

Q Notes

The Carolinas' Most Comprehensive Gay & Lesbian Newspaper

The Latest Q-POLL Results

In March, "Equality Begins at Home" activities will occur in all 50 states as part of localized gay rights efforts. In April 2000, the Millennium March on Washington will take place. Which effort, local or national, do you feel will have the best results for gay equality?

Local	National	Not sure
48%	31%	21%

Vote at www.q-notes.com

Published Every Two Weeks On Recycled Paper • Volume 13, Number 21 • March 6, 1999 • FREE

Commissioners repeal anti-gay, anti-arts laws

by Dan Van Mourik
Q-Notes Staff

CHARLOTTE, NC—The new Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners wasted no time in undoing the wrongs of their predecessors. As promised during the 1998 election campaigns of both Parks Helms and Becky Carney, arts funding was once again brought before the board.

On Tuesday, February 16, the commissioners rescinded the 2-year-old policy that cut arts funding because of objections to gay themes and characters in locally produced plays. They also revoked the restrictions that had required county-funded counselors to get parental approval when a child sought help or answers about sex or sexuality.

The 8-1 vote happened quietly, unlike the April 1, 1997 vote that drew hundreds to the Government Center to speak for and against the possible arts funding cut. Only a few principals from the earlier debate attended, including top arts council officials and one opponent.

The two rules were among the most controversial in commission history and resulted in a loud, bitter and nationally watched debate with consequences for the arts, counselors, churches, AIDS organizations, gay youth organizations and political leadership.

The original vote was clearly an anti-gay initiative, targeting the Arts & Science Council, which had an unexpected benefit. The action united arts fans, gays, uptown power brokers and thousands of others who objected to the anti-gay spirit of the entire debate.

"It is heartening that newly elected county commissioners are responding to the vast num-

ber of citizens who favor public funding for the arts and stand solidly behind the Arts & Science Council," said Michael Marsicano, president of the organization.

Only one of the five commissioners who voted to cut the funding, Republican Bill James, is on the current board. With little surprise, his was the only vote against pulling the restrictions he and the other four members of the "Gang of Five" had worked so hard to put into place.

The furor over the arts started because of objections to gay themes in Charlotte Repertory Theatre's production of *Angels in America*. The adopted resolution denied county money to arts agencies that exposed people to "perverted forms of sexuality" and that "deviate from the value and societal role of the traditional American family."

The same five commissioners agreed to require that a parent must be told when their child talked to a counselor about sex. That led to a protest from medical and mental health professionals who said the decision would steer kids away from counseling.

The new vote means County Manager Jerry Fox can consider the city and county tradition of allocating money to the arts council when he puts his budget together. Commissioners would still have to approve the money when they vote on the budget in June.

Some, like James, say the arts council — which had a record year of fundraising after the 1997 vote — has proven that it doesn't need tax money.

"I think the board is fixing something that is no longer broken," said Republican Tom Bush, former commission chair, after the vote.

"The public clearly accepted that there's no more need for taxpayers to fund the arts."

But there are those that disagree with Bush. "The censorship issue is very much alive," said Janet Isenhart, artistic director of Actor's Theatre of Charlotte. Actor's Theatre has twice put off a production of the play *Dream of a Common Language* because it fears a nude scene would cost the theater its arts council money and could jeopardize public funding across the board in Charlotte.

"We and the community have been denied the opportunity to see a beautiful, wonderful play," Isenhart said. "We have to go into self-censorship mode now when we read scripts. It's really quite scary."

Censorship lives on

Organizers of the Charlotte Young Playwrights Festival have excluded one of five winning entries from performances because its central characters are lesbians. Festival sponsors, Children's Theatre of Charlotte and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), said discussion of sexual orientation was not appropriate for middle and high school audiences.

Because some past winners were edited before being performed, the sponsors had told students in advance that winners could be deemed inappropriate for production.

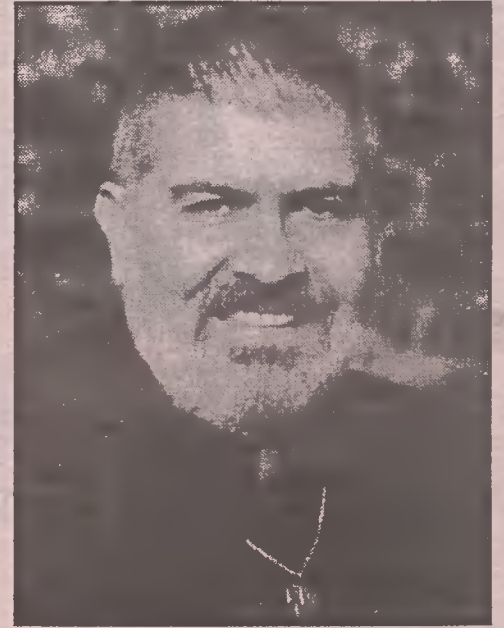
"I still consider it discrimination," said Samantha Gellar, 17, whose play *Life Versus the Paperback Romance* was selected from among 200 plays.

The play is about two adult women, one visually impaired, who meet, talk and fall in love. There is no explicit sex or nudity.

