

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

Gay and Lesbian Youth Hotline:

1-800-347-TEEN

Thurs.-Sun. 7 p.m.-12 a.m.

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

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

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Asheville Gays and Lesbians Join Protest against Local Hate Crime

by Betty Sharpless

On Wednesday, July 22, over 80 people gathered on a front lawn on Arlington Street in Asheville to protest the latest in a rash of "skinhead" hate crimes. The previous evening, the resident, Millard "Mitty" Owens had been beaten by white men after walking outside to investigate the sound of breaking glass.

Owens, an African-American and Coordinator of the YMI Community Development Center, encountered a group of six white youths, one his neighbor from across the street, and two with the shaved heads and military attire characteristic of white-supremacist "skinheads." According to reports, Owens asked whether they knew where the sound of breaking glass had come from, to which one man responded, "What gives you the right to ask a white man a question?" Two of the men then punched Owens in the face, knocking him down.

At the rally, the diversity of the protesters was notable. For the first time, people of color, white residents, and lesbians and gays stood substantial in number, firmly united, and ready to take action on the issue of hate crimes in Asheville. Local

lesbian and gay leaders spoke on the need for a hate crimes ordinance, which would mandate documentation and intensive legal followup of all hate-related crimes.

During the rally, Heather McDonald, a 17-year-old white neighbor, stood on her porch across the street making obscene gestures. "If he was a white man, it (the rally) would not be happening," she yelled, according to a report in the *Asheville Citizen-Times* (7/23/92). In an interview broadcast on WCQS radio the morning after the incident, McDonald said that the beating was Owens's own fault for addressing the white men, and that the skinheads were just "defending the white race."

SALGA (Southern Appalachian Lesbian and Gay Alliance) has been working with the Asheville-Buncombe Community Relations Council for over two years to pass an anti-discrimination resolution. The Buncombe County Board of Commissioners passed a hate crimes resolution, but rather than list sexual orientation with other protected categories, didn't list any categories.

At the rally, Bob Smith, head of the Council, spoke of his and other members' frustration with the Asheville City Council

and Buncombe County Board of Commissioners. He stressed the need for all the people present at the rally to call their City Council representatives as well as the mayor's office and demand that a hate-crimes ordinance be made a priority for the City of Asheville.

P.R.I.D.E. (People Recognizing Individuality, Dignity, and Diversity in Everyone), a non-profit project of the Western Carolina Coalition for Social Concerns, recently requested that City Council and Buncombe County Commissioners pass

an anti-discrimination ordinance that includes sexual orientation. An ordinance would have greater legal impact than a resolution.

People wishing to be alerted to future protests and community actions against hate crimes can call Bob Smith's office at 252-4713 to be put on the action alert phone tree, or attend P.R.I.D.E. meetings every third Monday at 7:30 at the Asheville Housing Authority. Our lesbian and gay community's strong, visible turnout in response to the attack on Mitty Owens strengthened a much-needed link in the antidiscrimination network. Every effort should be made to reinforce this unity. As a united coalition, African-Americans and lesbians and gays can work together to put an end to institutionalized bigotry. □

A Conversation with Gay Filmmaker Sam Irvin

by David Hopes

Over the mantle in the Biltmore Forest home of Sam Irvin, Sr., where one might expect a family portrait or—given the opulence of the surroundings—an Impressionist original, hangs a framed poster from Sam Irvin Jr.'s film, *Guilty as Charged*. In it Lauren Hutton and Heather Graham flank Rod Steiger, who appears to be seated on an evil-looking winged throne surmounted by a cross. Though we can see for ourselves since the film was released on video July 1, the promotional material tells us that *"Guilty as Charged"* is a \$3.1 million black comedy, starring Rod Steiger as a God-fearing vigilante who tracks



Sam Irvin, Jr. (photo by Peter Iovino)

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Community Connections Achieves Tax Exempt Status

The donations you make to *Community Connections* will now be tax deductible, thanks to our new 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. This includes donations made this

past Spring, when we initiated the phone-a-thon.

So far this year, fundraising has earned the paper nearly \$3,000. The Board and staff of *Community Connections* thanks our readers for their generous support. □



PRIDE!

Saturday, June 13, Asheville was host to 1,500 marchers in support of lesbian and gay rights. John Penley, a professional photographer born and raised in Asheville, returned from his home in New York City for the occasion. More of his photographs appear on pages 4 - 7.