

# COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

SERVING WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA'S LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDERED COMMUNITY

## C.L.O.S.E.R CELEBRATES 20TH ANNIVERSARY

**LOOKING TO THE FUTURE, CLOSER CELEBRATES 20 YEARS**

by Laura Brower

Asheville, N.C. (November 28, 1999) Asheville's oldest gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered organization, CLOSER just celebrated its 20th year, and about 120 members of the community gathered on November 16 to honor the occasion. Needless to say, we (the board) were thrilled that so many joined us on a Tuesday night. The food was abundant and delicious; Cantaria performed two beautiful songs. CLOSER President Michele Mamone delivered the obligatory speech; and Asheville City Council member, Barbara Fields, was the keynote speaker. More than a special evening, however, this anniversary has been a welcome opportunity to re-examine CLOSER's mission and purpose in the community. I would like to share some of these thoughts with you, hoping that they will spark a welcome discussion



**Nancy Baker, Awarded ,The Humanitarian Award**

about these issues. Asheville has changed dramatically over the last decades, as has the climate for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people. While it is remarkable that CLOSER has continued to meet steadily every Tuesday, every week (an At a recent

board retreat, we asked ourselves, why do we keep coming back to CLOSER? Simple enough question: the people. All Souls' Cathedral Parish Hall provides a safe, alcohol-free environment to meet new friends, young and old, and a space where you are appreciated and accepted, no matter what your history. Granted, the board is not exactly a random sample.

Why is this important? Because no matter your state of mind - lonely and depressed or simply eager to get involved - there is somewhere you can go for a good giggle every Tuesday. Whether you need to bounce an idea off of someone, or a whole group, there's a chair waiting for you. That's twenty years worth of staying power. Programs provide a welcome forum for delving into issues relevant to all of us, whether directly or indirectly. Recent programs have allowed us to explore questions such as gay parenting, the coming out process, parents of gay children and their role as advocates, the staggering



**Lisa Morpew, Awarded, Lifetime Achievement Award**

number of homeless gay teenagers. Speaking for myself, there has never been Tuesday night when I haven't

**CLOSER continued on page 12**

## NEW REPORT ON RISING TIDE OF ANTI-GAY BIGOTRY

**PEOPLE FOR THE AMERICAN WAY FOUNDATION LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN TO REACH STATE LEGISLATORS, SCHOOLS**

undertow of partisan rhetoric, public and corporate policy -- fosters hate by validating and perpetuating discrimination," said Carole Shields, President of People For the American Way Foundation.

"Since Matthew Shepard's death, we have been asking ourselves, as a nation, 'How have we arrived at such a place, where someone could commit such a heinous, heartless crime?' The answer, as this book reveals, is that we start down this path whenever we deny people their basic human rights and dignity. The hostile climate that lesbians and gay men face -- with its powerful

PFAW Foundation has received support from the Gill Foundation, a leading philanthropic foundation focusing on justice and equality issues, to establish the "Hostile Climate Campaign," an aggressive program for distributing the report to state policy-makers and

**Hostile continued on page 7**



**The C.L.O.S.E.R. Board -, Louis Ramsey, Pete Tolleson, Loyd Kinnett, Jeffery Blackwell, Michele Manone, Laura Brower, Joan Marshall. Not pictured Steve Henderson.**