

Reyes may be out of prison by May

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sentenced Reyes to 57 months. Now the same judge has cut the sentence to 40 months.

An in-depth article published by the *Observer* shortly after Reyes' initial disappearance in 2001 revealed some startling previously unknown facts about the young entrepreneur who had risen quickly with-



Reyes at his swearing in as Mecklenburg County Democratic Chairman.

in the state's Democratic ranks from unknown to well-respected.

According to the story, Reyes declared bankruptcy in California in 1989. A short time later he managed to get a new Social Security number, effectively clearing his marred credit record.

In 1992 he met Butch Barksdale and later moved to Charlotte to continue their relationship. The two rented an east Charlotte apartment while Reyes did accounting work through a temp agency. Later that year he took a job as a controller for United Building Contractors. By 1996, he was the company's treasurer.

That was the year that Reyes went from something slightly short of poverty row to high roller. In 1997, he started Seyer Communications.

It was 1997 when Reyes spurred local response during the controversy surrounding "Angels in America," a gay-themed play that a handful of local conservative politicians objected to.

Reyes emerged from the flap as a voice for Charlotte's gay community. Afterward he attempted an ill-fated run for county

commissioner and later still became a key voice for Charlotte's Latin community.

In 1998, he opened the Wilson Reyes & Associates accounting firm, bought a Spanish-language newspaper and launched a bilingual magazine, all the while continuing to do the books for United Building Contractors.

The year 1998 proved to hold even more bounty for Reyes — he was elected chairman of Mecklenburg County's Democratic Party — the first latino or openly gay person to hold the seat. His ever increasing position in the gay political spotlight and continued charitable and campaign contributions had already given him access to nationally known politicians and entertainers. As

Democratic Party Chair he now came in contact with even bigger names.

He developed relationships with Kennedys and Clintons and attended White House dinners and mingled with celebrities. He claimed friendships with Maryland Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, actors Jimmy Smits, Ellen DeGeneres and Anne Heche and singer Gloria Estefan.

In April of 2001 Reyes and Barksdale sold the Myers Park house they owned together. Reyes moved ahead with plans to break up his accounting firm and reportedly emptied two brokerage accounts.

On May 4, 2001, Reyes left Charlotte on business. Along the way, he called his assistant and told him that he was getting off the highway because he was tired of driving. Reyes was not heard from again and nationwide press attention ensued as friends and co-workers initially assumed he had met with foul play. Eventually, a missing person's report was filed for Reyes.

More than a year would pass before authorities would track Reyes down to Chula Vista, Calif., where they would discover him with another gay man and a for-

mer Charlotte resident, Patrick Blakenship. The two were stopped at the border crossing Oct. 3, 2002.

Reyes was held at the Mecklenburg County jail until Dec. 1, 2003. After his sentencing he was transferred to a minimum security facility in Ashland, Ky.

According to his attorney James Wyatt, Reyes has been a "model inmate." The fact that he has agreed to enter a halfway house is also thought to have had an impact on his sentence reduction.



Would-be commissioner: Reyes attempted a run for a Mecklenburg County Commission seat in the late 1990s but pulled out before election day.

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