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Will you spend the holidays with:

- significant other
- family
- friends

Celebrating the season — LGBT style

Queer Carolinians tell us how they do Thanksgiving

by David Moore
Q-Notes staff

For many people, this time of year has a special significance. It can be a season of never-ending parties that initially kicked off with Halloween on Oct. 31, or a time to reflect quietly on the year that has passed and what lies ahead.

In this part of the country, there's a noticeable crispness in the air. The sight of dry leaves dancing in the wake of a passing car, combined with the smells of the season — holiday edibles, wood smoke from a nearby chimney and the immediately identifiable odor of decaying leaves — complete the seasonal package.

But what exactly is the significance of the Thanksgiving Holiday? We know it always falls on the last Thursday in November (this year it's Nov. 27) and we know the general history surrounding the holiday that was taught in elementary school history: Sometime in the early 1600s a native American named Squanto taught the Pilgrims how to survive in the new world, which led to a successful harvest and a big dinner party. Pilgrim Governor William Bradford proclaimed their success in a day of thanksgiving that was shared by all the colonists

and the neighboring Native Americans.

In the 250 years that followed, calls for a national thanksgiving holiday frequently reappeared. During the American Revolution — the late 1770s — a day of thanksgiving was suggested by the Continental Congress. In 1817 New York State adopted Thanksgiving Day as an annual custom. A little later in the 19th century many other states also began celebrating a Thanksgiving Day. It wasn't until 1863, however, that President Abraham Lincoln finally appointed an official national day of thanksgiving, which came to be known as the holiday Americans continue to celebrate in current times.

Now that you've had your history refresher for the day, let's get down to the meat of this article: how do folks in the LGBT community celebrate Thanksgiving?

In an effort to answer that question, we sought out a handful of individuals who told us just what we wanted to know.

Denise Sawyer and LaKeysha, Shareka, Calvin and Tonio

Originally from Jersey City, N.J., Denise Sawyer moved to Charlotte with her family in the early 1970s. An out and proud lesbian and single mother of four (LaKeysha, Shareka, Calvin and



Denise Sawyer with daughters Lakeysha and Shareka.

Tonio), Sawyer is a women's pregnancy counselor. She's also extremely active at the Unity Fellowship Church.

"Thanksgiving is an all-day affair here," says Sawyer. "We'll go to church — we'll be having a big dinner there — and then later in the day we'll come back here to be with our family. We'll watch football on TV and eat a lot of food. It's just a big ol' shindig!"

Sawyer has faced many challenges over the

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LGBT candidates win victories nationwide

Palm Springs elects first gay black mayor

by Taylor Owen

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Gay & Lesbian Victory Fund, a political action committee that works to elect gay and lesbian candidates to office, announced Nov. 5 that openly gay and lesbian candidates fared well in general elections held across the country Nov. 4.

The Victory Fund had 24 endorsees nationwide and two-thirds of them claimed victory. All told, the Victory Fund endorsed 37 candidates in 2003 — a record for an odd election year — many of whom faced elections earlier in the year.

"[It] was a terrific day for openly gay and les-



In Palm Springs, Calif., Ron Oden is the first gay African-American to be elected to the office of mayor.

see CANDIDATES on 4

World AIDS Day a global call to arms

HIV rates among gay/bi men in the Carolinas rise for a third year

by David Stout
Q-Notes staff

As we approach the 16th observance of World AIDS Day on Dec. 1, a scan of the available global statistics reveals just how far we remain from eradicating the disease:

- An estimated 40 million people are living with HIV — more than 3 million of these are children.
- More than 8,000 people die from AIDS every day.
- Since its inception AIDS has claimed the lives of more than 22 million men, women and children.
- About 5 million people died from AIDS last year alone.
- AIDS has created 14 million orphans.
- Roughly half of all people who become infected with HIV do so before age 25 and die with AIDS before turning 35.
- Nearly 95 percent of all people with HIV live in the developing world.

While the last fact in the list suggests that the HIV epidemic is under control in the U.S., this is not the case. In fact, for gay and bisexual men it's just the opposite.

New data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reveal that HIV diagnoses among gay and bisexual men in more

than two-dozen targeted states — including North and South Carolina — increased for the third consecutive year.

"These findings add to the growing concern that we are facing a potential resurgence of HIV among gay and bisexual men," said Dr. Harold Jaffe, M.D., director of the CDC's National Center for HIV, STD and TB Prevention.

Data from 25 states with longstanding HIV reporting reveal that HIV diagnoses among gay and bisexual men rose 7.1 percent from 2001 to 2002. And all told, HIV diagnoses for gay and bisexual men are up 17.7 percent since the lowest point in 1999 — even as HIV diagnoses in other vulnerable groups have remained stable since 2001.

The U.S. observance of World AIDS Day and its theme "I Care...Do You? Youth and AIDS in a



HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson: 'Never was it more clear to me that we must do more. Fighting AIDS is a social, moral, political and — yes — personal obligation.'

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