

NC PRIDE '99
Greensboro
June
11-13

PRIDE in the CAROLINAS

SC PRIDE '99
Columbia
June
10-13

Q Notes

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Pride celebrations will be taking place across the country this June. How often do you attend?

Yearly	Occasionally	Never
30%	41%	29%

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Leadership woes threaten future of Pride in North Carolina

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

GREENSBORO, NC—An email message circulated a month before the upcoming NC Pride celebration in Greensboro shocked people across the state by raising the possibility that the 1999 event might be the last one following 13 successful years.

The message, sent from NC Pride Inc.'s email address and signed by board member Darnel Gay, advises that a town meeting has been scheduled during NC Pride '99 to discuss a number of critical topics (including "where we are now and where we hope to be in the 21st Century") and closes by tossing a grenade: "We will also find out if this will be the last NC Pride Celebration, which at this point is looking very possible."

When *Q-Notes* contacted Gay, also the co-chair of the Greensboro celebration, he stated that the problem stems from a lack of experienced leadership within NC Pride Inc., the group that oversees the annual event.

"Our goal is to have 20 board members for NC Pride Inc. Currently, we have eight. Between people moving away and terms ending — I'm being transferred to the Washington, DC area in July — there will only be four by mid-summer. With the exception of one of them, they're all relatively new."

According to Gay, the shortage of qualified leaders is due to the proliferation of area events that are siphoning off veteran organizers.

"What's hurting us is the local events. Charlotte has OutCharlotte — now we don't have any representation from there. There are also events in Raleigh, Greenville, Fayetteville, Asheville, Greensboro and Wilmington; these are all of the major cities. It's great, but it's hurting our efforts. NC Pride Inc. is strictly a grassroots organization now because 80 percent of our board have never organized a gay community event before."

The focus on these city events is hurting the effort to produce a statewide celebration in other ways, as well. "The deadline for bids to host the next Pride was May 15," Gay observed, "we haven't received a single one at this point." He noted that a potential bid was being prepared by someone in Raleigh, but nothing had been formalized.

The committee that is organizing NC Pride '99 in Greensboro has made economics — in relation to both attendees and production costs — a focal point of their campaign.

"We wanted to scale the costs of Pride way back from previous years," Gay said, "and we wanted to offer more events that people could do for free. Some Pride celebrations have cost as much as \$85,000 to produce; this one will cost around \$15,000 and we've already raised half of that." Only one event, a variety show called "Spice of Life," is scheduled to have an admission charge.

To lower costs so dramatically, Gay said the

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Community leaders respond to anti-gay television ad campaign

by Brian M. Myer
Q-Notes Staff

NEW YORK—The Center for Reclaiming America and 17 other religious political extremist groups announced they would launch a series of television ads touting "conversion" therapies to turn lesbians and gay men into heterosexuals.

Last July, the same coalition released a \$250,000 print ad campaign, called "Truth in Love," and followed it with an unsuccessful broadcast launch on October 8, 1998, the day after 21-year-old hate-crime victim Matthew Shepard was found tied to a fence in Wyoming. Reportedly, the newest ads will air on the Washington, DC UPN affiliate, having been rejected by other network affiliates in the same market.

Kerry Lobel, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, was one of the first to respond to the new ads. "This multi-million dollar campaign is dedicated to demeaning gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people. It is a mean-spirited affront to our basic traditions of democracy. By asserting that the 'ex-gay' movement is borne out of love and

compassion, they seek to shroud their homophobia in the highest principles of Christian belief. But America knows better. The 'ex-gay' movement is simply one more weapon in the conservative arsenal of those who want to wage war against the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. It has neither the constitutional authority nor the anecdotal evidence to justify its relentless campaign to 'convert' us to heterosexuality. Above all, it is bankrupt of the very virtues it espouses — love and compassion."

The announcement of this latest volley of anti-gay propaganda comes on the heels of a study on gay and lesbian youths and suicides. Dr. Robert Garofalo of the Boston-based Children's Hospital published his findings in the American Medical Association's *Archives of Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine*. He found that students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or not sure of their sexual orientation are 3.41 times more likely to report a suicide attempt. The study said that factors which may exacerbate this problem are "psychological

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Myrtle Beach business owner fights to keep flags flying

by Dan Van Mourik
Q-Notes Staff

MYRTLE BEACH, SC—According to the city, two rainbow flags outside of a Myrtle Beach business are flying illegally. Rainbow House Bistro, a restaurant and bar that caters to a primarily gay and lesbian crowd,



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was notified that it is in violation of the city's sign ordinance, which among other things prohibits the flying of flags in certain zones. However, the ordinance allows for the flying of US flags; foreign nations' flags; state flags; town, city and county flags; and church flags.

