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Did you attend Charlotte Pride? Yes . No

POLL RESULTS: 07

Phelps clan takes on Western Carolina University

Production of *The Laramie Project* drives Westboro Baptist Church members to picket in Cullowhee, N.C.

by Elizabeth Kerwin

CULLOWHEE, N.C. — Vociferous homophobe Fred Phelps wasn't in attendance, but a handful of his supporters from the Topeka, Kansas-based Westboro Baptist Church visited Western Carolina University prior to the staging of "The Laramie Project" Apr. 25 to protest the production.

Their signs read "Matt: 5 years in hell," and "God Hates Fag Enablers."

"The Laramie Project," a play based on the life and brutal murder of Matthew Shephard in Laramie, Wyo., in October of 1998, was staged at Western Carolina University (WCU) in Cullowhee, N.C., Apr. 16-18 and Apr. 23-25. The play portrays openly vengeful homophobes from Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kan., led by fanatical Fred Phelps, while they protest at Shephard's funeral.

A Westboro Baptist Church press release claimed the protest was aimed at picketing "the sodomite whorehouse masquerading as Western Carolina University and the Laramie Project April 23-25." Phelps supporters requested a place near Hoey Auditorium, where the play was staged. "There was no safe place for them on NC 107," said Gene McAbee, Director of University Police, "so they were designated some space at Dodson Plaza, a free speech zone on campus."

Lauren Black, a WCU marketing major, was part of the large crowd of nearly 100 people who showed up to counterprotest. "I

have no problem with gay people and their actions," said Black, "but I do have a problem with people belittling their actions."

Two protestors had American and gay flags tied to their belt loops, which dragged on the ground. Rachel Hockenbarger, a member of the Westboro Baptist Church and Phelps supporter, stood between two children, one of whom was her daughter. She led the group in a mock version of "God Bless America" that began "The wicked land of Sodomites." Hockenbarger said she brought her daughter along because "it is my duty to teach her the word of God, line for line."

Amy Van Duren, a WCU graduate, was present because she had a different viewpoint of the word of God. "I do not believe Phelps and his congregation should be given the right to judge anyone. God loves everyone. God doesn't hate."

The large crowd of counterprotestors was prevented from moving anywhere near the Phelps' group by roadblocks and police. The crowd responded to the parody of "God Bless America" by singing the real version of the song in unison. A group of students also began to chant, "Leave Our Campus" and "Take the flags off!"

The WCU campus police agreed to allow Phelps supporters 45 minutes on the sidewalk at Dodson Plaza. Since they arrived 35 minutes late, they were only allotted 20 minutes. Around 7:35 p.m. students reminded the police that it was time for WBC members to leave by chanting, "Your time is up now."

The protestors were escorted away shortly thereafter.

After their protest at WCU, Phelps' supporters headed to Asheville on Saturday and



A small group of Westboro Baptist Church protestors showed up for WCU's production of *The Laramie Project*.

Sunday to protest gay friendly churches. On their list were Saint Mark's Lutheran, Cathedral of All Souls Episcopal, First Baptist, Saint Eugene's Catholic, Central Methodist and Grace Covenant Presbyterian.

Before their visit to Asheville, leaders of LGBT groups in the area convened to discuss possible actions against them. "The gay community got together and decided the best thing to do was ignore them," said Lindsey Duchac, a member of the University of North Carolina Alliance, a LGBT student group.

As to why Westboro Baptist Church leader Phelps was not present, McAbee explained: "He's 74-years-old and he's sick." McAbee also noted that a plane full of supporters en route to North Carolina did not make it because "their plane broke down."

Don't miss S.C. Pride in Columbia May 15

Annual event boasts entertainment and more, see schedule inside

by Ed Madden

On May 17, marriage will become legal for gays and lesbians in Massachusetts. On May 15, the SC Gay and Lesbian Pride Movement will celebrate a year of amazing advances for gay and lesbian rights with "Created Equal," the 2004 S.C. Pride March and Celebration.

GLPM has planned several events for Pride Week, culminating



CREATED EQUAL
SC GAY & LESBIAN PRIDE
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Gay student loses fight, not giving up on battle

Jarred Gamwell's gay-specific student election campaign captured national attention, but he came up short at the ballot box

by Donald Miller

WILSON, N.C. — For an instant a gay high school student in this

small western North Carolina town caught the nation's attention. It wasn't because he has a 4.5 grade average, plays the saxophone in the high school band or that he tutors other students in english after school. It was because he is gay — and willing to capitalize on that aspect of his life in an attempt to win a student council president position at Wilson's Hunt



Jarred Gamwell posing with his controversial posters.

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