

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

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

NC PRIDE 2000 DRAWS 3500

By Lee Stinnett

If you missed N.C. Pride 2000 in Durham on June 10, you probably don't have the "lift" that participating in these events provides. You know what I mean if you have participated in other Pride parades.

This year's annual event to call attention to the civil rights of GLBT people was well-organized, colorful and fun (if you don't count the eight-hour round-trip commute from Asheville to Durham). The sendoff of the parade, at about 1 p.m. on a sweltering Saturday afternoon, set a patriotic tone for the marchers, including the National Anthem and "Stars and Stripes Forever" from the N.C. Pride Marching Band. The prayer bestowing blessings on the day's events was the most ecumenical imaginable and left nothing out, not even the critters in the sea and all the plants that cover the earth.

The Pride 2000 organizers crisply told us what to do and what we needed to know. They seemed to know what they were doing, and the march began more or less on time. The route led marchers on a stroll through Durham streets, roughly encircling Duke University's East Campus, site of the year 2000 pride event. Durham city police provided traffic control all along the way.

The parade route was lined with many bystanders, though there were stretches where the only folks who saw us were frustrated passengers trapped in vehicles whose progress was thwarted by the march. No cheers from those corners!

Despite temperatures in the 90s, good sprits were aplenty, both among the marchers and the onlookers.



Members of BREA marching in NC Pride 2000

One of the largest contingents in the parade marched behind a blue-and-white banner that proclaimed, "Parents, Friends, and Family of Straight People."



Men with strollers

Maybe there was a serious underlying message, but the sign drew cheers and laughter all along the route.

The smallest contingent in the parade was a foursome — two identically mustached thirty-something dads with good haircuts, clad in matching army-green walking shorts and white T-shirts, pushing identical navy-blue strollers, each with a tot in matching baby-blue ensembles. The sign above the baby carriages included the rainbow symbol and identified the "group" as "Men with Strollers."

One graphics-arts business along the Durham route replaced Old Glory with the rainbow flag for the occasion.

One dad — presumably straight — stood outside a shop and pumped his infant's elbow so that the child waved to the marchers. Likely it was the infant's first parade.

One lone man stood at a corner where the march made its first 90-degree turn. He held a huge sign that read, "Stop clown abuse of elephants!" When someone from the Asheville group, hollered to him, "What does that mean?" He swirled the sign around, to show the other side, which said, "Elephant abuse begins at home!" And from somewhere else, he produced another sign that stated, "Support the Million Elephant March on Washington!" He waved and we waved back.

One of my fellow marchers told me there was a sole Bible-thumping protester along the route, ranting that that homosexuals were going to hell. In all of the excitement of the day, I didn't even notice him.

Although some Ashevilleians were spotted among the contingents of various groups, including Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (P-FLAG), a dozen marchers strode behind the banner of Asheville's newly founded GLBT-rights group, the Blue Ridge Equality Alliance. The BREA bunch received cheers from bystanders all along the route. Was it because we were from Asheville? Perhaps. Or was it because BREA was the only contingent in the whole parade that sported politically edgy signs.

"Jesse Helms is the REAL Crime Against Nature!" proclaimed one of the signs created on the spot by BREA member Linda Oakleaf. "Can the Crimes Against Nature Act!!!" read another. "Not tonight, dear. It's a felony," said a third sign. "I agree!" shouted many of the applauding onlookers.

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