders who were law enforcement officers increased by 76

Hate-motivated violence continues to be a severe problem for the GLBT community.

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