

SC Pride attracts national crowd and performers to four-day festival

Despite rain and low parade turnout organizers declare the event a success

COLUMBIA — South Carolina's LGBT community kicked off their 12th annual Pride celebration on Thursday, May 15 in the state's capital of Columbia.

With a theme of "Carolina Colors," the four-day celebration culminated on Sunday with a festival in downtown Finley Park. Day-long crowd estimates were placed at 2500, while the parade attracted more than 1500 participants.

"The parade was smaller than in years past," explains South Carolina Gay and Lesbian Pride Movement President Bert Easter. "Probably because of the rain, but we were very pleased overall with the turnout for the various events."

SC Pride took its opening bow on Thursday with the screening of movie *Family Fundamentals*. The sold-out presentation was followed up on Friday evening with a banquet that included dinner and dancing in the Ndoki Lodge at the Riverbanks Zoo. Hosted by the South Carolina Gay and Lesbian Business Guild, more than 150 people showed up for the event.

Pride organizers Ed Madden and Bert Easter were given the Community Partner Award during the dinner for their contributions, while SC Pride Secretary Glen Pipkin received the Volunteer of the Year Award.

Throughout the weekend an open house

was held at Columbia's LGBT Community Center. The 1400-square-foot facility attracted about 150 casual drop-bys over the weekend and played host to a number of parties.

Attendees to the event included visitors from as far away as New Jersey, Florida and Atlanta. From South Carolina there was a particularly vocal contingent from Aiken that took part in the parade.

Finley Park festivities included appearances by lesbian comic Suzanne Westenhoeffer, lesbian political activist Candace Gingrich, discharged military linguist Alastair Gamble, musician Skott Freedman, Lambda Legal representative Hector Vargas and activist Mandy Carter.

Although things went smoothly throughout the weekend, "Carolina Colors" was not without incident.

"A group of three protestors held vigil," says Easter. "They're people who are well-known around town for protesting non-conservative events. But it didn't capture much attention."

"Local advance media coverage from *The State* newspaper was great," Easter continues. "This was the first year the event was held on Sunday. We've usually held the parade and festival on Saturday, but because



of a scheduling conflict with the park, we decided to go with Sunday.

"We were very pleased with the response. We added a community worship service that included elements for Jewish, Buddhist and Christian faiths."

Planners for SCGLPM admit that there have been financial problems in the past, even with nationally-known sponsorships from companies like Absolut.

"That is correct," says Easter. "There have been past Pride events where we ended up in the red," he confirms. "But for the past two years there has been no corporate sponsorship

and we've actually come out in the black."

In hindsight, Easter is also quick to confirm what he might have done differently for "Carolina Colors"


"I would've planned and organized earlier," Easter admits. "Especially when you're working with an all-volunteer staff. They have their own schedules to think about."

Easter is apparently heeding his own words: SCGLPM is already looking at performers and personalities for next year. Among those expressing interest — former PTL televangelist, turned gay rights supporter, Tammy Faye (Bakker) Messner.


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