

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Asheville Gay and Lesbian
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253-2971

A project of the Asheville Gay and Lesbian
Community Council

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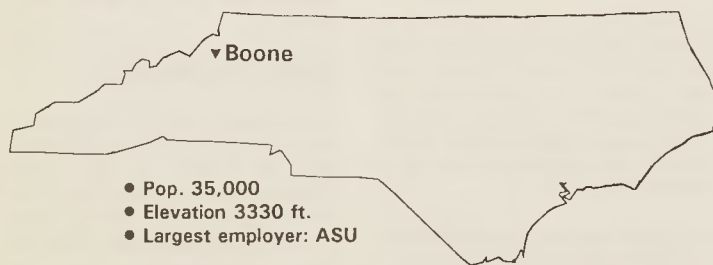
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Asheville, NC

Serving the WNC Gay/Lesbian Community

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Gay Boom in Boone

The gay and lesbian community in Boone, North Carolina, is coming out of the closet. Boone is the home of Appalachian State University (ASU), the town's focal point and largest employer. Half of the population are students at ASU. Located on the Eastern Continental Divide in the Appalachian Mountains north of Morganton, just a few miles from the Tennessee border, Boone is, by any measure, geographically remote. But for gay men and lesbians in and around Boone, social isolation may soon be a thing of the past. There now is both a student group and an adult group in Boone, in addition to an HIV support group.

SAGA serves ASU students

SAGA (Sexual Awareness Group of Appalachian) began a year ago, and has grown to a weekly average of 30 to 40 students. John Majors, this semester's Group Coordinator, says that weekly programs are varied, sometimes involving small group discussions of a particular topic, and sometimes a speaker.

SAGA recently wrote to *Community Connections* about their group's organization: "SAGA is now something of an umbrella organization with seven committees. We now have a Speakers' Committee similar to the Speakers' Bureau you have in Asheville: it serves as an educational resource on gay and lesbian issues for the dormitories, classrooms and communities in our area. Also, our Political Committee addresses activist

issues both through letters and attendance at meetings concerning AIDS, human rights, etc. Two of our members on this committee were able to appear and make a statement at the recent hearing in Asheville on the future of anonymous HIV testing in NC. Similarly, our AIDS Education Committee works closely with the Political Committee. This committee is currently trying to propose to the ASU administration a series of short lectures to the largest classes on campus on HIV and safe sex. Our Networking Committee is involved with producing a newsletter, contacting other student groups in our area, and distributing weekly flyers at key points on campus educating students about the gay community and its history. Finally, Programming and Finance keep our group going and organized while our Social Committee makes sure we have some fun along the way."

Majors said that six SAGA members will be attending the Northeastern Lesbian and Gay Student Alliance conference in Williamsburg, VA, March 1-4.

The group's biggest project to date is a mailing which will go to all 11,000

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Anonymous HIV Testing Snuffed in NC

by Cynthia Janes

On February 12 the North Carolina Health Services Commission, whose job includes setting the rules for HIV testing in North Carolina, announced that they had voted unanimously to phase out anonymous testing in NC. As of this fall, the number of anonymous sites will be cut from 100 to at least 16, spread over the state. The 16 sites will be announced by August 1. Beginning in 1994 North Carolina will offer only confidential testing.

With anonymous testing the person tested never gives a name, and is identified only by number. Confidential testing means that the person must give his or her name and address, and theoretically this information is kept confidential. However, numerous health care workers testified at the hearings that they place little faith in the

"confidentiality" of confidential testing.

The decision followed a series of six public hearings held across the state on whether or not anonymous testing should end. The Asheville hearing was held February 6, and was attended by 72 people, twenty of whom spoke on the issue. Nineteen speakers spoke out clearly for keeping testing anonymous at all 100 HIV testing sites.

Statewide, over one hundred speakers favored keeping all testing anonymous, while only a handful suggested reducing or ending anonymous testing. Speakers included AIDS activists, members of the medical professions who work with persons with AIDS, gay activists, human

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Asheville/WNC Selected as Official NAPWA Site

by David Owens

In a telephone conversation with Bill Allen on February 14, Paul R. Sathrum, Program Director for the National Association of People With AIDS (NAPWA), confirmed that the Asheville/Western North Carolina area is among four metropolitan areas in the U.S.A. selected as official NAPWA sites. A letter of confirmation has been sent to the Mountain AIDS Coalition (MAC), which will become a part of the NAPWA coalition. The other sites are Topeka, Spokane, and Tampa-St. Petersburg. A NAPWA representative will visit MAC in

mid-March to meet with the PWA community.

NAPWA is an advocacy group for PWA's. NAPWA will provide technical assistance in dealing with issues affecting the HIV+ population. Funding for technical assistance is made possible by a grant from the Centers for Disease Control. "The purpose of the [technical assistance] program will be to provide direct assistance to potential PWA groups or those in the initial stages of formation," Sathrum stated in an earlier communication.

MAC held the second of its series of planning meetings at Shambhala Institute on February 9. At that meeting, new members were welcomed, and the group

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