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Equality NC PAC loses director

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

RALEIGH—After serving as the executive director of Equality North Carolina PAC for more than four and a half years, MK Cullen has announced plans to leave her post with the statewide GLBT advocacy organization in February 2000.

After stepping down, she will relocate to Washington, DC where her partner, who will soon graduate from law school, has accepted a position with a law firm.

Addressing her departure, Cullen said, "This is a good time to turn the organization over to someone who can build on our strong foundation and move the organization to the next level in North Carolina history."

Under her leadership, Equality North Carolina (previously NC Pride PAC) became a player in NC General Assembly politics. Her lobbying efforts were instrumental in securing positive outcomes on numerous bills affecting the state's GLBT community.

In a written statement, the Equality North Carolina board declared: "MK's vision of a [GLBT] community that is 'plugged into' state politics has been the driving force of this organization during her tenure. She has successfully articulated our needs to General Assembly candidates and legislators and organized coalition

partners around our issues. She has raised our community's awareness through educational drives that included issues ranging from complex legal issues to understanding who represents us in the NC General Assembly."

Among the organizational highlights from Cullen's tenure are:

- Distributing 10,000 voters guides in 1998;
- Hosting the first Lobby Day for Equality at the General Assembly in March 1999;

- Lobbying the NC General Assembly on issues such as hate crimes penalties, same-sex marriages and the Crime Against Nature law;

- Participating in Equality Begins at Home, a national week of actions designed to promote GLBT issues at the local and state-wide level;

- Increasing GLBT voter participation and voter registration;

- Serving as one of the initial states in the Human Rights Campaign's Field Cabinet;

- Increasing the working relationship with NC Lambda Youth Network and increasing integration of young people into grassroots organizing;

- Being a founding organization of the Federation of Statewide GLBT Political Organizations;

- Increasing the visibility and awareness of GLBT issues in the mainstream North Carolina.

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MK Cullen

New housing options for gay elders

by Brian M. Myer
Q-Notes Staff

NEW YORK—Terry Kaelber, executive director of Senior Action in a Gay Environment (SAGE), wants to know whether the GLBT community at large is willing, or even interested, in supporting housing projects geared toward the growing numbers of GLBT elders across the United States. And, perhaps even more importantly, are investors willing to jump on the bandwagon?

In a study presented at the 45th Annual Meeting of the American Society on Aging in Orlando last March, Kaelber posed his question in a symposium titled "Laying the Foundation: Housing Options for Gay and Lesbian Older Adults." A number of housing alternatives for GLBT elders, ranging from a planned five-acre housing collective for women in Washington state to a 22-acre development opening soon in Palmetto, FL, were presented.

Kaelber states that "gay and lesbian seniors are twice as likely (66 percent versus 33 percent) as the general population of seniors to live alone." He also reports that, according to a survey, the GLBT elder population has "many times fewer people they can turn to in times of crisis." Twenty percent of gay and lesbian seniors felt there was no one who could help them if they had a debilitating health issue.

Our Town, a planned community to be located in northern California's wine country, is billed as "resort-style," sort of a gay Sun City. The plan consists of 400 - 500 condominiums and homes that range in price from \$200,000 to \$400,000. Even though this luxury price tag may be out of reach for many older GLBT people, the complex has a "preliminary list" of 1500 potential residents expressing interest.

Near the other end of the spectrum is the

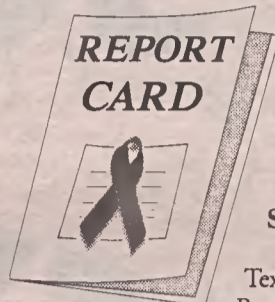
Pod Cluster Housing Project. The brainchild of Nancy M. Nystrom, founder of Elder Initiative and a professor at the School of Social Work at Michigan State University, the project will house seven women including Nystrom, her partner, three other lesbians and two who identify as heterosexual. The sunflower arrangement of structures will be constructed on a five-acre plot the group recently purchased along the Hood Canal in Washington state. The project will include six to eight individual homes, with a building in the center that will connect to each home. The central building will have a TV room, library, a gathering room and common kitchen, but that will be the extent of the group's commonality.

Nystrom stated, "They're ready to start blasting out the foundations and going ahead with the final deal on the housing." She admitted that she doesn't know how this small-scale effort will turn out. But she refers to the experiment as "a start," adding that "as a researcher I look at it and say, 'Let's see what happens.' Many women want to live collectively, and this could answer some of their housing needs. This could be one solution."

For William J. Laing, the man behind The Palms of Manasota in Palmetto, FL, research was unnecessary. "I just saw the need," he said, "from talking with all my friends and noticing the influx from the North. Good God, it was unbelievable. I thought that it's got to work, and if you build it, they will come. And they are coming!"

