

Queer February

Gay, anti-gay groups events culminate in week full of activity
by Matt Comer . Q-Notes staff

CHARLOTTE — A crazy month full of LGBT activity in the Queen City has come and gone. For LGBT activists and community members, February was nothing short of a full-fledged queer extravaganza, including a



LGBT and straight ally community members protest outside Central Church of God.

glitzy, glamorous awards gala, LGBT activism awareness events and challenges to local and national anti-gay organizations.

National organizations — gay and anti-gay — descended on Charlotte in mid-February for a series of events culminating in a weekend of frenzied activity. Community members heavily involved in several organizations found themselves dashing about town attending to several events, many of them overlapping.

The Charlotte Rainbow Action Network for Equality (CRANE), a newly-established LGBT grassroots activism group, kicked things off with a Valentine's Day Uptown awareness event. [Ed. Note — This writer is an organizer with CRANE.]

About two dozen community members, mostly youth and students, gathered at Trade and Tryon Sts. to pass out literature on LGBT equality and speak to passers-by.

"We're here tonight to raise awareness about relationship equality and our equal rights," said Lacey Williams, a CRANE organizer who also works for the Charlotte Coalition for Social Justice.

Only a few days later, a joint leadership conference with the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches and two primarily African-American LGBT Christian denominations set up shop in Uptown's Omni Hotel. Their conference brought together LGBT and gay-friendly religious leaders from across the nation. North Carolina congregations like Charlotte's Unity Fellowship Church and the Church of the Holy Spirit Fellowship in Winston-Salem participated.

At the same time as the LGBT-friendly religious conference, the anti-gay national group Focus on the Family brought their "ex-gay" conference, Love Won Out, to Charlotte. On Saturday, Feb. 21 — the same day as the Human Rights Campaign Carolinas Gala — the anti-gay group drew out close to 1,000 people to Central Church of God for a full day of teaching on so-called religious "conversion" and "reparative" therapies and ministries for people they say "suffer" from same-sex attractions.

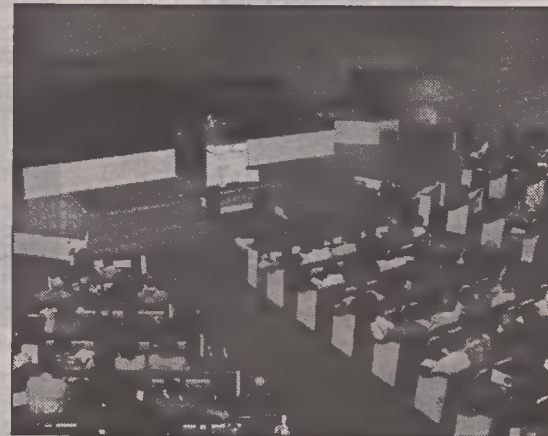
Through several events organized by CRANE and other local and national organizations including HRC, EqualityNC and others, community members spent the days prior to the conference debunking the lies and myths of "ex-gay" therapy.

On Thursday, Feb. 19, CRANE hosted author and syndicated columnist Wayne Besen at the Lesbian & Gay Community Center of Charlotte. Besen, executive director of the national group Truth Wins Out, spoke on the dangers of the ministries supported by Focus on the Family.

On the day of the conference, CRANE organized more than 50 community members who gathered outside Central Church of God to protest the conference and raise public awareness on the harms of religion-based bigotry and prejudice.

Love Won Out, featuring "ex-gay" speakers like Joe Dallas and Focus on the Family officer Melissa Fryrear, supports the notion that LGBT

people can "change" from gay to straight. Critics, like Besen, charge that the group relies



Ex-gay leader Joe Dallas speaks in the sanctuary of Central Church of God at the Focus on the Family conference, Love Won Out.

on false and debunked science, promotes ill-fated "conversion" programs and can lead to increased anxiety, depression and suicide.

Inside the church, speakers like Dallas discussed theories that claimed to explore the various causes of LGBT sexual orientations and gender identities. In a morning presentation, Dallas cited 19th century psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, the former president of the National Association for the Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH).

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