

Cullen to kickoff "Voting With Pride" at Down East Pride Festival

by Charles Roule

Mary Kate (MK) Cullen believes the adage "All politics is local." As Executive Director of the North Carolina Pride Political Action Committee for Gay and Lesbian Equality, she knows how true that is.

"The only way social change actually works is by changing someone's mind one on one," Cullen said.

Therefore, Cullen was "absolutely thrilled" to speak at the first Down East Pride Festival. She hopes the event will help bring together the dispersed gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities spread across the mostly rural part of the state. Cullen said, "Marty's [Daughtry, co-chair for Down East Pride] belief in the readiness of the community for a regional pride celebration is infectious."

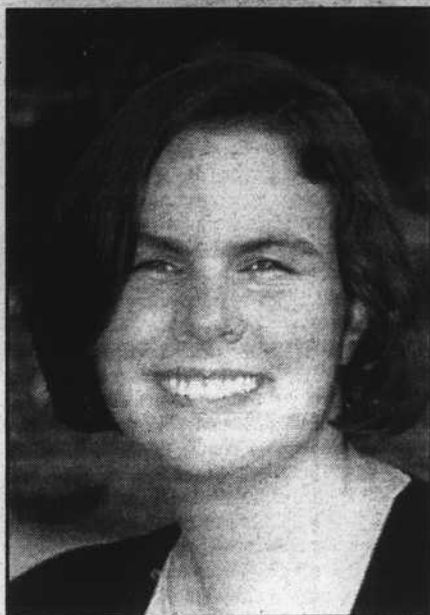
Cullen graduated from the State University of New York at Binghamton with a degree in Counseling Psychology. She got her activism start there, working with student campaigns.

In Washington, DC, she served as a coordinator for the GrassRoots Organizing Weekends with the United States Student Association (an organization working to make access to higher education a right for all who want to attend). Cullen also worked with the Human Rights Campaign Fund Speak Out program.

Cullen started with NC Pride PAC in July of 1995. She and teams of Pride PAC volunteers will be working to register voters all across the state in preparation for the 1996 elections.

The kick-off for NC Pride PAC's "Voting With Pride" begins at Down East Pride. The program is a combination of voter registration and education for the 1995/96 elections.

In her speech at the Festival, she intends to incorporate a "legislative wrap-up," and introduce "Voting With Pride." However, Cullen described the main theme of her speech as "modeling on



MK Cullen

leadership."

"The people who decided to go through with this [Down East Pride] I have been inspired by," said Cullen.

That inspiration began when certain local people felt the eastern part of North Carolina was ready for its own pride celebration. Cullen sees them as the real role models for the rest of the community.

Cullen said, "For every one who takes a step... for every one person who puts up decorations at a dance, or runs a workshop, there are a hundred who don't do anything." But looking to their neighbors during events like Down East Pride,

some will volunteer and prove to others that they, too, can get involved.

"By getting involved, people will increase their political involvement. 'It's all in the numbers,'" Cullen said, "By getting more people to register and vote... [we can show the General Assembly we're a serious political movement.]"

NC Pride PAC's mission is simple. First, mobilize grassroots constituencies to elect pro-gay candidates. Second, find volunteers, plug them into campaigns, and raise money for those campaigns.

Cullen also talked about NC Pride PAC's role in "building long-term change. Those of us in progressive communities are often under attack. We spend so much time doing action/reaction tactics, we can't concentrate on electing pro-active candidates."

Down East Pride represents the first opportunity for Cullen and NC Pride PAC to reach the "non-voting disenfranchised." Cullen wants to help give people a sense of their own power through involvement in the political process.

On interactions with other state organizations, Cullen said, "I've had meetings with Jeff [Prince of the Lesbian Gay Health Project] and Kenda

[Kirby of the North Carolina Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality]. We each have our separate spheres. After talking to Kenda, I realized that violence documentation is [NCCGLE's] specialty." She also feels that with so many organizations across the state, their prospective roles are increasingly defined. Therefore, cooperation between groups has been on the rise.

To help bring so many diverse groups and people together, Cullen believes people should, "Identify and acknowledge differences... people of color, people with disabilities... all varieties trying to sit at the same table. We should concentrate on the problems... issue-based organizing, laying out strategies, incorporating differences."