Laing, who financed much of The Palms himself, reports that there were nine people living at The Palms last spring, with the total climbing closer to 20 this fall. The prices have gone up — from the original asking price of

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AIDS report card: who made the grade in '99?

by Peg Byron
Special to Q-Notes
NEW YORK—

Texas Gov. George W. Bush flunked and Vice President Al Gore did just

slightly better on the annual World AIDS Day Report Card released by the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund.

"World AIDS Day is an opportunity to assess efforts against AIDS," said Lambda Executive Director Kevin M. Cathcart, referring to the worldwide observance on December 1. "This year, we find hope in a national resurgence of activism. But people's lives continue to be endangered by callous and compromising public officials," he said.

For the last four years, Lambda has graded public policy efforts and highlighted important trends in treatment, prevention and civil rights.

Just weeks after failing a foreign affairs pop quiz during a televised interview, Gov. Bush received an "F" on the Lambda report card for his push for so-called "abstinence education," an approach based on subjective moralizing rather than effective techniques designed to help young people avoid HIV infection. The Republican presidential candidate promises to let religious organizations get federal funds to support such abstinence-only programs.

Meanwhile, Vice President Gore received a "C" for retreating from his strong record on AIDS issues and siding with pharmaceutical companies out to block South Africa from producing affordable, generic versions of HIV treatments for its citizens.

The Democratic primary candidate backed down only under pressure from the activist coalition AIDS Drugs for Africa, which earned an "A" for its efforts and includes consumer advocate Ralph Nader and Doctors Without Borders, winner of the 1999 Nobel Peace Prize.

AIDS Drugs for Africa mounted a visible campaign that forced the US to drop threats of trade sanctions against the African nation with one of the highest infection rates in the world.

The United Nations recently reported that 33.6 million people worldwide, including 1.2 million children, are HIV-positive, and that 2.2 million people died of AIDS last year.

In total, Lambda handed out 22 grades to a wide range of groups and individuals working on AIDS-related issues, with many of the exemplary marks going to activists and advocacy groups working to reduce infection rates in various communities.

Lambda AIDS Project Director Catherine Hanssens said, "In 1999, we witnessed a new wave of street activism; small but well-orga-

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Minister defrocked by Methodists

by Dan Van Mourik
Q-Notes Staff

GRAND ISLAND, NE—The Rev. Jimmy Creech, 54, re-enacted a holy union for two gay men the night before facing a church trial for the original ceremony he performed in April. Soon after the re-enactment, at the Holiday Inn Midtown, Creech supporters began a prayer vigil outside Trinity United Methodist Church, where his trial would take place.

Creech, a former Nebraska pastor, faced a reprimand, suspension or removal from the United Methodist ministry for presiding at the original ceremony for Larry Ellis and Jim Raymer in Chapel Hill, NC.

Creech declined to reveal his defense prior to the November 18 trial, saying only that he was not the one on trial but the Methodist Church was on trial "for its bigotry against gays, lesbians and bisexuals."

It was Creech's second church trial. In March 1998, a jury of ministers in Kearney, NE acquitted him of similar charges after he officiated at an Omaha ceremony between two lesbians in 1997.

Outside Trinity, 74 Creech supporters were arrested for trespassing as they locked arms and sang. Across the street, the Rev. Fred Phelps of Topeka, KS stood with a handful of protesters holding up signs decrying Creech and his supporters.

Those arrested by police had locked arms and blocked the entrance to the church as potential jurors arrived. The people arrested were primarily members of Soulforce, a group led by the Rev. Mel White who support Creech. They were taken to a makeshift police headquarters where they were given citations and each paid a \$48 fine.

Creech acted as his own attorney during the 90-minute trial, but did not participate in jury selection and did not offer a defense. Offering

a defense, he said, would give credibility to what he considers to be unjust and immoral church law. Instead he chose to answer questions posed by the prosecution and give a final statement.

During the proceedings, Creech condemned the law and the church for putting him on trial.

"I believe the law that prohibits pastors from celebrating holy unions with gay and lesbian couples is an unjust and immoral law," he said. "This whole judicial process — this trial in particular — has been corrupted, contaminated. The trial is illicit."

Creech spoke extemporaneously for more than 50 minutes, including comments on the church's stand on homosexuality. He said that position is "incompatible with Christian teaching" and amounts to discrimination and persecution of homosexuals because it implies that homosexuals are unworthy and inferior. And that, Creech said, is comparable to racism.

He admitted in his testimony to knowingly violating the ban. He also said he would

perform same-sex ceremonies again regardless of the jury's verdict because he considers the law unjust and discriminatory.

Creech also implored the jury to refuse to reach a verdict, arguing that church law forbidding gay marriage is demeaning and a form of sacrilege.

But the 13-member jury did reach a verdict, delivering a unanimous "guilty." Then they immediately turned to deliberating punishment.

"I'm not surprised, but I'm really quite disappointed," Creech said. "I'm mostly disappointed that it was a unanimous decision."

Creech's 29-year ministerial career came to an end when the jury decided the punishment. They voted to remove his credentials. Creech said the loss of his credentials, which took ef-

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Rev. Creech