

CHARLOTTECity honors gay leader
page 17**GREENVILLE**Gay man wants to be first in S.C.
page 15**MORGANTON**Young and gay in rural Carolina
page 25

Q Notes

Noted . Notable . Noteworthy . LGBT News & Views

Volume 22 . Number 23 www.q-notes.com March 22 . 2008

UNC queer youth ready for Unity

Largest LGBT student gathering in South could draw 500 or more

by Matt Comer . Q-Notes staff

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. — Since 2001, the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Straight Alliance (GLBTSA) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has drawn hundreds of queer youth and students from across the southeast for their annual Unity Conference, the largest LGBT and allied student gathering of its kind in the South.

The conference provides opportunities for participants to discuss the intersections of gender and sexuality with ability, age, class, faith, health, race and ethnicity. Students also discuss strategies for effective grassroots organizing and learn about the work of other activists.

This year, those discussions will fit into the conference theme, "Are you being served?"



Slam poetry performance artist D'Lo will be a featured speaker and performer at UNC's Unity Conference.
Photo Credit: Todd Klinck

LGBTIQ Representation in the Media." The 2008 Unity Conference will span the weekend of Apr. 4-6.

"This is an election year, so there is a lot of media coverage around political and LGBT issues," Conference Director Robert Wells told *Q-Notes*. "There has also been a lot of talk about the decline of LGBT characters on TV shows and in movies."

A senior at UNC, 21-year-old Wells has a full course load, two jobs and the immense responsibilities of overseeing the conference.

"[Organizing the conference] has been great. It has gotten bigger every year and as it does we have to take that into consideration," he said. "It has been quite a challenge — I could spend up to 20 hours each week volunteering for this. I think I've gotten really good real world experience doing this."

Wells has been involved with the GLBTSA

see unity on 20

Charlotte school board passes anti-bullying policy

LGBT students offered protection after heated debate

by Matt Comer . Q-Notes staff

CHARLOTTE — After more than two hours of public comment and an hour of heated debate, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education passed by a vote of 6-3 an anti-bullying and harassment measure including protections for LGBT students.

A packed auditorium at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Government Center heard more than 40 citizens and students speak out on the policy. The overwhelming majority were in favor of adopting the new guideline for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS).

Arcena Todd, a senior at Berry Academy, told *Q-Notes* that bullying is a daily occurrence at her school. "This policy will give teachers the tools they need to stop the bullying and it will raise awareness. People aren't aware of these issues and this is going to help them learn and grow."

Brian Zarbock, a Providence High School senior and president of the campus' Gay-

Straight Alliance, told CMS Board members that his school experience has been extremely challenging.

"In June I will walk across the stage to receive my diploma. While everyone else there will be graduating, I will feel like I have finally survived."

Steven Shoemaker, senior pastor of Myers Park Baptist Church, asserted, "A school policy might not be able to change hearts, but it can create safer spaces for vulnerable students."

Myers Park was honored last month with an Equality Award from the Human Rights Campaign for its welcome of LGBT congregants.

The few citizens who opposed the anti-bullying policy seemed to be the usual malcontents from right-wing groups Operation Save America (OSA) and Coalition of Conscience (CoC). Significantly, no students spoke against the policy.



CMS Board of Education member Trent Merchant introduced the new anti-bullying policy.

In fact, while OSA and CoC members used biblical passages, inaccurate statistics and other homophobic rhetoric to condemn the board and the proposed measure, many students in the audience held high their

signs in support of the change.

"How we are fighting this battle is going to be determined on what we perceive the battle to be," said OSA Director Flip Benham, who claimed the real struggle was against the absence of God in school.

CoC director Dr. Michael Brown echoed Benham's remarks. He cited extreme examples

see anti-bullying on 20

Columbia officials pass pro-LGBT ordinances

Milestone votes could signal a change in attitude

by Matt Comer . Q-Notes staff

COLUMBIA — In an historic occasion for the LGBT community of the Palmetto State, the Columbia City Council passed new public accommodations and housing ordinances banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender-identity.

The motion passed unanimously on March 5. Columbia is the first municipality in the state to offer such protections and only the third in the Deep South. Atlanta and New Orleans offer similar protections.

"We have passed one of the most comprehensive bills in the country, in one of the most conservative states in the country," said C. Ray Drew, executive director of the S.C. Equality Coalition (SCEC). "South Carolina, and states like ours, represents the front lines of our battle for LGBT civil rights in this country."

Council members Daniel Rickenmann and Tameika Isaac Devine introduced the statutes and pushed for their passage. Rickenmann and Isaac Devine stated, "When we work together and respect each other, we can make Columbia an even better place to live."

Drew believes the votes show a dramatic shift in LGBT advances in South Carolina. "This really has made history here. This is largely considered the biggest advance in gay rights here. Almost out of disbelief,

people are asking, 'How could this happen in South Carolina?'"

Harriet Hancock, a longtime activist and board member of the S.C. Gay and Lesbian Pride Movement, was the architect of the 1991 city statute prohibiting discrimination in city employment on the basis of sexual orientation.

She echoed Drew's comments. "These ordinances represent the single greatest advance in civil rights for the LGBT community in the history of our state."

Drew said SCEC worked with the city council for more than seven weeks to achieve this milestone. "The best advances in our community are when you work at the local level and start working your way up from there," he said. "This is a grassroots approach."

SCEC also partnered with the S.C. Gay and Lesbian Pride Movement (SCGLPM) in building support for the legislation, which has not received any political or religious backlash in the Columbia area.

"There's a whole new energy in our state. We're focused and working together. There's no end to what we can accomplish," said Ryan Wilson, SCGLPM president.

Drew added that his organization is continuing to work with other municipal governments across the state and that he hopes to have similar successes elsewhere. ▀

info: www.scequality.org

'Code' author to visit Carolinas
page 25Top spring destinations
page 25'Outdoorzy' guys blaze cyber trail
page 13