

Greensboro

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"The sheriff and I talked about this and decided the publicity the arrests got would tend to alleviate the problem out there," Dowda said. "We sort of took a compassionate approach because in most cases their professional and private lives were impacted by the arrest."

But complaints from travelers, who said they had been approached for homosexual acts while stopping briefly in Greensboro, reportedly continued. The undercover officers went back, and several more arrests were made.

"Apparently, the problem is not alleviated, and we will have to step up prosecution," Dowda said. "The fact that there would be any [arrests] in a place you'd hit within a year with right much publicity is shocking."

"These closet gays — and I assume that's what they all are — are making it hard to help them. I wish they would either wear flowers in their hair or earrings so they could recognize each other and leave the straights alone," Dowda added. "Nobody knows these people are gay — that's why they're coming out there."

"We've tried to take an understanding, non-criminal approach, but when you get right down to trying to balance their rights against the general public's rights, then the problem has to be alleviated," he said.

Detective Sgt. L. Gregory of the Sheriff's Department said the problem with travelers being approached at that particular rest stop has been going on for more than a decade. It's "notorious up and down the East Coast," he added.

(A letter to the Burlington Times-News, printed on May 22, 1981, spoke with rare candor on the subject. Addressing in general the waste of tax dollars, G.C. Fletcher gave this example among many: "What about the rest areas, used only by a few, and when use is heavy, it's because of the prostitutes and homosexuals who travel in campers to perform their tasks. Just listen to your CB radio while on the road, and you can hear the free advertisements for their services.")

MURPHY'S MANOR

by Kurt Erichsen



The Greensboro Record editorialized on the subject after the first arrests, on March 17, 1983: "Some people celebrate aberrant sexuality. We are not of that school of thought. Homosexuality is at best a sad and illegal deviation from sexual mores that have regulated society's appetites for centuries. . . we're glad the officers are cracking down. . . It is not something in which the Piedmont area of North Carolina should take pride."

The Record spoke out again after the second series of arrests, although in a slightly moderated tone, making the same point (11/17/83): "Sexual imposition and solicitation is not a municipal characteristic to be advertised, no matter which of the sexes is doing it. We support law enforcement officials' efforts to break up such activity, and to protect those who unknowingly walk into it. . . We don't presume to think that the rest stop is the only homosexual action in town, or that closing it will dampen the ardor of those men who frequent it." This editorial was reprinted in the High Point Enterprise (11/26/83), and the Raleigh Times added its voice in a companion editorial (11/23/83):

"We don't blame Greensboro for being concerned, especially since there is no assurance that the construction of a rest stop just down the interstate will effect a cure when the old gay hang out is closed. . . But officers

shouldn't ease up on efforts to keep all our rest stops orderly and free of harassment by any one or any group. We would feel the same way were the problem related to female prostitutes rather than male. . . Purveyors of sex should peddle their wares elsewhere."

Undercover officers are about the only way to attack the problem, according to Detective Sgt. Gregory, because complaints come from travelers usually not willing to bring charges and testify.

Sgt. David Comer of the Greensboro Police Department told the Daily News that the city police have similar problems, particularly at the bus station.

Undercover officers netted six to eight arrests in the downtown area recently, charging men with soliciting male and female undercover officers for sex, Comer said.

Reports of such invitations in the downtown area had been climbing recently, Comer added, until the undercover officers began their work. "I think it's let up some," he said. "They've probably moved."

Detective Sgt. Gregory said Guilford County won't have its rest stop problem much longer. A new rest stop, replacing the one west of Durham and the one east of Greensboro, is under construction in Alamance County and should be open by the middle of next year, he said.

"I don't wish anybody any bad luck, but I'm glad they're getting this," Gregory said. "Thank God it's out of our area."

Similar comments were made several years ago when two rest areas in Rowan County were closed. North Kannapolis Police Chief J.L. "June" Bost told the Concord Tribune (5/20/80): "I'll be glad when they are moved."

Bost went on to describe problems his department had faced with the rest areas they patrolled. "We continuously have had trouble with homosexuals," he said, noting that officers had caught individuals in the act. He also noted problems with robberies and prostitution.

(Bill Johnson of the landscape division of the Department of Transportation told the Tribune that the Rowan County rest area was closed due to inadequate sewage treatment on the site.)

Cabarrus County Sheriff J.B. Roberts made it clear to the Tribune that he would've rather seen the new rest area located somewhere other than his county. "I think rest areas are needed," he said, "but they are problems for law enforcement. . . that is another headache."

He pointed out that he had "heard" rest areas had been the scene of numerous robberies, the transferring of contraband, prostitution and homosexual activities. •

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