



Photo by Carol Creech

SC Joins Cracker Barrel Protests

by Cynthia Janes

South Carolina has joined the demonstrations against Cracker Barrel, the restaurant chain which has fired some employees since January simply because they are gay, and now has a stated "no gays" employment policy.

Protests against the company have taken place in Charlotte, NC, and Atlanta, GA, but until now there had been none in South Carolina. On Sunday, July 28, a coalition made up of members of the Palmetto Gay and Lesbian Alliance (PGLA) and others staged a low-profile protest at the Greenville, SC, Cracker Barrel. "We wanted to raise some awareness," spokesperson Bonnie Smith told *Community Connections*.

Smith reported that 27 people walked into the restaurant singly and in small groups, beginning at about 11 AM. They occupied about 12 tables, ordered small,

inexpensive items, and stayed until about 1:45 PM, when several members of the group were asked by management to leave. As each group of protesters left, they left good tips and placed a list of demands on the table. Many group members used credit cards to pay their (small) bills. The demands were: inclusion of sexual orientation in a Cracker Barrel equal employment opportunity statement, restitution to all unjustly-fired employees for lost wages while unemployed, the rehiring of the individuals with a guarantee of no retribution, and a public apology to the gay and lesbian community.

Smith said she thought the coalition had caught the Greenville Cracker Barrel by surprise. "Sure, they had heard about actions in Atlanta and in Charlotte, but they probably thought it wouldn't happen in a small, quiet place like Greenville."

Smith said she thinks the protesters were successful in raising awareness, even through the low-key approach. "One server left a card with one of our protesters saying, 'I really support what you're doing, and I'm glad you're doing it,'" Smith said.

"This protest kind of tested the waters to see if anyone would be willing to do it. We wanted to do something that people could feel empowered by. It was kind of a first step to see if there's enough interest to continue doing things political."

Asked about the group's reaction to having staged the protest, Smith said of those who participated: "Everybody was real positive about it. People were so excited they want to come back and do it again next week."

A hotline has been set up to register individuals' complaints about Cracker Barrel. Calling 1-800-325-6000, ID #9823, will generate a telegram to Cracker Barrel's president for a \$7 charge. ▽

SC Gays and Lesbians Celebrate Pride

The second annual South Carolina Lesbian and Gay March and Rally were held June 22 in Columbia, the capital. About 2,000 marchers battled the South Carolina heat to march to the Statehouse. Onlookers were mostly supportive, with only a few religious zealots protesting the event.

At the rally which followed the march, emceed by NC's Mandy Carter, participants were treated to addresses by Dr. Jim Sears, USC professor and author of *Growing Up Gay in the South*; the Honorable Dale McCormick, openly lesbian state senator from Maine; and Karen Thompson. Charlotte's gay and lesbian chorus, One Voice, entertained. ▽

3,000 Attend NC Gay Pride March

by Ron Huskins

The Sixth Annual NC Lesbian and Gay Pride March and Celebration was held in Durham June 29 with around 3,000 people attending. Groups and organizations from all over the state proudly marched behind their banners while hundreds of spectators looked on.

The parade route was peppered with preachers armed with Bibles and bullhorns. Marchers were not disturbed by their presence, however, and retaliated, chanting "God loves Gays, too," and singing "Jesus Loves the Little Children," altering the lyrics to include "gay, lesbian, bi and straight," instead of "red, yellow, black and white."

The rally was held at the Duke East Campus, with towering old oak trees and magnolias bringing a much needed relief from the heat. Camped out all around the back of the rally site were vendors selling their wares and organizations selling t-shirts and signing people up for various membership and mailing lists.

March organizer Jim Duley of Chapel Hill presented the NC Lesbian and Gay Service Awards given each year to two outstanding individuals in recognition of their hard work and dedication to improving the lives of gay men and lesbians in the state. This year's recipients were Leo Teachout of Wilmington and Cynthia Janes of Asheville. Neither was present to receive their award. ▽

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