Bar owner Linda Robertson said she understands those flags being flown because they represent something to different groups of people — much like the rainbow flag is a symbol to gays and lesbians.

Robertson took down the flags to give the council a chance to review the city's sign ordinance and make revisions, but the council has been silent on the issue.

While the flags may have been taken down, that hasn't stopped her from displaying the rainbow colors more prominently than before.

She painted two large rainbow triangles on the front of the building and also painted the gable of the house with rainbow colors.

According to Public Information Officer Mark Kruea, there is no city law prohibiting the triangles. "I'm not aware that we have any difficulty with the triangles," he said. "They'd become a sign if they add wordage to them."

Kruea also said there is no city law prohibiting Robertson from painting the entire building in rainbow colors.

Councilwoman Judy Rodman, who helped put together the sign ordinance, said the triangles and additional paint defeat the purpose of reducing visual clutter.

"There is a loophole there and obviously they've found it," she said. "If it weren't illegal, I'd rather see the flags than what they have now."

Robertson twice appeared before the council, asking it to consider or discuss her request to amend the ordinance. On both occasions, council members sat silent.

Rodman, who spoke up for gay rights during the Pride '98 rally in Myrtle Beach, said she doesn't think council will reconsider the ordinance. "We had silence at the first meeting," she said. "We had silence at the workshop. And we had silence tonight. That tells me we're not likely to do anything about it."

"It is a somber day in this country when a city can use its authority to deprive individuals of their constitutional rights," Robertson said. "There are many things in this life I will never have, but I will have my constitutional rights."

On Thursday, May 13, she put one of the flags back up, after almost a week's hiatus. Robertson could be jailed and/or fined for each day of violation.

"If I allow my rights to be violated, then somebody else behind me has got to pick up that struggle," Robertson said.

In contradiction to Kruea's comments, Robertson was notified shortly before she put her flags back up that the two rainbow triangles she painted on the building are considered signs. The matter has been referred to the Community Appearance Board for permitting.

In an odd twist, Robertson may have an ally in Mayor Mark McBride. McBride had lobbied to stop last year's Pride Festival in Myrtle Beach, but he had also voted against the sign ordinance. McBride said he's not now advocating gay rights; he just doesn't agree with the ordinance.

"I feel the same way I did [when the vote was taken], I thought it was unconstitutional," he said. "I thought it was giving the big people an unfair advantage. I believe businesses should be allowed to fly corporate flags."

The zone the restaurant/bar is in doesn't allow corporate flags except at amusement parks of five acres or more.

"There's nothing I can do now," McBride said. "The people who voted in the affirmative are the ones who have to make the change."

"What the city is doing is clearly unconstitutional," said Human Rights Campaign Communications Director David Smith. "To limit a person's ability to express whatever they wish to express violates a cornerstone of the foundation on which this country was founded — I cannot think of anything more un-American."

On Wednesday, May 19, Robertson appeared in court before Judge Ted Collins. She pleaded "not guilty" to violation of the sign ordinance. Collins asked if Robertson had gone before City Council to resolve this matter.

"What the city is doing is clearly unconstitutional. I cannot think of anything more un-American," — David Smith

Upon hearing they would not consider amending the ordinance, Collins found her guilty and fined her \$373.00.

If the flags continue to be flown, Robertson faces a fine of up to \$865.00 per day. She has, therefore, decided to hang the flags in the windows rather than on the front of the building.

On Thursday, May 20, Robertson appeared before the Community Appearance Board for a ruling on the two rainbow triangles painted on the building's front. The board is comprised of ten citizens from Myrtle Beach and they are charged with determining what constitutes a sign under the sign ordinance. All ten agreed the triangles were not signs.

However, Zoning Coordinator Lyle Kershner overruled the board saying he and his staff had determined the triangles to be signs. Robertson now has the option of appealing that decision to the full zoning board.

Robertson is working with the American Civil Liberties Union which has agreed to file a civil lawsuit in the matter and will advise Robertson on whether or not to appeal the ruling on the triangles. ▼