

The FRONT PAGE

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Serving the Carolinas' Gay & Lesbian Communities for Over Eighteen Years

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Rev. Jimmy Creech after his acquittal by a Methodist Church Court last year.

The Stories Of Carolina

■ A review of the people who made the news.

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Nineteen ninety-eight was a momentous year for news about the gay and lesbian community in the Carolinas. Some events occurred outside the region, but influenced North and South Carolinians. And, the impact of some events here rippled across the nation.

Ten stories dominated the news in the pages of *The Front Page* last year. Selection of these news events were based on two criteria: initial impact of the events on the Carolinas, and lasting influence of the events in the future.

The beating and murder of Matthew Shepard leads the list of the top 10 news stories in the region. The young university student resided in North Carolina for two years. Shepard had attended Catawba College in Salisbury, N.C., and spent some time in Raleigh.

Ranking second on the list is funding by the N.C. General Assembly, of \$8 million for the

AIDS Drug Assistance Program. In third place is the controversy leading up to South Carolina Pride 1998 in Myrtle Beach.

The fourth most important news event in the Carolinas in 1998 was that Fred Smith, a gay man from Hendersonville, N.C., lost custody of his two sons to his ex-wife. Next on the list is the travails of the Rev. Jimmy Creech, who was acquitted of breaking church policy by performing same-sex unions, but nonetheless was relieved of his church duties in Kansas and returned to Raleigh.

Kevin Nuttall's battle with the Western North Carolina AIDS Project in Asheville, N.C., over its service priorities ranked sixth on the list. That is followed by the acquittal and conviction on separate charges of disseminating obscenity by employees of Our Place, an adult bookstore in Raleigh that caters to gays.

Eighth on the list is an investigative report by *The Front Page* on lax hate crimes reporting in North Carolina. N.C. Superior Court Judge Ray Warren of Charlotte openly declared his homosexuality, and this event

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Co. Commission Wants To End Discrimination

■ Mecklenburg Commissioner wants his board to outlaw discrimination.

CHARLOTTE — A Mecklenburg County commissioner wants his board to adopt a new policy outlawing discrimination against gays and other minorities, according to a report in the *Charlotte Observer* (1/9/98).

Democrat Lloyd Scher said Jan. 8 that he wants to prevent issues that came up during the past two years, including an anti-gay initiative that led to an arts funding cut.

With four of the commissioners who voted to cut the funding out of office and Democrats now in the majority, Scher says he'll push for the change.

"It would include anti-discrimi-

nation in every aspect of housing and health care and education," Scher said.

He had planned to bring the issue up today as the board wraps up its annual three-day retreat in Southern Pines, but said he'll now wait until later.

Others, both Democrat and Republican, question why Scher is raising the topic now. Homosexuality and morality issues bitterly divided the past board and the fall-out overshadowed much of the board's term.

Most commissioners interviewed by the *Observer* say they want to stay out of that fight for now.

Republican Bill James — the lone remaining commissioner who voted to cut arts funding in 1997 — says he'd fight Scher's move.

"It's a gay-rights ordinance," James said of Scher's proposal.

"After campaigning on avoiding divisiveness, it would be a tragedy if the one success that Democrats push through is the debate regarding homosexuality. I can't see anything more divisive. I don't think the public supports this."

Chairman Parks Helms, a Democrat, says he's not ready to tackle the issue, but would consider making changes to the county's non-discrimination policies.

"This is not the time," Helms said. "My grave concern... is that it will do exactly what I have said I would not let happen... which is to have this distract us from the fundamental issues of managing growth, social services and transportation."

In 1992, the Charlotte City Council rejected a move to broaden the city's anti-bias ordinance by including discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Hotline Operators To Fight Lawsuit

RALEIGH (AP) — A former employee of the national AIDS hotline has filed a sexual harassment lawsuit against the contractor operating the service, charging that her workplace was filled with explicit posters and vulgar conversations.

When she complained, Machele Graham said she was told that the workplace needed to be one "where gays could be themselves."

The lawsuit claims that Graham, of Durham County, began working for the hotline in 1996 as a health communication specialist. It says that posters depicting same-sex activities and full-frontal male nudity were displayed in the workplace.

In addition, the lawsuit claims

that she was exposed to unwelcome sexual conduct, slurs and innuendo in the workplace by and between female co-workers.

The hotline, based in Research Triangle Park, is operated by the American Social Health Association

After her supervisor told her that gays needed to be comfortable in the workplace, she complained to two higher supervisors, but her complaints were disregarded, the lawsuit says.

She was refused a request to take a medical leave of absence for emotional distress, the lawsuit claims. Later, in March 1998, she was allowed a medical leave of absence. She did not return from her leave and, in September, ASHA determined she had volun-

tarily resigned, the lawsuit claims.

Graham's attorney, Deborah Meyer of Raleigh, filed the lawsuit under federal and state sexual-harassment law for damages for loss of Graham's job; and for emotional and mental distress for the posters, fellow employees' behavior and for having to take calls from individuals who wanted to engage in phone sex activities.

Graham "believes in the purpose of that hot line," Meyer said, but thinks that employees have difficulty doing their job in the atmosphere that existed there.

ASHA contracts with the Centers for Disease Control to

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