

north & south CAROLINA Q Notes

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Volume 20 • No. 17 • December 31, 2005

The Carolinas' most comprehensive Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender newspaper . Published every 2 weeks

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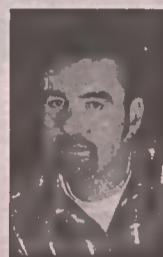
advertising space deadlines

issue: 14 January deadline: 01-04
issue: 28 January deadline: 01-18
issue: 11 February deadline: 02-01

Happy New Year to our friends, family, writers and advertisers. Thanks for your support!

Editor's note

Remembering good times in old New Orleans



On my first visit to New Orleans back in the mid 1990s. I was fortunate enough to have along an enthusiastic travel companion who made sure I saw everything there was to see.

We explored massive old cemeteries, rode the trolley to the end and back, sampled cuisine from multiple historic restaurants and spent days and nights navigating the French Quarter's various storefronts and bars.

Late one night after too much partying at a club called Oz, my friend and I made our way to a hole-in-the-wall diner called the Clover Grill. A bearded waitress took our order while a rather weathered looking KC from KC and the Sunshine Band sat next to us sipping on coffee and reading a paper. The bearded lady caught me glancing at KC and held up a menu to obscure her face from his view. "I think he lives here now," she mumbled. "Been seein' him in here a lot."

You could tell by the gleam in her eye she was proud to be the purveyor of inside gossip of goings-on in the French Quarter. I just nodded and smiled.

The following evening, our last in New Orleans (that trip anyway), we decided to take another stroll through the French Quarter and hit some of the cheesier places — just so we could say we had. It was my birthday and I wanted to be adventuresome.

If you've ever been to New Orleans' French Quarter then you can't miss this place — it's a seedy little strip joint with a painted black board in place of a picture window. The board has two large holes cut in it so that the legs of a mannequin continuously pop out and then back in, giving you the impression that a naked woman on a swing is waiting just on the other side of the door (made of plastic of course, but you get the idea).

I've never been one who was able to resist the lure of camp and bizarre, I just can't. I had to go in. I drug my friend along with me — much to his chagrin. "Why are we going in here? We're gay aren't we?"

"Yes, of course we are, but you know this is going to be really fun — come on! Naked girls dripping glow stick fluid on their bodies dancing to bad '70s disco or hanging upside down from a pole while they crush beer cans between their breasts doesn't sound the least bit arousing but it does sound pretty entertaining."

We took a seat at a table as a large transgendered waitress lumbered in our direction.

"What can I get you guys?"

"Two Rolling Rocks will do it, thanks."

In less than the time it takes to turn your head from one side to another we were quickly pounced on by two topless dancers. One was a small freckled redhead, the other an extremely tall latina with one eye that

tended to wander off to the left.

"Hi boys," the redhead said. "I'm Britney. This is my sister."

"Hey guys," I'm Carolyn. "You guys wanna specialty dance? We're sisters. We do a special sister act together for you in the back room if you like."

During all of this my friend is squirming and about to bolt and run while I'm sitting back taking stock of the situation.

"You guys are great," I tell Britney and Carolyn. "Come on, you're not sisters, though. You don't even remotely resemble each other."

They both laugh. "No we're not," says Carolyn. "We just like to tell the guys that. They seem to like it. What do you guys like?"

"Other guys," I say matter-of-factly. "We just thought we'd stop in and watch the show and have a drink. It's my birthday."

The lumbering transgendered waitress returns without beers while Britney and Carolyn seem to be making some kind of covert plan of action.

"Ohhhh! So it's your birthday. Maybe we know somebody else here who you guys might like a little better."

Something in the back of my head made me think I probably should have kept the part about my birthday to myself.

Several minutes later a rail-thin male dancer appears, draped in a ripped-up "Flashdance" sweat top, minus a few front teeth and sporting a particularly intense mullet cut.

"So you guys wanna private dance in the back, huh? Want me to show you a good time for your birthday?"

Now we were both squirming.

"I don't think so man, we were on our way out — but thanks."

My friend and I made a bee-line for the front door and out into the night air.

In the years since that time I've made other trips to New Orleans, and I have to admit I've always had a soft spot for the town's people — especially those unique, one-of-a-kind individuals you'd encounter nowhere else but New Orleans. They're good-natured and charming and always ready to lend a hand.

Now it's our time to lend a hand back to the people in New Orleans' LGBT community.

According to a story that came across my desk this past week, New Orleans' Gay and Lesbian Community Center is on the verge of collapse. Supported solely by public donations — most of the funds have dried up after donors were forced to evacuate. Although many people have returned, those who kept the center afloat with regular donations apparently haven't.

The director of the center is requesting gays and lesbians who can afford to from around the country to make a donation of just \$20. If 2,500 people from the gay community can donate that small amount each, the center's crisis could be averted for a full year.

Wanna help? I know I do. If you've got the extra cash, send your donation to the New Orleans Lesbian and Gay Community Center, 2114 Decatur St., New Orleans, LA 70116.

— David Moore
Editor

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