



The Front Page

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Charlotte Celebrates Pride 2005

CHARLOTTE – Police increased their presence at this year's gay pride festival in Marshall Park in Uptown Charlotte on Saturday, May 6. It was the Charlotte Pride's fifth anniversary celebration.

Dozens of anti-gay protestors showed up at the event. A group called "Operation Save America" held a vigil



at the park Friday evening, and came back Saturday to rally against the event itself.

Police were on site to prevent a clash between the gay participants and anti-gay protestors like one that happened last year.

This year's emcees were Derek Hartley and Romaine Patterson, from Sirius Radio's OutQ, the only nationally broadcast entertainment outlet for the LGBT community in the United States.

Hartley has been featured in numerous articles in newspapers and magazines including: *The New York Times*, *The Advocate*, *Unzipped*, *Genre*, *Instinct*, *Out and About Travel*, *On Our Backs* and *Hero Magazine*.

Sudden fame surrounded Patterson following the death of her friend Matthew Shepard.

Appearing to counter-protest Fred Phelps, the image of Patterson in silent defiance to hatred landed her on the cover of countless newspapers and



Hundreds gather at Charlotte Pride in Uptown Charlotte on Saturday.

Photo by Stephani McC Carson/Blackbox Studios

magazines.

Her experience was central to the theatre production *The Laramie Project* and she was portrayed memorably by Christina Ricci in the HBO film of the same name.

Jen Foster was this year's headliner, and performed at the end of the festival. Other acts included Eric Himan, Sasha Sacket and Josh Zuckerman. *Forever Plaid*, a new musical comedy from NC Blumenthal Performing Arts Center, performed selections.

With many new vendors and many former vendors returning the Pride Market was filled with many options for all attendees.

Message of Hate

Fundamentalists in red shirts mingled with people attending the Charlotte Pride festival, singing to them, preaching to them and pulling them aside for conversation and argument, according to a report in the *Charlotte Observer* (5/6/05).

As amplified Christian music blared from the sidewalk, Sherry Welpé of Charlotte had a simple message for the protestors: "Do something constructive with your time instead of telling us we're going to hell."

Hundreds came, but some people probably stayed away from the festival because of the protests, said Mette

Andersen, executive director of Time Out Youth, an advocacy and support group for gay teens and young adults.

"I'm very concerned about the message of hate," she said. "Our youth are very vulnerable, they're insecure and to be hit over the head with the Bible like this is unsettling."

Charlotte Pride, a nonprofit organization, hosts the festival each year. It usually features speakers and entertainment. And each year, some Charlotte residents push city officials to deny access to uptown's Marshall Park. But the city says the group breaks no laws and retains its First Amendment rights.



Unlike recent events in the Triangle, Charlotte Pride still brings its share of protestors. At left, a lesbian Pride participant humors demonstrators by allowing them to pray for her. Afterwards, the woman pretended to "speak in tongues" before jumping up to say "Just kidding".

Photos by Doug Shockley.

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