

# Pride Parade faces smelly predicament

*Protesting farmer dumps tons of cow manure along parade route in rural Arkansas*

by Mark Johnson

CONWAY, Ark. — An Arkansas farmer in the tiny town of Conway says he was exercising his constitutional right to free



The town of Conway, Ark., got a stinky surprise when a farmer 'protesting' a gay pride parade dumped three tons of horse, cow and pig manure along the route of the event.

speech when he dropped three tons of horse, cow and pig manure along the route of the community's first gay rights parade June 27.

Wesley Bono, 35, pleaded innocent Aug. 2 to dumping manure on the parade

route and in front of the home of a couple who organized the pride weekend.

Bono told the judge that he was "exercising his constitutional right to free speech."

Outside the court Bono expanded on what he sees as a civil rights issue.

"Under the First Amendment, a man is allowed to protest. That's what I was doing," Bono told KATV. "I didn't do it as a hate crime or any crime at all."

But Brian Chase, a staff attorney for Lambda Legal, disagreed: "In the first place, he didn't spread [the manure] along the street, he also targeted a local home. Spreading it on a public road is one thing, targeting a specific house is another.

"The First Amendment doesn't allow you to do whatever you want," added Chase. "It allows you to say whatever you want. He's not free to

waste thousands of tax dollars by dumping refuse all over the street."

His trial is set for Sept. 16. If convicted, he could be sentenced to perform community service and pay for the cleanup. Conway officials have not said how much it cost them to clean up the mess.

City crews worked for hours removing the manure. Once the streets were cleared and hosed down, about 275 par-

ticipants in the town of 26,000 continued their march.

Two radio disc jockeys, Phillip Beard and Christine Brown, were also at the parade, making fun of the marchers by handing out gay pornography. The stunt backfired when a 16-year-old boy told authorities that Beard, dressed only in a skimpy black swimsuit, gave him a DVD of gay porn.

The two radio personalities were charged with two counts of possessing and giving away obscene materials to minors. KABZ-FM cancelled their show, and they now face up to five years in prison and \$2,000 fines if convicted.

Prosecutor H.G. Foster said he doubted Brown or Beard would do time.

"This is an important case, but it's mostly important as a societal statement," Foster said in a quote published by the Associated Press. "There are very few who would disagree that when it comes to distribution of explicit materials, generally as a society, we think that's unacceptable."

But Chase said that Foster's remarks show that these cases "are not being taken as seriously as they should."

"If gay people did that, they would be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law," Chase said, "Especially in Arkansas."

—Wire services contributed to this report



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