

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Asheville, NC

Serving the Southern Appalachian Gay/Lesbian Community

Asheville Gay and Lesbian
Information Line:
253-2971

A project of the Asheville Gay and Lesbian
Community Council

To report anti-gay/HIV +
discrimination/violence:
253-1656

U.S. Department of Justice toll-free:
1-800-347-HATE

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MCC Coming to Asheville

by Liz Peacock

An information meeting for the establishment of an Asheville area MCC will be held on April 4, at 4:00 pm, at the Unitarian Universalist Church (downstairs) in Asheville. The meeting will be conducted by Cassi Wylie, MCC Assistant Southeast District Coordinator, and Reverend Bob Galloway, MCC pastor in Knoxville, Tennessee.

The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches is a Christian denomination with a special outreach to the lesbian and gay community. We believe in God's unconditional love and acceptance of all people, regardless of sexual orientation, race, gender, or color.

Founder Troy Perry held the first MCC worship service in Los Angeles, California, on October 6, 1968, with an attendance of 14. The first sermon was

entitled "Be True to You." Troy Perry had a dream. In his own words, "I shall come to the City of God... knowing I shall be totally accepted as myself, sharing my 'being somebody' with all gay people everywhere. I dream of that time when all people who are gay, all who are hiding it, will step forth *freely* into the light of truth, total acceptance and understanding." MCC was to be a church of doing: "Do love your God, do stand tall, do walk proud, do love your neighbor as yourself." (Troy Perry, *The Lord is my Shepherd and He Knows I'm Gay*, 1972.)

More than 15 years after its founding, MCC is composed of over 200 congregations representing people from nine countries. An MCC congregation was active in Asheville for several years in the late 1970's and early 1980's. There are also MCC churches in Hickory, NC;

Greenville, SC; and Knoxville, TN.

On February 4, 1992, the Reverend Nancy Brown, pastor of MCC in Hickory, presented a program to C.L.O.S.E.R. about MCC. She stressed that MCC is truly an ecumenical church that tries to draw from the best of all traditions. Weekly worship services include a full length sermon as well as Holy Communion. We practice open communion: everyone is welcome at the Lord's table, either alone or with a partner, regardless of religious belief or background.

Several members of the Asheville gay and lesbian community feel the time has come to reestablish a local MCC. We invite you join us on April 4. Come worship with us, celebrate with us, and help create a community of healing and reconciliation through faith, hope, and love. V

Buncombe County Candidates Forum To Be Hosted by CLOSER

CLOSER is hosting a Candidates Forum on Tuesday, April 14. The Forum is co-sponsored by the Southern Appalachian Lesbian and Gay Alliance (SALGA) and CLOSER, and will be moderated by Ron Lambe, Co-Chair of the Asheville Gay and Lesbian Community Council.

Nine Democrats and six Republicans are running for four seats on the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners. The field will be narrowed to four Democrats and four Republicans in the primary on Tuesday, May 5. The final election for the four seats will be held in November.

The Asheville City Council Candidates Forum sponsored by SALGA in cooperation with CLOSER last September was very well attended, and provided an opportunity for the audience to acquaint themselves with the candidates and to ask them questions. The Forum also provided the candidates an opportunity to be educated about gay and lesbian issues.

Everyone is welcome to come and meet the candidates for the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners on Tuesday, April 14. Socializing and refreshments begin at 7:00 p.m. with announcements starting at 7:45. The Candidates Forum will be held from 8:00 to 9:30. Come early to get a seat!

CLOSER meets in the Parish Hall of All Souls Episcopal Church, corner of Hendersonville Road (U.S. 25) and Angle Street (just north of I-40), in the Biltmore area of Asheville. V *Thanks to Ron Lambe*

Need for Non-discrimination Legislation "Skates" into Focus

by Beth Mitchum and Cynthia Janes

As many of you know already, the skating party scheduled for March 15 was canceled by the owner of Skate-A-Round USA. This party was to have been a fundraiser for the NC Lesbian and Gay

Pride '92 Celebration. Well, just in case you didn't catch the announcement of the cancellation in the *Asheville Citizen-Times*, or if you did and wondered what it was all about, *Community Connections* contacted

continued on page 8

Witch Hunt Ends?

Commentary by Cynthia Janes

On March 25, McDowell County school teacher Mary Ann Messina was found not guilty of a crime against nature and two counts of taking indecent liberties. The charges stemmed from allegations made by a mixed-up, emotionally-starved 15-year-old female student. Though acquitted, the 39-year-old chorus and band teacher will never teach again.

The five days of testimony left observers wondering who was on trial and for what. Messina was on trial for the charges brought against her, to be sure. She was also on trial for being a lesbian. In addition, two other McDowell teachers were put on the stand and grilled about their alleged "lesbianism." Rumors of a lesbian "ring" at the school were raked about. Certainly every gay and lesbian teacher in Western North Carolina who followed the proceedings felt themselves on trial, a feeling which will surely continue to haunt them far into the future.

One also wonders how many victims there were in this case. The alleged victim



Harlee (L) and Paul Rhudy at CLOSER's Camp Drag Variety Show. The event netted \$1,000 to be split between Pride '92 and WNCAP. More photos on page 14. (photo by Cynthia Janes)

is probably a victim of her family. The teachers brought to the stand--and every other teacher on the informal "lesbian list" in McDowell schools--as well as all gay and lesbian teachers in the county are victims. We will never know how many

victims there were among the students, but all the gay and lesbian students must certainly be counted among them. Also, the non-gay students have been victimized, for incidents like these encourage them to

continued on page 11