

# Retrospection: The year that was

The top political and community news stories of 2010

by Tyler DeVere and Matt Comer

## HRC Carolinas makes a move

After five years in Charlotte, the Human Rights Campaign's Carolinas Gala moved their annual festivities to the state capital in February. The event drew nearly 1,000 LGBT and straight ally supporters to downtown Raleigh's new convention center. Organizers said smart event planning led to lower overhead costs than any other previous HRC gala event in the state.

— M.C.



Human Rights Campaign chairs (l-r) Maddy Goss, Robert Dogens and Joni Madison, welcome attendees to the 2010 Carolina Gala in February.

## The more Pride, the better

Raleigh community members met early this year to discuss creating a local Pride event. Though some organizers with the nearby NC Pride in Durham felt concern, general consensus agreed: the more Pride, the better. Raleigh organizer Willie Pilkington said having a local, Raleigh Pride would bring attention to important matters in the capital city. Ultimately, organizers from both Pride events have worked together to find ways the events can benefit each other. Raleigh's LGBT Center will present their OutRaleigh festival next year.

— T.D.

## City protects LGB workers

In March, Charlotte City Manager Curt Walton certified changes to city employment non-discrimination policies adding "sexual orientation" and protecting lesbian, gay and bisexual employees. Community members welcomed the change as a step forward but, along with this paper, issued concerns about the manager's decision not to include transgender protections. In an article in April, *qnotes* explored the city manager's decision and City Attorney Mac McCarley's legal opinion on the city's ability to make such changes. Conversations among community members and public leaders eventually led to Mayor Anthony Foxx's historic town hall at the Lesbian & Gay Community Center of Charlotte in December.

— M.C.

## TOY models for Memphis Center's youth program

After deciding a greater outreach effort to LGBT youth was needed, the Memphis Gay and Lesbian Community Center (MGLCC) eventually formed their Youth Empowerment Services (YES) program.

The need for this outreach quickly became even more apparent once it had begun. Young people were showing up regularly to MGLCC needing help with various issues from family relations, bullying, homelessness and even drug addictions.

MGLCC Executive Director Will Batts discussed these issues with his counterpart at Time Out Youth (TOY), Steve Bentley. Through their conversations and other avenues, the center's YES program was formed and modeled after TOY's success-

ful emergency housing program. MGLCC continues to offer a support group for youth peers, and other essential services in addition to their YES housing program.

— T.D.

## N.C. group hires Obama staffer

In April, Hickory, N.C.-based Faith in America made headlines when it announced it had hired former Obama presidential campaign staffer Steve Hildebrand.

"Steve's talent and experience — his record of success — in organizational development and strategic planning are tremendous assets as we position the organization to exert leadership within the movement for equality," Faith in America founder Mitchell Gold said in an April release. "We are very fortunate Steve has decided to assist us in meeting that goal."

Hildebrand is helping the organization re-strategize and grow its influence nationally.

— M.C.

## Loss turns to action

On April 3, transgender Charlottean Toni Alston was fatally shot at her home in West Charlotte. Many believe the incident was a hate crime, and though the murder remains unsolved, community members have stepped up to open communication with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD).

In the time since Alston's murder, community leaders like Roberta Dunn have urged CMPD officials to create an LGBT police liaison and institute LGBT-inclusive police training. The result of many of those conversations was CMPD Chief Rodney Monroe's October open forum at the Lesbian & Gay Community Center.

— T.D.

## Discrimination at Duke?

Controversy over alleged incidents of anti-gay discrimination among Duke University College Republicans members echoed across the state's and nation's LGBT media and blogosphere throughout the year. Duke student Justin Robinette

had claimed College Republicans members ousted him as president after he was outed as gay. Group members denied the charges. Robinette later produced evidence of a significant amount of anti-LGBT harassment directed toward him and other gay and straight ally students. Duke administration has refused to weigh in on the matter and attempts to address the situation has failed several times in Duke's student government. In the fall, Robinette filed a complaint over the alleged discrimination with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights.

— M.C.

## Transparency is key

In May, *qnotes* summarized a survey of the state of 22 LGBT non-profit groups across the Carolinas. The results of the newspaper's first-ever Community Assessment Survey were positive, as

organizations stepped up to plate to offer transparent financial data and other information. The news wasn't all roses, though. NC Pride Fest organizers quickly realized they were out of compliance with IRS regulations. The discovery, a result of *qnotes'* survey, prompted the organization to take steps to rectify the situation. The in-depth survey also found Carolinas

LGBT executive directors' salaries were far below statewide non-profit averages, despite their tireless work on behalf of the community.

— T.D.

## Susan Burgess' legacy

City Councilmember and Mayor Pro Tem Susan Burgess passed away June 16 after her battle with cancer. Burgess was a friend to the LGBT community in Charlotte. Among other activities, Burgess had performed the duty of issuing letters of welcome to several LGBT organizations' events. Mayor Pat McCrory had always refused to do so.

Following her tearful resignation, local community activist and former council candidate Owen Sutkowski entered his name as a possible replacement for Burgess. Sutkowski, a gay man, said, "I want to bring community voices to the table." Ultimately, the seat was given to Burgess' choice successor, her son Jason Burgess.

— T.D.

## Community change begins at the top

At the end of her term in July, former Lesbian & Gay Community Center of Charlotte board chair Denise Palm-Beck stepped down from her position. John Stotler, former vice chair of the board, was elected as Palm-Beck's replacement.

Stotler has been active in the Charlotte community for many years and said he

wants to see the organization play a greater role in the public life of the city and LGBT community.

Other organizations also experienced leadership changes this year. The Charlotte Business Guild said goodbye to former president Melissa Woods and hello to Renae Elam. In December, Elam was re-elected as president and Tom Groonell was brought on as vice president.

— T.D.

## A legend passes

Community leader and beloved mentor and friend Harriet Redic Bell, 62, passed away on Sept. 14. Long known for her advocacy on behalf of the LGBT and HIV-positive community, Bell was given a tearful yet joyful goodbye by hundreds who attended her funeral at the Metropolitan Community Church of Charlotte.

— M.C.

## It Gets Better

Following a tragic slew of gay teen suicides in September, Charlotte community members organized an Oct. 11, National Coming Out Day and It Gets Better vigil at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, remembering those lost and offering public support to those youth in need of acceptance.

The vigil attracted hundreds of attendees, both gay and straight. Inspired by Dan Savage's "It Gets Better" project, the vigil was a message to struggling youth that there is help available, and that suicide is not the answer to their problems.

Religious, secular and political figures alike spoke out to support LGBT youth in Charlotte, including County Commissioners Jennifer Roberts and Harold Cogdell, three Time Out Youth members and other community leaders.

— T.D.

## Turning point: Election 2010

LGBT community members and leaders had reasons to celebrate and mourn the day after midterm elections this year. Nationally, Republicans surged back to majority control in the U.S. House of Representatives and on a state level took control of the North Carolina House and Senate. Advocates worry state GOP leaders might push anti-gay initiatives, like an anti-LGBT constitutional amendment on marriage or a repeal of 2009's landmark *School Violence Prevention Act* and *Healthy Youth Act*. Several GOP leaders, including House Speaker-designee Thom Tillis, have said they intend to stress economic and budget issues instead of social concerns. On the other hand, however, North Carolinians celebrated the election of Greensboro's Marcus Brandon, the state's second openly gay member of the legislature. Brandon also becomes the first openly gay or lesbian African-American to hold public office in the state.

— M.C.