

Collaboration stressed by CMPD chief at forum

LGBT-inclusion a priority for Chief Rodney Monroe, but resists commitment to create permanent LGBT liaison

by Matt Comer :: matt@goqnotes.com

Fifty people gathered at the Lesbian & Gay Community Center of Charlotte on Oct. 12 to meet and chat with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) Chief Rodney Monroe. His appearance at the forum was historic, marking the first time a Charlotte police chief so publicly held an open discussion with members of the LGBT community.

The discussion was quickly opened up to audience questions. Several audience members asked the chief about a potential LGBT

year's officers' training on domestic violence.

Monroe also stressed his desire to see more interaction between CMPD and the LGBT community. Forum organizer and moderator Roberta Dunn said she was working on creating some sort of volunteer community advisory board made up of business owners, community members and others.

Still, Monroe resisted committing to a permanent LGBT police liaison, although that topic came up for discussion several times.

He said Maj. John Diggs, CMPD's Community Services Division head, already performs similar functions for the entire community and directed LGBT people to contact Diggs if they needed anything.

"We don't know all the issues in your community," Monroe said. "I'm not going to sit here and say I do. We need someone willing to come in and help us understand those issues. But, I'm not overly focused on specialization. It's not fair to any community to only have one person responsible for a set of issues."

Several other cities in the Southeast have or had LGBT police liaison units, including Atlanta, Washington, D.C. and the Richland County (Columbia, S.C.) Sheriff's Office. Atlanta's liaison office has recently been increased to two officers.

Audience members also asked about CMPD's recruitment efforts among the LGBT community. One audience member said he knew of no openly gay male officers and asked Monroe if he did.

"Yes, I do know some personally," Monroe replied, saying he is comfortable knowing CMPD reflects the diversity of the city it serves.

The forum was partly a response to CMPD's handling of the Toni Alston murder case. Alston, who was transgender, was murdered at her home in April. The resulting follow-up by police and detectives failed to include the LGBT community and led to the use of anti-gay and anti-trans slurs at a press conference. Those slurs later made it into mainstream media reporting on the crime.

Monroe's forum at the Lesbian & Gay Community Center marks the first time a CMPD chief has publicly addressed the LGBT community, although other CMPD officials have had meetings with the community. The last CMPD meeting with the community occurred more than a decade ago. ::

— Originally reported at goqnotes.com/8801/ on Oct. 12, 2010.

Miss the forum?

Did you miss the Oct. 12 forum with CMPD Chief Rodney Monroe? Catch *qnotes'* entire video of the event at goqnotes.com/8824/.



Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Chief Rodney Monroe speaks with an LGBT community member at the Lesbian & Gay Community Center of Charlotte.

police liaison position inside the department and specialized training on LGBT issues and sensitivity for all CMPD officers.

Monroe said he was supportive of such measures, but asked for community support. Such direct support and collaborative action, he said, would enable CMPD to make steps forward.

"Charlotte, as big and as pretty as it is, is still a Southern town, with small town ways," he said. "We have to work together to make this happen."

Riley Murray, a Pride Charlotte committee member, asked Monroe specifically about LGBT training for officers. She said some officers working at the 2010 Pride festival weren't gay-friendly.

"The officers we had at Gateway [Village] were great, but when we moved to the NC Music Factory, we had some officers who weren't LGBT-friendly" Murray said. "I feel we need better backing from CMPD [at these events]."

Monroe said he expected all of his officers to act professionally, but that "officers are human beings and will bring their own prejudices to the job." He said officers who don't act professionally should be reported. If a pattern develops, he said, action would be taken.

Monroe stressed his willingness to offer more LGBT-inclusive training for all officers several times.

"More than 800 of our officers have received training in mental health issues," Monroe said, drawing a parallel. "As a result we have seen a tremendous reduction in the number of arrests and in increase in sensitivity in those situations."

LGBT issues will be included in the coming




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