

Editor's Note

by David Moore

Ready to show your Pride?

It seems like only a short time ago when it became apparent that the group producing the previous Charlotte Pride Festival had dropped the ball.

We've never really been quite sure exactly what happened and I'm not one to dwell on past negatives — but I have to admit it was alarming to learn that they had not applied for the permit for the annual May event held in Marshall Park. In fact, one of the groups that had protested at Charlotte Pride in '05 had managed to snag the permit for their own gathering.

I can still recall the conversation I had with Q-Notes publisher Jim Yarbrough in mid February regarding the situation.

"We're the largest city between D.C. and Atlanta," I moaned. "We can't let this slip through the cracks. If we don't have a Pride then you know Operation Save America will run around telling everybody they're responsible for it not happening."

Both Yarbrough and I have full plates, but that thought certainly got the ball rolling.

Earlier in the year I had spoken with Lesbian and Gay Community Center Director Laura Witkowski, inquiring as to whether she thought the Center would be interested in taking on Pride as a signature event.

After a few more conversations, we sent out this mass email to a list of Charlotte and area LGBT community members. I've always hated sending out mass emails but this was important. Lucky for us, it grew wings and was posted and re-posted on multiple sites around the internet:

Forgive me for the mass email, but we're in a hurry and trying to get the message out to as large an audience as possible. As many of you know — last year's Charlotte Pride Festival was badly mishandled (for a number of reasons). Following conversations with the former director — who indicated that he was not particularly interested in continuing with the event — The Charlotte Gay and Lesbian Community Center has decided to create a totally new Pride Celebration. Q-Notes Publisher Jim Yarbrough and myself are acting as advisers to the Center and Center Director Laura Kane Witkowski in this effort to make sure that Charlotte has a Pride Celebration to be proud of.

Despite protests from area anti-gay forces and even negative comments from city Mayor Pat McCrory, PRIDE will be held — on a new date and in a new location.

We're in negotiations with a number of area venues and are currently working as fast as we can to iron out those details.

We need your help — whatever you can bring to the table — be it volunteer time, a tax deductible financial donation or taking on a position as a task force member. Maybe there's some way that you can help that we haven't thought of yet — let us know. All would be

appreciated.

Some of you I've never met before in person — while others I have spoken with by phone and some I know personally. I hope you'll join us in making this event a stable constant for Charlotte's LGBT community by placing it permanently in the hands of the Community Center.

This year is perhaps the most imperative ever for our community to stand up loud and proud. If we don't, Mayor McCrory and the anti-gay forces of Operation Save America will claim victory in silencing our voices with their tactics of hate and divisiveness. We MUST NOT let that happen.

We're having a meeting Wednesday, March 1 at 6 p.m. at the Community Center (1401 Central Ave.) and we'd love to have you attend if you're available. ...

The responses were quick and heartfelt. Over the next few days so many individuals jumped up to the plate I can't even recall the numbers — but what a few of them had to say has stuck with me to this day:

"I was appalled at the way the anti-gay terrorists (Operation Save America) were able to infiltrate and disturb our festival last year."

"There is no reason for any civil disturbance to occur within the festival grounds. IMHO, the city and the Mayor "dropped the ball" on protecting our right to assemble peacefully, and prevent any other group from gathering and violating city noise ordinances."

"I want to be a part of the fight against this homophobic bigotry."

"It's time for Charlotte's LGBT community to stand up and take their rightful place in society — time to say this is who we are and we are proud and we're not going to take any of your crap anymore."

"Sign me up. There are more of us than there are of them. We just need to be louder than they are this time."

Six months later, the day is finally here. After countless weekly meetings, endless debates about venues and some pretty incredible volunteer work from a dedicated task force, the newly renamed PRIDE Charlotte is upon us.

I'm tipping my hat to that task force: Rev. Robert Arrington, Devin Baez, Raine Cole, Michael Curtis, Darryl Hall, Jessica Kane, Jermaine Lee, John Quillin, Jeff Schmehl, Toryn Stark and co-chairs Laura Witkowski and Jim Yarbrough. Thanks for saying yes. Thanks for picking up the ball and running with it. Thanks for getting the job done. And thanks for turning a somewhat panicky email into a reality.

To everyone who shows up for the events that lead up to Pride and for the big day itself (Aug. 26 at Gateway Village) — enjoy yourselves. This is our time to relax with old friends and make new ones. Happy Pride! ▀



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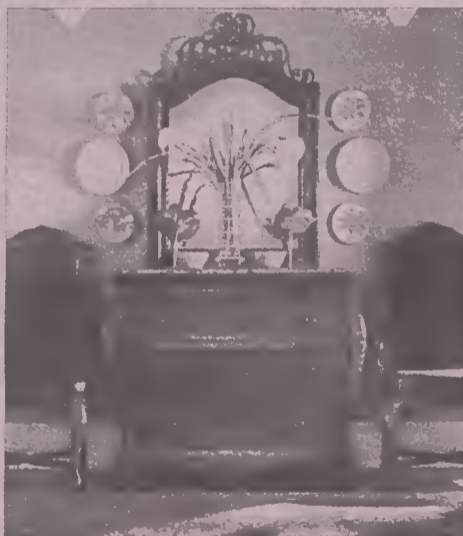


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