

The FRONT PAGE

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Serving the Carolinas' Gay & Lesbian Communities Since 1979

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The Rainbow Flag Turns 25

Mile and a Quarter Long Flag to be Unfurled in Florida; Celebrations Mark Anniversary Nationwide

KEY WEST, Fla. (AP) — The artist who created the rainbow flag is hand-sewing a 1 1/4-mile long, 16-foot-wide version of the internationally recognized gay and lesbian pride symbol to be unfurled in Key West on June 15, the final day of the city's upcoming PrideFest festival.

Gilbert Baker's mammoth creation is to be displayed along the entire length of Duval Street, the island's main thoroughfare that stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico.

Baker created the original rainbow flag in San Francisco 25 years ago as a symbol of community pride in response to anti-gay activities.

"Some of my friends call me the Betsy Ross of the gay community," Baker said, after he and about 60 Key West residents stretched out a 100-foot test section.

The Key West flag commemorates the 25th anniversary of the original rainbow flag's creation. Its debut will also kick off rainbow flag anniversary events around America.

Sections of the banner are to travel to 100 cities, including New York, Chicago, Boston, Cleveland, Denver, Detroit, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, Seattle and Washington D.C.

Baker, a San Francisco resident, estimates the flag will require approximately 17,600 linear yards of fabric and weigh more than three tons. More than 25 miles of seams must be stitched before the project is completed, he said.

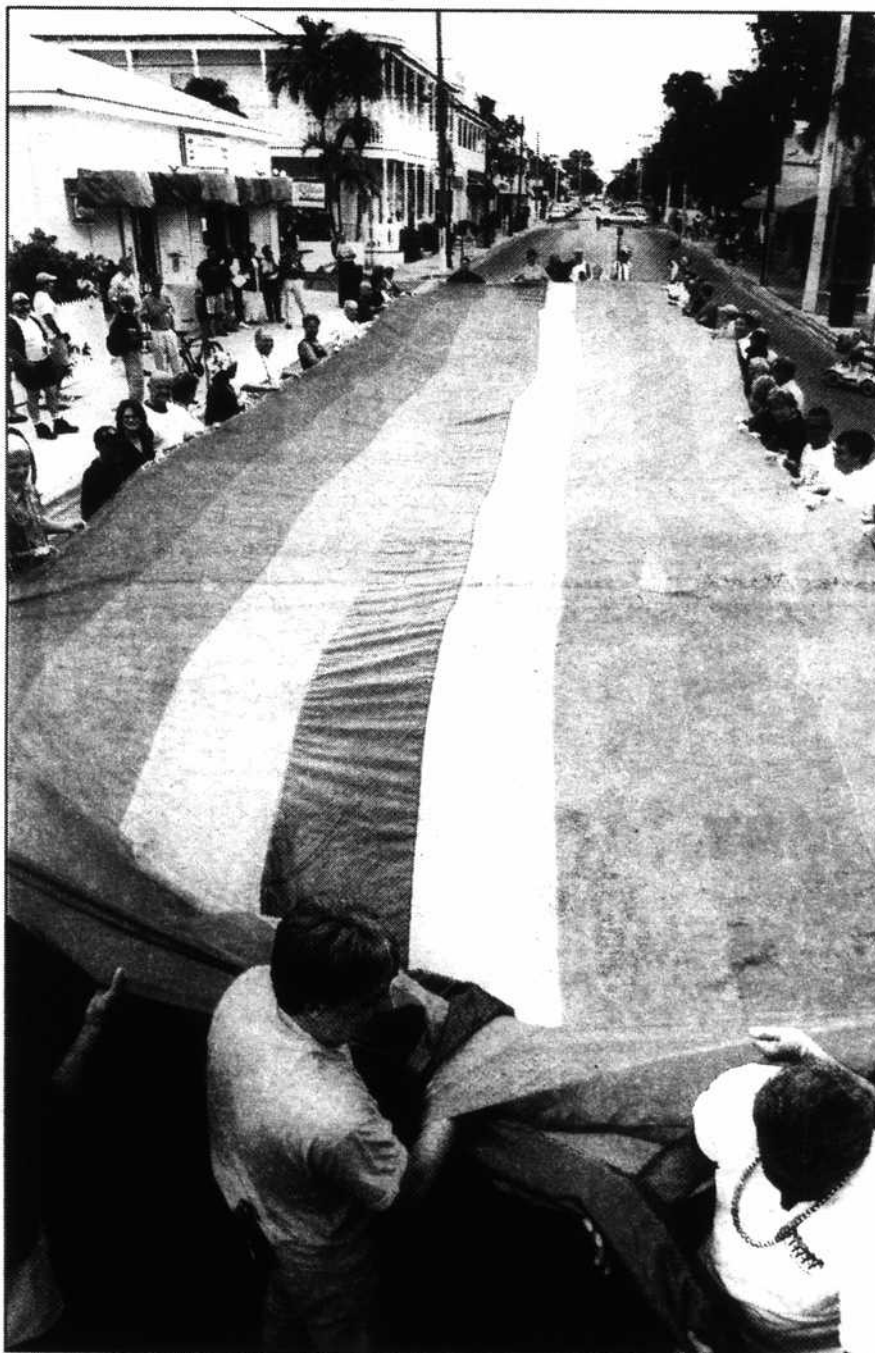
Because of the weight of the fabric, Baker and two assistants work together to form each seam. About 3,000 people will be needed to deploy the flag, he said.

