

## MYRTLE BEACH

Youth attend Center prom  
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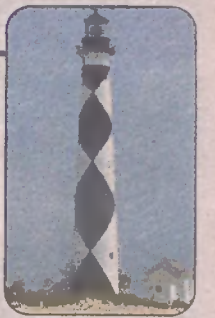
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# QNotes

Noted . Notable . Noteworthy . LGBT News & Views

Celebrating 22 Years!

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## Students excused for skipping gay day

Watauga school superintendent cites safety concerns

by Matt Comer . Q-Notes staff

BOONE — More than a third of the 1,500 students enrolled in Watauga High School were absent April 25, the day set aside for the National Day of Silence. Under the direction of Watauga County Schools Superintendent Dr. Bobbie Short, all of them received excused absences.

On the other hand, LGBT and allied students who came to school and participated in the nationwide day of action, held this year in memory of 15-year-old murder victim Lawrence King, were reprimanded for not speaking in class.

Citing a policy that requires students to respond to instructors, Marshall Ashcraft, Watauga County Schools' community relations director, confirmed the punishments. "Students [observing the Day of Silence] were told in advance they'd be required to participate in classroom activities," he said.

The disparate treatment between the two sets of students drew criticism and charges of homophobia from N.C.'s LGBT community. In an interview with *Q-Notes*, Short contended that while the decisions might appear anti-gay, they were made solely for safety concerns, given the controversy surrounding the Day of Silence.

Starting months ago, anti-gay "family values" organizations made a heavy push for conservative parents to protest and keep their children home from school on the National Day of Silence. In Charlotte, school board member Kaye McGarry pushed an unsuccessful motion to give excused absences to Charlotte-Mecklenburg students who missed the day.

"We erred on the side of safety," Short said. "We also had word that we could be picketed, although it never happened. It didn't enter my mind [when this decision was made] that it would look like it was a tolerance issue. It wasn't for me. It was a safety issue."

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## AIDS agencies rely on comfort food

Dinner fundraisers fuel the battle against HIV

by David Stout . Q-Notes staff

Most people have heard the term "comfort food" before. It's usually used to describe edibles that evoke childhood happiness and security. In other words, the stuff mom used to make: meat loaf, mashed potatoes and gravy, scratch biscuits, apple crumble and the like.

Here in the South we take comfort food to another level, because the notion that food is a balm is practically encoded into our DNA. It's something we see modeled from our earliest understanding. If someone is sick, hurting or down on their luck, you're supposed to feed them.

Consider the number of times growing up you accompanied your grandma to take soup to a friend with the flu or tagged along with your mom to deliver a casserole to an elderly shut-in. Without even realizing it, you probably knew that the appropriate response to the news that a neighborhood family had lost a loved one was carrying over a 21-piece bucket of chicken — original recipe, of course.

Given this heritage it's no surprise that food has become a critical component in the fight against HIV in the South. Fundraisers for AIDS service organizations in the form of privately hosted dinners have proliferated throughout the region, raising millions of dollars for care, case management and support. These life-saving meals are perhaps the ultimate expression of comfort food.

The 19th Annual Dining For Friends to benefit Triad Health Project (THP) will be held May 17. According to Shane Burton, THP's

director of community involvement, over 100 dinner parties will be held throughout the Triad.

Dining For Friends is organized like most ASO dinner fundraisers. Hosts plan their own events, buy the ingredients and supplies, assemble their own guest lists and set the minimum donation. The agency provides pre-printed invitations for mailing. Guests come to dinner prepared to give the requested amount or more and all money goes to the agency.

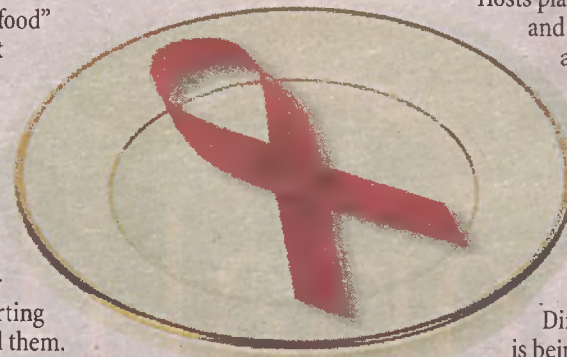
After dinner, guests from all the events are invited to come together for a free dessert reception. For this year's Dining For Friends, the Grand Dessert Gala is being held at the Greensboro Coliseum

Special Events Center beginning at 9 p.m. Desserts will be provided by area restaurants. The general public can give donations at the door for admission.

Burton told *Q-Notes*, "Dining For Friends is absolutely, vitally important to [Triad Health Project]. It is our largest fundraiser each year. We've been doing it for 19 years now and it has raised over \$2 million since its inception. Our agency would not be able to operate day-to-day without the funds generated from this event."

Last month, the Columbia-based AIDS Benefit Foundation of South Carolina (ABF) sponsored its yearly Dining With Friends fundraiser. ABF is a 20-year-old non-profit organization that exists solely to raise money for AIDS charities and agencies, including Palmetto AIDS Life Support Services.

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## Lesbian co-mom wins joint custody fight

Groundbreaking decision from N.C. appellate court

by Arthur S. Leonard  
Special to Q-Notes

RALEIGH — In a ruling on an issue it had not previously considered, the North Carolina Court of Appeals upheld a decision by Durham County District Judge Ann McKown to award joint custody of a child to JoEllen Mason and Irene Dwinell, former lesbian partners.

In the May 6 ruling on what is known in legal circles as a "case of first impression," McKown found that Dwinell, the birth mother of a boy conceived through anonymous donor insemination, had will-

ingly created a *de facto* parent status for Mason that she could not unilaterally dissolve when the women ended their partnership.

Mason and Dwinell lived as domestic partners for eight years. When they decided to raise a child together, they held a commitment ceremony, researched their options for conceiving a child and jointly decided that Dwinell would bear the child.

In that process, they identified an anonymous sperm donor who had physical characteristics similar to Mason's, and Mason fully participated, attending Dwinell's insemination sessions, prenatal care appointments and childbirth classes.

When their son was born, Mason cut the umbilical cord, and the couple gave the

child the combined surname of Mason-Dwinell on his birth certificate, but only Dwinell was listed as a parent because the hospital refused to list both women.

Despite the birth certificate, the couple jointly agreed on who godparents would be, held a baptism ceremony at which they both acted as the boy's mothers, involved Mason's parents as grandparents and raised the child together as a family. On school forms and other critical documents Dwinell named Mason as the second parent.

In 2000 when the child was three years old they signed a parenting agreement drafted by an attorney, in which they agreed that both of them were parents with equal parental rights. Dwinell also executed a healthcare power of attorney authorizing Mason to approve medical care for the child and they jointly agreed on his education in a

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JoEllen Mason fought a long, hard battle in her custody suit.

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Eureka! Q-Notes takes a road trip  
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Fab travel...cheap  
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