



The Front Page

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HRC Dinner Breaks Records in Charlotte

By Doug Shockley
Guest Writer

A small crowd of men, wearing red flannel shirts and baseball caps stood by the entrance to the log cabin home show with curious looks on their faces as hundreds of gay men and women from across the Carolinas descend upon the Charlotte Convention Center Saturday evening for the annual Human Rights Campaign Dinner.

"Not to worry sir, we're really quite harmless. We're just here to have a good time", said one dinner attendee as he walked past the group of flabbergasted men with a look of bewilderment on their faces. And with that, the tone for the evening was put into gear. The party had begun.

Each year, the Human Rights Campaign holds its annual fundraising dinner to raise money and promote awareness for rights of GLBT individuals and organizations throughout the Carolinas.

And although Saturday night's dinner was indeed similar to that of HRC events in the past, this year's dinner superceded past events in numbers, donations, excitement and overall awareness for the cause.

This year was the first time in the organization's 10-year history that the event has been held in Charlotte. Based on attendance, that was clearly a smart move by event organizers. The Charlotte dinner sold out every last one



Keynote Speakers Robert Gant from Showtime's *Queer as Folk* and Judy Shepard, mother of slain Matthew Shepard

of the 1350 available seats in Charlotte, dramatically surpassing the previous year's dinner in Greensboro, in which a then, record breaking 800 tickets were sold.

Donations exceeding approximately \$300,000 were raised over the course of the evening with one extraordinarily generous gift of \$50,000 by Mitchell Gold and Bob Williams of The Mitchell

Gold Company.

As the evening began, excitement grew as attendees were entertained by the One Spirit Choir of Unity Fellowship Church of Charlotte and an unannounced, surprise performance by Martha Wash as she sang, 'Everybody Dance Now' and 'It's Raining Men'. Without skipping a beat, the entire room transformed into a

dance club and all 1350 attendees leapt to their feet and danced.

Over the course of the evening, HRC recognized numerous individuals and organizations that have made substantial contributions to the LGBT community throughout the Carolinas. Award recipients included Sandy Fitzgerald and LeAnn Wallace, founders of

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Photos by Doug Shockley: Joni Madison (far left) and Shane L. Windmeyer (far right), co-chairs of the 2005 HRC Carolinas Dinner, flank Rick Myracle and Cheryl Ann Welsh as they're presented with the Distinguished Leadership Award for their years of service to HRC-Carolina; Jonathan Nosan, an aerial acrobat was among the entertainers; Joni Madison presents the Equality Award for Community Service to Sandy Fitzgerald and LeAnn Wallace organizers of SWOOP (Strong Women Organizing Outrageous Projects); and The One Spirit Choir of Unity Fellowship Church of Charlotte singing "Power of Love."

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