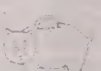


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Excited about Pride

Pride Charlotte organizers plan for record event, anti-gays plan counter
by Matt Comer . Q-Notes staff

CHARLOTTE — Organizers of one of the largest LGBT Pride festival between Washington, D.C., and Atlanta are gearing up for what they anticipate as another record year of growth.

Kicking off at the end of July, Pride Charlotte brings with it a host of activities and events. The mainstay of each year's Pride celebrations, the Pride Charlotte Festival, will take place on Saturday, July 25 at Uptown's Gateway Village.

Anti-gay religious organizations are also gearing up. The Coalition of Conscience, led by Dr. Michael Brown of FIRE Church and School of Ministry in Concord, N.C., is planning a 1,000-strong "God Has a Better Way" worship and prayer event.

"What we hope to accomplish is to send another message to the city and to the lesbian and gay community, in conjunction with the gay pride event, that is really a message of God's love and God's goodness," Brown told Q-Notes.

Brown said his group doesn't plan on doing any public preaching, as has been the case with past anti-gay protests of Pride Charlotte and other LGBT events.

"We plan to be engaging primarily in worship and prayer," he said. "We do not plan on being disruptive of the event itself. The goal is to send a message that God does have a better way and to surround the event with an atmosphere of worship and God's presence."

Clay Smith, one of Pride Charlotte's 2009 co-chairs, told Q-Notes that Pride is about celebration and shouldn't be about the conflict it might create among certain portions of the Charlotte community.

"We want everyone to be excited about Pride and not necessarily the conflict that it brings," he said. "We aren't necessarily making a political statement. We are putting on a festival to celebrate who we are."

Brown, whose group is the sole organizer of the counter "God Has a Better Way" event, said he will be getting the word out however he can. He said those participating in his event are churches and individuals who "share a heart of love for the gay and lesbian community," adding that, "under no circumstances will anyone be allowed to participate who does not share the same heart."

Smith said the Pride Charlotte festival is a family-oriented event and that anti-gay protesters really have no reason to be offended by the festival. "You won't see nude artists or nude art. You won't hear vulgar language from the stage. Those are things to celebrate."

He added, "We are there to have a good time. I encourage everyone to come out and have fun."

Organizers have already planned to counter any resistance they receive from protesters. As in years past, the "Partners in Peace" will help to keep anti-gay protesters from interrupting the festival, which is being held on

private property.

"Speaking as someone who attended the festival last year, the Partners in Peace handled the protesters very smoothly," Smith said. "I can only imagine that it will be handled with the same professionalism and grace this year."

Smith said last year's festival set record attendance and that organizers "would love to see that surpassed this year."

Entertainment at the day-long festival includes musician and poet Amy Steinberg, singers Brendan Velasquez, Chrys Matthews, Rodie Ray and Joshua Klipp, dancers Daniel



Gray and the Beledi Beat Dancers and the Gay Men's Chorus of Charlotte and One Voice Chorus, among others. The event will feature more than 100 vendors including businesses and non-profits, food vendors, a children's area, DJ tent, beer and other refreshments and two stages for entertainment.

Pride Charlotte organizers have been holding several Pride Charlotte Pageantry System preliminaries. The winners of the preliminaries will compete at a final pageant at Scorpio on July. The winner of the final will be crowned Miss Pride Charlotte.

Sponsors and a full slate of official events have yet to be officially announced; Q-Notes plans on being an event sponsor.

In-depth: 'God Has a Better Way'

Dr. Michael Brown of the Coalition of Conscience will hold "God Has a Better Way" on July 25, from Noon to 3 p.m. According to the event's website, those who will be a part of the group's prayer and outreach teams will meet at First Baptist Church on Davidson St. in Uptown at 11 a.m. Others will meet there at Noon for prayer and instructions and walk to their final destination for worship and more prayer.

Brown told Q-Notes he was unsure of the final destination for the event. As this story was being completed at press time, Q-Notes was unable to reach city officials in charge of event and protest permitting.

Their website says the group is looking for "worshippers, intercessors, musicians, soul-winners, walkers, talkers and believers."

The Coalition of Conscience is expecting 1,000 or more participants.

More information on the event and Coalition of Conscience can be found online at www.godhasabetterway.com and www.coalitionofconscience.org.

— For more on Pride activities in Charlotte and across the Carolinas visit Q-Notes' Pride 2009 website at www.q-notes.com/pridel.