

Carolina Leather Clubs Trying to Change Attitudes



L to R: Nick Donovan, 1st runner-up; Joe Cyback, Mr. Leather Carolinas 1991; Bill Costomiris, 2nd runner-up

by Raymond Ward

Saturday night, February 9, a walk through the doors at Club Cabaret in Hickory, NC, had a startling effect on many of the regular members.

"I don't feel as if I am in Hickory, I must be in San Francisco or somewhere," remarked a member as he gazed around the packed facility and observed the leather men and women who were everywhere. Club Cabaret was the host to leather bars from North and South Carolina as they gathered for their scheduled caucus meeting and for the Mr. Leather Carolinas contest.

The transformation of Club Cabaret began almost as soon as you entered the building. In the lobby customers were met with the smiling face of "Tex" from Columbia, SC. He was there peddling his wares, consisting of any type of leather article you could wish for, hundreds of decorated shirts, magazines and other articles.

Traveling farther into the recesses of the club, visitors were confronted with a stage decorated with piles of automobile tires and draped with yards and yards of chain. Large letters on the backdrop proclaimed this the setting for Mr. Leather Carolinas. Leather-clad bodies were everywhere, smiling, joking and having a great time with everyone.

One might well ask, why all this leather activity in Club Cabaret, a predominately show bar? David Wright of the Tarheel Leather Club in Greensboro, NC, one of the largest clubs in the area, explains. "We are trying to change people's attitudes concerning leather people. We are trying to find areas where we can work to improve the gay communities at large. We are working to improve communication and cooperation. We, as leather people, wish to stay as fraternal as possible but still be as involved as we can be. This meeting is also to help find a common ground on which all the clubs in this area can function. We will try to maintain our individual identities as clubs but still work together."

The voice of Whitney Houston singing the Star Spangled Banner, and a cluster of leathermen bearing flags, signaled the beginning of Mr. Leather Carolinas. The master of ceremonies for the evening, Mr. Kim Brokaw, introduced the five contestants competing for the title of Mr. Leather Carolinas. Categories to be negotiated were interview, leather attire, cruise attire, and jock strap.

The contest winners were Joe Cyback, Mr. Leather Carolinas 1991; Nick Donovan, first runner-up; and Bill Costomiris, second runner-up.

Mr. Leather Carolinas Interviewed
Joe Cyback, Mr. Leather Carolinas for 1991, has been a resident of Charlotte,

NC, for the past three years, and is originally from Warren, Ohio. He currently holds the title of Mr. Manfreds and is Vice-President of Tradesmen Levi Leather Club, based in Charlotte, NC.

At age 32, he has been active in the leather community for about five years.

"I decided to enter this contest because I feel I have what it takes to represent a positive image of leather in the Carolinas. The leather communities have enjoyed a favorable growth in both the Carolinas, and it is time for us to be recognized and represented."

When asked what he will do to help the gay communities see the leather lifestyle in a more positive way, Joe replied, "I really believe in the way the leather community reaches out to persons in need. I will try in every way I can to continue this very positive gesture."

Joe sees a need for more interaction within the gay communities between other gays and the leather community. "People really should not be afraid of leather people. We are just human like everyone else and we love to party and mingle with others so they can see us as we are...really, we're not going over anyone's limit."

As the interview ended and Joe was asked what he would like to say in closing, he replied, "No one should ever be afraid to go to the leather clubs. You are always welcome to visit us Tradesmen in Charlotte; TLC, Greensboro; Capital Leather Men, Raleigh; Brigade, Columbia; and Menamore in Wilmington. The doors are always open--come in and check out our lifestyle."

"I would like this in the interview, come and check out Club Cabaret in Hickory, NC. It is a really hot bar and the new downstairs bar is really worth checking out!" said Joe with a broad smile. ▽

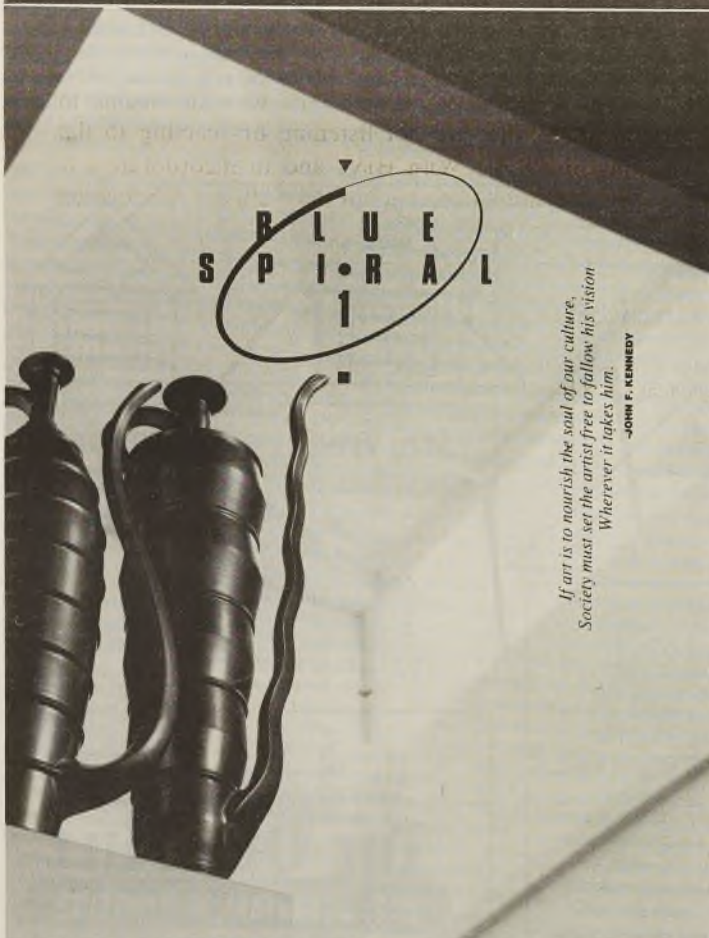
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set some immediate and long-term goals, among which is to incorporate MAC into the mission statement of NAPWA.

MAC's heart-felt thanks to those individuals and organizations who have expressed their support. Members of MAC urge the gay/lesbian community to be active in the fine local organizations which support their lifestyles and their rights.

MAC's next meeting is planned for Saturday, March 9, from 2 until 5 PM at Shambhala Institute, 118 Cumberland Avenue. Membership applications may be clipped from the February - May editions of *Community Connections* (SEE APPLICATION ON RIGHT), or applications may be obtained directly from MAC. Readers who have questions may call 258-0999 or write to MAC at PO Box 1862, Asheville, NC 28802.

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-JOHN F. KENNEDY

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