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PRIDE Charlotte a huge success

Organizers say 6,000 attended Gateway Village Festival

CHARLOTTE — This year's LGBT Pride celebration, PRIDE Charlotte, produced by volunteers working with The Lesbian & Gay Community Center, was nothing short of a huge success.

Held Aug. 26 at Gateway Village in Charlotte's uptown business and residential district, an estimated 6,000 people came out to enjoy the festivities, which included a jam-packed entertainment lineup, a dance tent, vendors and a kid's area.

"I am so pleased with how this all turned out," says PRIDE Charlotte Co-chair Laura Witkowski. "All the work was completely worth it. The enormous turn out, the positive affirmations for Charlotte's LGBT community — it all goes to show how important an event like this is for our city."

The Lesbian & Gay Community Center took on the event after Witkowski, executive director of The Center, had a meeting with Jim Yarbrough and David Moore, Publisher and Editor of *Q-Notes* respectively, to discuss the rumored demise of a Pride festival in Charlotte.

"When it became apparent that the previous organizers had dropped the ball — we knew it was time to step up to the plate," says Moore. "We sent out a mass email to the community letting them know how important it was that we have a festival. We ended up with overwhelmingly positive response."

Witkowski, Yarbrough and Moore then assembled a task force of volunteers to work on the event.

"One thing I can say for sure is that we absolutely had amazing people working on this event," Witkowski beamed. "Our task force members put their hearts and souls into this effort and we could not have done it without them."

This is the first time that Charlotte's Pride festival has fallen under the umbrella of The Lesbian & Gay Community Center. Previously, the event was organized by independent producers.

With the overwhelming success of the event it's clear The Center and PRIDE Charlotte are a good match.

"Absolutely," said Witkowski, "PRIDE Charlotte is a perfect fit with our mission and vision — it brings people from our diverse community together and empowers attendees to find the strength to be themselves. That's such a crucial element in making strides toward equality, and that's what The Center is all about."

Witkowski also points out that The Center depends on community support to fund its daily operations and existence.

"Without The Center, there would have been no Pride festival this year. I think that speaks volumes about the importance of supporting this organization — I urge people to remember how important grassroots giving is to the success of Charlotte's LGBT community. I am so proud to be at the helm of this organization and I'm continually excited not only by what we do, but by the enormous potential The Center has. It's a great time to be a part of this place."

Although only a small handful of protesters showed up for Pride, their impact was minimized by pre-planning as well as the dedication of Rev. Robert Arrington's "Enforcers of the Peace" — volunteers identified by their teal shirts with a heart-shaped

peace sign.

The "Enforcers" handed out "Bags of Truth," which included "Know Your Rights" cards to inform festival-goers of how to deal with protestors, as well as LGBT affirming religious information. They also collected any unwanted literature and handouts given out by protestors and plan to recycle the material into art.

Many people at the event were unaware that there were any anti-gay protestors on hand at all.

"We drove here from Columbia," says Allen Reynolds, who attended Pride along with his



Festival-goers packed Gateway Village for the PRIDE Charlotte Festival.

partner and a few friends. "We had a fantastic time. A great venue, lots of good food and entertainment. I didn't see any protestors at all. This was a lot of fun and I can guarantee you we'll be back next year." ▀

info: www.pridecharlotte.com

New entertainment for N.C. Pride

Line-up promises to entertain and inform

by Mark Smith

DURHAM, N.C. — At the top of the webpage for N.C. Pride is the following line: "Pride isn't just in One's Sexuality, but in your Whole Well Being."

In keeping with that theme, organizers have put together a well-rounded slate of events that kick off Sept. 29 with a party at Fowlers in



Bruce Wyatt, a former sergeant with the U.S. Air Force for 20 years speaks at N.C. Pride on his discharge from the service under the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy.

formerly of The Butchies, The Dirty Little Heaters, Girls Make

downtown Durham produced by Magnus Events with special guest DJ Rob Harris.

In addition to many other exciting entertainment opportunities, the 2006 North Carolina Pride Parade and Festival have teamed up with 307 Knox Records to create "Pridefull Noise," a complete musical mainstage event during the festival. Headlined with acts such as the EX-Members with musical icon Melissa York

Messes, Anaturale and Midtown Dickens, the festival will have a new energy. "Pridefull Noise" takes place on the main stage between 3-5 p.m., Sept. 30, following the parade at the Duke East campus lawn.

"Gay Pride takes all forms. This community really values local music and artists," said 307 Knox founder, Melissa Thomas. "The festival coordinators have dedicated themselves to make 'Pridefull Noise' another great reason to attend NC Pride Fest."

NC Pride includes a parade, floats and festival activities. The festival itself will

take place on Sept. 30 at Duke University East Campus.

Pride schedule of events:

Friday, September 29

The Big Top Kick-Off Party

Magnus Events and Centaur present DJ Rob Harris in an event of gigantic proportions. An official release part for DJ Rob Harris's new CD "Soakin Wet." Three additional DJs spin in the three-ring Big Top, 10 p.m.-3 a.m.

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MeckPAC announces endorsements

by Bert Woodard

CHARLOTTE — The Mecklenburg Gay & Lesbian Political Action Committee (MeckPAC) announced its endorsements for this fall's local elections at the organization's annual summer fund drive event held August 31 at the Morehead Inn.

The following candidates have been strongly endorsed for the Nov. 7 election based on the results of written surveys sent by MeckPAC to all candidates for local office: Parks Helms (current Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners chairman seeking



MeckPAC announces the organization's endorsements for this fall's local elections the organization's annual fund drive at the Morehead Inn.

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