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CALENDAR

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Preview Show at 10:30 pm  
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**Friday & Saturday**

Fri., May 7 - South Carolina Gay Pride Show  
Mr. & Miss Gay Pride Pageant  
Sat., May 8 - Dance Night & C.L.A.W.S.  
Fri., May 14 - Mr. Time Out Contest  
Sat., May 15 - Dance Night with Ausia Lee  
Fri., May 21 - Chocolate, Leslie Lain, and the  
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Sat., May 1 - Dance Night with Imani Tate

Karaoke Tuesday - 11 pm Karaoke Sunday - 10 pm  
Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday - No Cover  
(excluding special holidays or events)

THE HOTTEST DANCE MUSIC ON THE BEACH WITH D.J. MACKEL  
For booking information (female impersonators/male dancers)  
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**editor's note**

by matt comer  
matt@goqnotes.com

**CMPD liaison conversations are needed**

In this issue, we've got quite a bit of coverage on the April 3 murder of transgender Charlottean Toni Alston (see pages 14 and 16). It's an important, sad and unfortunate situation. We mourn with Alston's family and friends and hope detectives with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) are able to find the person or persons responsible and bring them to justice.

Alston's murder and the resulting follow-up by CMPD officials and media have also exposed concerns many in the Queen City might not usually think about.

Some of the many issues raised by the situation:

1. Nearly two weeks after the murder, CMPD detectives and family members held a press conference. Speaking to area media, police detective Bill Ward and family members identified the victim as a "crossdresser," used male pronouns, failed to divulge the victim's female/chosen name and spoke of "alternative lifestyles."
2. Although mainstream media were invited to the press conference, this city's only functioning LGBT newspaper wasn't invited. There was no opportunity for LGBT journalists to ask appropriate follow-up questions and get important clarification about the victim before the mainstream media ran inaccurate, and some would say offensive and sensationalistic, news reports.
3. Reporters with WCNC and *The Charlotte Observer* simply repeated what they'd been told by police and family. Terms like "cross-dresser" and "alternative lifestyle" made their way into the news. Like police, media referred to the victim as a man and failed to honor the victim's gender identity.
4. Because of the vagueness of the reports, and because of LGBT media's exclusion from the original press conference, our community was left to wonder: Have police reached out to the LGBT community? Have they sought advice on this matter? Have

they spoken to Alston's LGBT friends?  
5. Most importantly, police said the crime might have been a robbery. They don't have much evidence to suggest a real motive, and also said they didn't have evidence Alston's gender identity played a role in the crime. Again, the LGBT community was left to wonder: What if Alston's gender identity was a motivation in the killing? What if this was a hate crime?

After learning of the murder, I spoke with both reporters and police officials regarding the use of such offensive terminology, the failure to provide accurate details regarding Alston's gender identity and why accuracy and sensitivity were necessary. Police and media were responsive to constructive criticisms and feedback and reacted positively.

I don't doubt the root cause of the confusion in CMPD's handling of the case and the media's coverage: lack of education and awareness. I honestly believe that neither media nor CMPD detectives acted out of any maliciousness. Simply put, they just didn't know.

All of these concerns could have been addressed prior to any problematic public relations and media reporting if only CMPD had a well-placed and well-utilized LGBT police liaison. As our cover story points out, other cities — not much larger than Charlotte — have similar positions or programs. In Atlanta, city officials might very well expand their one-person LGBT police liaison unit to two. And, in Washington, D.C., the Metropolitan Police Department operates a 10-person, LGBT staff in their Gay and Lesbian Liaison Unit.

qnotes applauds the efforts of leaders like the Lesbian and Gay Community Center's Denise Palm-Beck. She has begun initial conversations with CMPD regarding the creation of an LGBT police liaison. Other leaders, like Richard Thomas and Roberta Dunn of the Mecklenburg Gay and Lesbian Political Action Committee (MeckPAC), hope to, at minimum, institute some sort of educational campaign or training for both our community and city and public officials.

All of these efforts and more are much needed, and we hope conversations regarding any possible CMPD LGBT police liaison or educational initiative are opened up to more community leaders and members. With teamwork and conversation, our community can move forward together and ensure that the situation resulting from Alston's murder never occurs again. : :

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