Gellar, a junior at Northwest School of the Arts, recently came out as a lesbian. She said she plans to use her \$100 prize to help pay to have the play produced at a local theater.

"It's a play-writing contest," said Children's Theatre spokesman Rob Odum. "We would never make a play ineligible for the contest based on content. This play is still an award-

See REPEAL on page 12



Rev. Troy D. Perry, MMOW board member

Y2K March plans continue to move forward

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

WEST HOLLYWOOD—Despite ongoing opposition from some segments of the community, the Millennium March on Washington for Equality (MMOW) seems to be on track. The Board of Directors recently met and approved the mission statement of the event, a voter campaign has been established and key endorsements have come through from two national women's groups.

At the board's last meeting in West Hollywood, directors unanimously approved the following mission statement: "The mission of the Millennium March on Washington is to energize, mobilize and activate the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, our friends, our families and our allies."

As part of that commitment, board co-chair Nicole Ramirez-Murray unveiled plans for GLBT Vote 2000, a campaign that will encourage GLBT and allied constituents to connect with those groups throughout the nation who are engaged in voter registration. The campaign will direct people to those agencies through web links, print and electronic media and public events. The goal is to identify and help register new voters all over the country in anticipation of the important 2000 elections.

In other business at the meeting, MMOW Executive Producer Robin Tyler presented a comprehensive work plan and a tentative budget — both accepted by the board — and three new board members were selected: Donna Red Wing, National Field Director of the Human Rights Campaign; Ingrid M. Duran, executive director of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and Jose Alberto Ucles, Assistant Director of Development at the Whitman-Walker Clinic. The board accepted the resignation of Elizabeth Birch, Human Rights Campaign executive director.

Endorsements

Two leading women's organizations, the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the Feminist Majority, have added their names to the growing list of supporters who are endorsing the goals of the MMOW.

In announcing its endorsement, NOW's statement noted the group's anticipation that "the March agenda will address discrimination based on not only sexual orientation, but also sex, race, class, age and disability" and that the

See MARCH on page 12

Spirituality highlighted during EBAH campaign

NC Lobby Day will bring GLBT citizens to the General Assembly

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

WASHINGTON, DC—In conjunction with Equality Begins at Home (EBAH), an unprecedented national campaign of grassroots organizing scheduled for March 21-27, religious leaders across the country will devote their sermons to the issue of GLBT equality. Congregations will be called upon to support the full equality of GLBT people and to challenge the anti-gay attacks of the religious right.

EBAH, coordinated by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) and organized by the Federation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Statewide Political Organizations, is the first-ever GLBT political campaign focused on actions in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

"For many of us faith fuels our passion for social justice, while others of us feel forced to choose between our faith and our sexual orientation," said NGLTF Executive Director Kerry Lobel. "These Equality Begins at Home faith-based events and coalitions are critical to countering the homophobia and misinformation of the religious right. We thank all religious leaders and faith-based activists who join us in this historic week."

In North Carolina, Equality NC (formerly NC Pride PAC), the lead organization in EBAH planning, has announced that spiritual issues will be highlighted on Sunday, March 21 and again on Sunday, March 28. (Equality NC is scheduling events from March 20-28, slightly longer than other states.) Community members are asked to solicit the participation of supportive clergy during the effort.

One way that religious leaders can show their support is by endorsing a statement from Equal Partners in Faith, a multi-racial, multi-faith national network of religious leaders committed to equality and diversity. They have developed a Proclamation of Equality for people of all faiths to sign. It is hoped that the proclamation will be read at prayer vigils, rallies and worship services held in connection with EBAH.

"We are going to show mainstream America that this is not a polarization issue. There are many people of faith who support the full equality of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people," said Rev. Steven Baines of Equal Partners in Faith and an ordained Southern Baptist minister.

In Michigan, supportive houses of worship across the state will fly rainbow flags during the week. In California, there will be an interfaith service at the capitol building. Other states planning worship services and faith-based activities for equality include Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, New

York, Virginia and Wyoming.

For more information on the Proclamation of Equality, call Equal Partners in Faith at (202) 296-4673 or write Washington office of UUA, 2026 P St. NW, Washington, DC 20036.

NC Lobby Day

The highlight of NC's EBAH efforts is likely to be Tuesday, March 23 when Equality NC is organizing the state's first-ever GLBT lobby day.

Voters will converge in Raleigh to meet their Assembly representatives and discuss issues that impact them. Equality NC has highlighted four areas of special concern: reforming the Crime Against Nature (CAN) law; passage of a hate crimes bill that includes sexual orientation; reforming the "Teach Abstinence Until Marriage" law; and giving local municipalities the power to enact non-discrimination laws.

Participants should arrive at the Legislative Building between 8:00-10:00am for registration and packet pick-up. Packets will include a map of the General Assembly, information on each participant's representative (including office location and picture), hand-outs on issue talking points and additional materials to leave behind. During the registration period, a Lobby Clinic and Issue Clinic will be offered.

From 9:00-11:30am, attendees will meet with their elected officials, followed by a press conference and rally until 12:30pm. From 1:00-4:00pm, folks can attend the General Assem-

See CAMPAIGN on page 12