

Eight Gay Men Busted in Raleigh

Eight men were arrested in Raleigh recently on charges of soliciting for a crime against nature. The arrests, which took place across from a gay bar and adult bookstore, involved a male police decoy and appeared to be part of a wider undercover operation intended to "clean up" the downtown Raleigh area.

The arrests occurred on Friday night, July 27, on the 300 block of Hargett Street. Located on that block are the Capital Corral, a gay bar, and Our Place (formerly Hart's Book Store).

According to a witness, the police decoy was wearing tight jeans, a T-shirt, and a red handkerchief, and was "groping his crotch." He stood on the street corner across from the bar, where cars leaving the parking lot would stop to make a turn.

The witness said that the decoy made eye contact with the drivers of passing cars, and even signalled at some of them to stop. The decoy would strike up a conversation with the driver, who would proposition the decoy and sometimes offer money — according to police, as little as \$10 and as much as \$1000. At that point, the decoy would arrest the driver.

According to Sgt. A.L. Watson, quoted in the Raleigh Times, the male decoy was "a straight, regular man."

One of the Corral's owners spotted the decoy in the course of the night and began to keep a close watch on him. He was then threatened with arrest if he continued to interfere with the operation. The owner then posted a sign on the door, warning patrons as they left about the decoy. In spite of the sign, some patrons still propositioned the decoy and were arrested.

Interviewed by the Raleigh News and Observer, Captain E.O. Lassiter said that the operation was a "pilot program," but that the department had used male decoys in the past.

Asked the reason for the operation, Lassiter said: "We had several complaints from people who were being solicited for crimes against nature when they stopped at traffic lights and stop signs."

A different story emerged, however, when lawyers for the bookstore owner asked to see the complaints. They were told the complaints were from the police themselves, who were sometimes propositioned as they went off duty on their way to their cars. The police parking lot is immediately adjacent to the lot used by bar and bookstore patrons.

Angered by the fact that the complaints came from the police, one of the bar owners

said, "If that's the case, they should arrest the guy who propositions them right there, instead of sending out a decoy to stand on a street corner looking sexy and very available. People who would otherwise have minded their own business were tempted then, and got into trouble."

Long-time Raleigh residents also noted that the 300 block of Hargett Street is no longer a heavy cruising area. Several years ago, many people used to drive around the block propositioning pedestrians. But in 1979, a similar police operation resulted in several arrests. Since then, there has not been much street cruising on the block.

On the Monday following the arrests, one of the Capital Corral's owners went to talk with Raleigh Chief of Police Frederick K. Heineman. Heineman said that the goal of the operation was simply to clean up the streets, and that no decoys would be placed in the bar or bookstore. He also denied that any entrapment was involved in the arrests.

In the days following the arrest, the North Carolina Human Rights Fund printed and distributed posters about the decoy. It stressed caution "if someone you're cruising tries to get you to mention a specific sex act. It's perfectly legal to ask someone to come home with you, to have a drink with you, to go someplace to be alone with you, etc. But if you mention an illegal sex act (usually oral or anal sex), you're guilty of 'soliciting for the crime against nature'."

The poster also clarified a common mistake about police decoys: "If you ask an undercover cop if he's a policeman, he'll probably say 'no' and you may think you're safe. *Not so!* This is a popular misconception that's gotten a lot of people into trouble. The policeman *does not* have to tell you he's a cop if you ask, and he can still bust you!"

In his remarks to the Raleigh Times, Sgt. Watson denied that the operation specifically targeted gays: "It's aimed at them not because they are gay but because of complaints we get

from citizens who are solicited and are not gay."

Apparently, the Hargett Street operation was one of three recent ones involving police decoys. Fourteen people — nine of them teenagers — were arrested as they tried to steal wine bottles or money from six police decoys disguised as winos.

Earlier last month, female decoys disguised as prostitutes were used to arrest nearly 100 men. Nearly half those arrested were charged with soliciting for a crime against nature. That charge carries a stiffer penalty than soliciting for prostitution.

The decoys are from the department's street crime unit, which is composed of policemen specially trained for work in Raleigh's streets.

Training involves using make-up as well as advanced undercover and surveillance techniques.

Commenting specifically on the wine decoys, Police Chief Heineman said that the technique was an effective deterrent. He said that the undercover operation "will help to uplift the sensitivity of those ne'er-do-wells, so if they feel that downtown is an area that they can commit crime, they'll know better by our presence or omnipresence."

Members of the street crime unit believe that publicity about decoys deters crime. According to Lt. R.C. Friese, "You don't know who's a real victim and who's a cop. We like it that way."

Carolina at the Demo Convention

You already know the news from the Democratic National Convention in San Francisco. What we have here is more human interest — experiences of and comments by North and South Carolinians, drawn from local newspapers.

Carolina involvement in the convention began last year, according to the Raleigh News and Observer (7-18). On the committee to select the city for the convention was Betty Speir, a high school guidance counselor and "down-home woman from the small Pitt County town of Bethel."

The committee voted unanimously for San Francisco, but Speir had worried about how the very visible gay community there would be perceived back home: "I probably had more concerns than anybody on the committee. However, all of us from the South were particularly concerned."

To quiet her fears, authorities introduced her to city officials and police officers who were gay: "They took pains to see that I met many of the more conservative people in the gay community."

During the convention itself, as gays and lesbians were getting ready to march, Speir said she was still a little nervous: "But I feel better about it than when I originally came out." Which is how the marching gays and lesbians felt, too.

Among the 100,000 gays and lesbians who marched was Joe Herzenberg of Chapel Hill, a Mondale delegate. Herzenberg was quoted in several newspaper and broadcast stories as saying "the important thing for people to know is that gay people aren't just in New York and San Francisco, but in North Carolina, too." Herzenberg said that about 40 delegates from 17 states marched in the rally.

In addition, Herzenberg said he met several Tar Heel expatriates during the march.

One response to the march is recorded in the Charlotte News (7-17):

"The first thing greeting N.C. delegates to the Democratic convention Monday morning when they stepped out of their rooms at the

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THE NEWS

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