

# ALFA: On the Go

## An Interview with Director Steve Yount

by Ron Huskins

After almost two years of operating out of the trunk of a car, the AIDS Leadership Foothills Area Alliance (ALFA) has moved into office space in Hickory. ALFA, which was based in Drexel until March of this year, serves the Unifour Area, which includes Alexander, Burke, Catawba and Caldwell Counties. McDowell and Rutherford Counties, which were served by ALFA in the past, will now be served by the Western North Carolina AIDS Project (WNCAP) in Asheville.

ALFA has survived early growing pains and is at the point where they can do what they were set up to do—achieve quality performance in meeting the direct care needs of persons affected by AIDS, and educating the community at large about AIDS. But, according to Chief Operating Officer Steve Yount, "I couldn't have said that a year ago."

Yount, who helped start an AIDS service organization in Florida and came to the Hickory area with some valuable experience, said that, in the beginning, funding was provided by the volunteer board members who took money out of their own pockets to keep ALFA going. It was very difficult at first to get the community—including the health care community—to respond to the needs of AIDS victims.

All that is all changing now, thanks to the visibility of the people involved with ALFA and the new board of directors. Yount says of the Board, "Having been in this business for so long, I've seen so many well-intentioned people without the ability to pull off what needs to be done, but the board that we have has that ability." The Board includes gays and non-gays, blacks and whites, men and women—all from the professional community. Yount went on to say that at



Betty Byrum and Steve Yount

a planning retreat, the old board decided to replace themselves "with people with more knowledge, more expertise, more community support, more visibility." They decided to "let the professionals take it and turn ALFA into an agency instead of a grass-roots effort." This was done with great caution because "one misplaced person can really topple your intent," Yount added. "It has worked very, very well for us."

ALFA's new office and some renovations were paid for by a local Presbyterian church. The Lutheran church bought a new copying machine and gave the old one to ALFA. Hospice of North Carolina presented ALFA with a \$20,000 grant, which pays for the office manager. Hospice of Catawba County pays for the volunteer coordinator. ALFA has also just been awarded a grant from the Ryan White Fund in the amount of \$35,000. Most of this money will go for direct support.

About 30 people are clients at ALFA and Yount fully expects that number to double within the next six months. "They are also presenting us with a lot more difficult problems," Yount said. "Up until

now, people were coming to us already in a crisis situation, ... but now that the community is aware that we're here, people are being referred to us much earlier. We're also being given these clients at a stage where they literally don't know what resources are available."

Excellent referral services have been provided by Club Cabaret, a local gay bar, and the North Carolina Royal Court, which has done an outstanding job at fundraising for direct support for PWA's. "They find out about more people than we have access to here at the agency," Yount commented.

An advantage of having office space and a paid volunteer coordinator is that it helps broaden the volunteer base. Volunteers are evenly split between the gay and non-gay community, and ALFA needs more. Volunteer Coordinator Betty Byrum said, "We need volunteers in all areas." Organizational volunteers as well as Buddy Program volunteers are needed. The latter go through an orientation program for some basic training.

ALFA has two back-to-back events planned for October. On Friday, October 18, a Candlelight Vigil in remembrance of all people affected by AIDS will be held on the square in downtown Hickory at 7:30 PM. On Saturday, October 19, the Second Annual AIDS Walk will be held in downtown Hickory. The goal of the WALK is to raise community awareness about HIV disease and to encourage education about HIV disease. Last year the walk-a-thon raised well over \$2000, according to *ALFA News*, a bi-monthly newsletter published by ALFA. The 10K walk begins at 8:15 AM. Everyone is invited to participate in and/or support these events. For more information, call 1-800-473-1447 or (in Hickory) 322-1447.

# LETSA: An Oasis for Lesbians

LETSA stands for Lesbians of East Tennessee and Surrounding Areas. LETSA is a support/social group for lesbians who live in the area around Johnson City, Kingsport, and Bristol, TN, and Bristol, VA. Women from S.W. Virginia come occasionally, as well.

We wanted to know more about this group of women in a remote, rural area of Tennessee, so we talked to one of the group's regulars, Martha McLean. McLean is well-known to those who have been involved in Asheville's lesbian community for several years. Until she went back to graduate school, McLean was very involved in the Asheville community. She has lived in the Johnson City area since 1987. "It's pretty closeted up here," McLean remarked, "much different from Asheville," which has a history of being open to more diversity. It's an achievement for this group to have been in existence for two and one-half years.



Photo by C.A. Whittemore

Martha McLean reported that LETSA came into being in March 1989. Before LETSA, there was a group called ET AL, which stood for East Tennessee Alternative Lifestyles. ET AL was an organization for both gay men and lesbians, and met every Monday night. "As an offshoot of that group, we

Continued on next page -

## CHARLOTTE STREET CAFE

132 Charlotte St., Asheville, NC 28801 704-251-1427

Open Monday through Saturday

• Drive thru service • Catering available

Warm, friendly staff

HONEY HILL FARMS

The Best Things in Life are <sup>fast</sup> Free!

"Wholeheartedly healing together"



## HEALTHY INSPIRATIONS

Therapeutic Massage • Breathwork  
Energy Balancing • Nutritional Advice

Deb Criss  
Denise Newborne

(704) 251-1116

# Natural™ Light BEER



## Carpentry by Lucy

- certified master residential carpenter
- licensed journeyman carpenter
- home improvements
- wall covering and painting

over 12 years experience

LUCY NEHLS • 658-2228