

All-Gay Housing Option Offered to UMass Students

Cindy Sher

The Daily Northwestern

Chris Savastano faced housing problems that most students at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, Mass., never have to deal with.

When students in his dorm discovered he was gay, they tampered with his mail, broke into his room and even threatened his life.

When Savastano heard about "2 in 20," a floor of all gay, lesbian and bisexual students and their heterosexual allies, he signed up immediately.

The first successful program of its kind, 2 in 20 works to end homophobia and to provide a supportive environment for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students.

"When you're first coming out, it's nice and reaffirming," Savastano, a junior said.

"You're not alone and isolated. It's exactly what other people are going through."

Students asked the housing administration to initiate the floor in 1992 after many had faced problems similar to Savastano's.

"It provides a sense of support and comfort in a society that doesn't always provide that to them," said Michael Gilbert, the director housing services at UMass.

The floor began with 10 residents and has grown each year. It now has 33 residents and may expand to another floor this fall.

The name 2 in 20 refers to sex researcher Alfred C. Kinsey's claim that one in 10 people are gay. Residents preferred the name 2 in 20 because "one in 10 sounds lonely," said the floor's resident assistant Donnie Roberts in an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* on February 21.

Located on the fourth level of the Mary Lyon dormitory, the floor also provides unique programming for its students.

Residents have a drag ball each semester in addition to an open house for university faculty, staff

and students to learn about 2 in 20.

The floor also has a Response Room, otherwise known as a "safe room," which is available to any student living in university housing who is being harassed because of his or her sexual orientation.

The student may use the "safe room" as a temporary housing assignment.

"We adapt our programming to be quite specific," said Julie Robbins, residence director of the floor, which has the same housing fees as other dorms at UMass. "Whereas they might have a program on 'Homophobia 101' at another dorm, they might have 'Racism Within the Gay Community' here."

Near the holidays, the floor plans programs to help residents cope with going home, which can be stressful for students who may be at the beginning stages of the coming-out process.

Although resident assistants say that the majority of the university appears to support 2 in 20,

there are members of the community who say they disapprove of it.

"This university claims to promote diversity," said Paul Ferro, the treasurer and former president of the Republican Club at UMass.

"You are supposed to have contact with people who are not like you."

Ferro said he doesn't think it is right that gay couples can live together while heterosexual couples cannot.

At Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill., an all-gay floor isn't necessary, said Danny Nolan, a sophomore and the acting co-president of the Bisexual, Gay and Lesbian Alliance.

If problems arise, Nolan said he would encourage students to first confront the administration.

"When you have to segregate to form a community, that's a good sign that things are wrong," he said.

Savastano, though, said living in 2 in 20 has helped him fulfill his main purpose for attending college:

to get an education.

"We can concentrate on being students," he said. "That's why we're here and paying money."

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Elon Security Ready For De Klerk Visit

Jeff Wirick
 Editor-in-Chief

Elon Campus Police Chief Joe Taylor said he remembers former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's visit to Elon as alert, but enjoyable.

Despite several alleged bomb threats, Taylor said it was business as usual.

"It was very enjoyable. Mrs. Thatcher was a real nice lady," he said.

Security for former South African President F.W. de Klerk should be the same, if not a little more low profile, said Chuck Gantos, director of campus security and safety.

"I don't anticipate any problems. He is not a controversial figure," Gantos said. "We'll provide the best security we can provide."

Students shouldn't experience any lack of freedom because of de Klerk's visit.

"I don't see any inconvenience at all for the students," said Gantos, whose department will team up with police from the Town of Elon College and the city of Burlington.

"There's been a lot of planning

and preparation that have gone into his visit. And we want it to be a successful one. We want him to have as much freedom as possible."

Gantos wasn't a member of the Elon security department during Thatcher's April, 1995, visit. But Taylor said he remembers that special precautions had to be taken due to alleged bomb threats.

"I think we will be as prepared for de Klerk as we were Thatcher," said Provost Gerald Francis, whose office is in charge of the de Klerk question and answer session for students on Monday at 4:30. "You know Thatcher's concerns were the IRA (an Irish terrorist group). This could be from anyone who has disagreed with apartheid. And many folks have disagreed."

Taylor said the threat was there during Thatcher's visit, but nothing materialized.

"We took some extraordinary precautions that day as far as checking the buildings for explosive devices," he recalled. "We were strict on monitoring some entrances and exits. And there was also the threat of a protest. But it was pretty routine." And security hopes for much of the same come Monday.

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