When asked how successful regional activism has become, Cullen replied, "There has been a qualitative change since November 1994. It's much more easy to put aside our differences when we can easily recognize the enemy."

Cullen summed up the political climate for the next year, "We're going to feel like our backs are against the wall. But there are a lot groups out there. Each step is to get people more and more political. It's gonna be a hell of a year."

DOWN EAST PRIDE FESTIVAL

FESTIVAL ITINERARY

Friday, September 22

9:00PM Celia Hearnin will perform at the Percolator Coffeehouse.

Saturday, September 23

10:00AM Workshops will be held at the Willis Building till 2:00 PM.

12 NOON The Outdoor Festival will take place at the Town Common till 5:00 PM.

9:30 PM The one-act play, "A Portrait of Iowa," will be performed at the Percolator Coffeehouse.

FEATURED SPEAKERS

Franklin Fry was Co-Chair of Stonewall 25, the international march which brought over one million people from 72 countries and all 50 states to New York City in June of 1994.

Mandy Carter is affiliated with the Human Rights Campaign Fund (HRCF) and is currently working on Mobilization '96 and its effort to unseat Senator Jesse Helms next year.

Don Davis has been a grassroots activist in North Carolina and Virginia for the past 15 years and has recently been appointed to the Board of Directors of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NCGLTF).

M K Cullen is the Executive Director of North Carolina Pride PAC for Lesbian and Gay Equality (NC Pride PAC).

WORKSHOPS

Saturday at Willis Building

10:00 AM "Crowing Up Cay" facilitated by Elaine Penn

11:00 AM "Lesbian and Gay Self-Esteem" facilitated by Wanda Lancaster

12 NOON "Relationships Between HIV+ and HIV- Gay Men" facilitated by Carolina PWA Coalition

1:00 PM "How Domestic Violence Affects Us All" facilitated by Yvonne Smith

2:00 PM "Bisexuality Workshop"

HOTEL ACCOMODATIONS

The Ramada is the host hotel (or this year's Down East Pride Festival. Down East Pride's hospitality suite at the Ramada will serve as a welcome center offering visitor packets, festival information, maps and light refreshments. The hotel is offering a special rate of \$49 per room for up to 4 people. This rate is available for Friday September 22nd and Saturday September 23rd. To reserve a room at this special rate, call the Ramada by September 8th at (919) 355-8300 and request the Down East Pride rate.

SEPTEMBER 22 & 23

GREENVILLE, NC

"COMING TOGETHER WITH PRIDE"

GETTING THERE

Directions to Greenville's Town Common for Down East Pride's Outdoor Festival Parking is located for the Town Common in downtown Greenville.

From Wilson, Raleigh and Greensboro (US 264 East): On Stantonsburg Road, turn left onto Memorial Drive. The next light is Fifth Street. Turn right. At the second light, the road "V's." Take the left "V" and continue on Fifth Street. Go about 1/2 mile to Reade Street. Turn left. Go to First Street. The Town Common is in front of you.

From Bethel, Williamston, Tarboro and Tidewater, VA (NC 11/US 13): On Memorial Drive, turn left onto Airport Road (airport will be on the right, Hardee's on the left). At the next light is Greene Street. Turn Right. Cross the Tar River (bridge) and at the signal light after crossing the bridge is First Street. Turn left. The Town Common is on your left.

From Rocky Mount (NC 43 South): On Fifth Street, cross Memorial Drive. At the second light, the road "V's." Take the left "V." Go about 1/2 mile to Reade Street. Turn left. Go to First Street. The Town Common is front of you.

From Kinston, Jacksonville and Wilmington (NC 11 North): On Memorial Drive, turn right onto Alternate 264 (Greenville Blvd.) Go 1 mile to Evans Street. Turn left. The fourth stoplight is Reade Circle. Turn right. Follow Read around to First Street. The Town Common is in front of you.

From New Bern (NC 43 North): On Charles Boulevard, cross Greenville Boulevard. The third light is Reade Circle. Turn right. Follow Read around to First Street. The Town Common is in front of you.

From Goldsboro (Alternate 264/US 13): On Dickinson Avenue, cross Memorial Drive. The fourth light is Reade Circle. Follow Reade to First Street. The Town Common is in front of you.