"To figure out how to pack it and how to deal with the volume of fabric, I studied the way fire hoses are folded and loaded into trucks," he said.

"It has to be folded very carefully so it will never twist."

As well as honoring the banner's birth, the 2003 flag will recreate Baker's original eight-color design. The 1978 flag lost two original colors — pink, because it could not be commercially reproduced at that time, and turquoise for logistical reasons, Baker said.

The two colors will be represented in



his Key West flag, along with the traditional red, orange, yellow, green, indigo and violet.

In his Key West workshop, Baker said "When I raised the first rainbow in San Francisco in 1978 I instantly knew that my flag belonged to every lesbian and gay man.

"For Rainbow25, I'm restoring the Rainbow Flag to its original colors and bringing it to cities worldwide — as my gift to the community that embraced it."

Previously, in 1994, Baker created a mile-long, 6-color Rainbow Flag for

Stonewall 25 in New York.

On the 25th anniversary of the Rainbow Flag's birth, Rainbow25 is a worldwide celebration of the Rainbow which acknowledges the Flag's powerful impact on the LGBT community and the culture at large.

Their website, www.Rainbow25.org provides up-to-the-minute news about Rainbow25 events and will provide visitors with a vibrant interactive history of the flag, a "visions of the flag" slideshow, contests and a store complete with 8-color flags, tee shirts and memorabilia.

Discrimination Bill Narrowly Defeated

Equality NC condemns Warner, Republicans for opposing fair treatment

The North Carolina House Committee on State Government voted down House Bill 924 by a margin of 8 to 7. The bill, sponsored by Rep. Paul Luebke (D-Durham) sought the addition of sexual orientation to the State Personnel Act, prohibiting discrimination against government employees because they are gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual.

The vote was expected to split along party lines, allowing the measure to pass due to the absence of one Republican committee member. However, supporters of the bill were shocked that Cumberland County Democrat Rep. Alex Warner cast the decisive vote against the measure.

"We are extremely disappointed that Rep. Warner has chosen to ignore his own party's platform, and the wishes of the people of North Carolina," said Jo Wyrick, Executive Director of Equality NC. "Rep. Warner and the Republican committee members are out of touch with the vast majority North Carolinians of both parties, who overwhelmingly believe that government employees should not face discrimination based solely on their sexual orientation."

Although disappointed by the defeat, advocates pointed out that legislative support for equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people has been steadily increasing in recent years.

"Never before have we seen House leaders take such an active role on behalf of gay North Carolinians, which makes Rep. Warner's vote all the more upsetting," said Wyrick.

"Equality NC truly appreciates the extraordinary effort that Rep. Paul Luebke, the bill's sponsor, Rep. Larry Womble, the committee chair, and other House leaders put into this bill."

The Republican party appeared to

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