



Q Notes

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Gay men at helm of North Carolina's Human Relations Commissions

Greensboro's Wayne Abraham and High Point's Paul Siceloff reach out to help their communities

by David Moore . Q-Notes staff

Despite the notion that it's hard to be out and proud and politically involved in a small town, two North Carolina men are living exactly that life in two distinctively different towns.

Paul Siceloff, 50, became the Chairperson of the High Point Human Relations Commission earlier this year.

Siceloff grew up in High Point, though he attended college in Spartanburg, S.C., and later spent many years living in Raleigh, N.C.

"I spent the last 12 years in Raleigh," Siceloff explains. "I moved back here two years ago to work with the North Carolina Shakespeare Festival."

Professionally, Siceloff works as a freelancer, helping art and performance organizations with administration needs and marketing communications.

His role as chair of the commission is a volunteer position, though that doesn't make him any less committed.

"This is a small town," says Siceloff. "The population is about 90,000 and they tend to lean politically to the right — they're pretty conservative. I

find it to be an energizing challenge to reach out to these people and help broaden their perspectives."

When the commission's Director Al Heggins took on the job with High Point three years ago — she set out to include all aspects of the town's diverse population — including the LGBT community.

It was at the behest of Louisa Hart of the High Point Theatre that Heggins appointed Siceloff.

"She's been absolutely great," says Siceloff. "She's very supportive of the gay community."

This past September for High Point's Racial Equality Inclusive Communities Week, Siceloff was responsible for bringing together representatives of the media to speak to the public about representation of minority communities.

"We talked about coverage of ethnic, religious and the gay and lesbian community," Siceloff recalls. "It was a very enlightening experience for a number of people."

"As a whole, we work on issues of race relations between the black and white communities, although that's not our exclusive concern. We're committed to creating better understanding between all the differences in our community, be they ethnic, cultural, religious or of a sexual orientation nature."

In the upcoming year Siceloff plans to continue working with the High Point community to foster better relations by holding panel discussions with representatives of the Jewish, Islamic and Christian faiths. He also plans to screen topical films to initiate further dialogue.

"This past year we screened 'Crash,'" Siceloff recalls. "That was a very dynamic film and represented a broad cross section of the population, so a lot

of people could relate to it. The dialogue that was generated as a result of the screening was amazing."

Despite Siceloff's enthusiasm, he admits much of the population has a way to go with issues regarding the LGBT community.

"Homosexuality is not broadly enough on the plate here," he offers. "It's still

a very closeted community and not very gay friendly in some aspects — but that's why I think it's important for people to step up to the plate and offer their services, especially if they are gay or lesbian living in a small town like High Point. It educates and informs people who otherwise might not know a gay person."

In decidedly more liberal Greensboro, N.C., openly gay Wayne Abraham, 49, is chair of that town's Human Relations Commission.

"Guilford is a blue county," says Abraham. "Fairly liberal. It's a good place for gays to live."

Abraham is very politically active in Greensboro — he's one of the founders of the Triad Health Project and a former president of the organization. He's also the chair for the Democratic Party in the sixth congressional district.

His interest in human equality and politics are what set him on the path to his role as chair of the Greensboro Human Relations Commission.

"I asked one of the city council members to nominate me," he says matter-of-factly. "This is my fourth year with the commission."

Abraham grew up in Maine, but has called Greensboro home for the past 29 years. He shares his life with his partner of 14 years, who is a teacher at a nearby school.



Paul Siceloff is the chairperson of the High Point Human Relations Commission.

For the two of them, one recent accomplishment by the commission holds particular significance.

"We were able to get Greensboro to add domestic partnership benefits for city employees," Abraham beams. "People could start signing up at the beginning of this month. It takes effect Jan. 1."

"It's extremely rewarding for me to see how my work can have a positive impact on the community." ▀



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— Greensboro Human Relations Commission Chair Wayne Abraham.

Carolina neighborhood listed in top U.S. 'gay ghettos' list

From New York state and Washington D.C. to Charlotte N.C. and Atlanta, Ga — most larger cities have 'gay ghettos.'

DENVER, Colo. — Whether or not you subscribe to Richard Florida's "creative class" theory that where the gays go eventually so do higher property values, less crime, better schools, ethnic diversity and growth — there's no disputing the fact that across the country in many cities, LGBT communities have frequently taken back decaying neighborhoods and made them viable and livable once again.

In that vane, GayGhettos.com in



Charlotte's NODA (North Davidson) neighborhood has been chosen as an up-and-coming 'gay ghetto.'

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