

THE TRIANGLE

The Monthly Newspaper from Gay & Lesbian Community Services of Central Florida, Inc.
Serving Orlando's Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Community

Organizing Against The Religious Right

Florida Activists Meet To Establish Guidelines Based On National Surveys

By Steve Meunier

On Oct. 7, people from throughout the state met at the Orlando Public Library with one goal, to establish a Florida Network. The meeting was entitled "Winning Through Reason, Not Fear: Meeting the Challenge of the Religious Right. Sponsored by People for the American Way, the network they are looking to formulate in Florida will be established by guidelines based on in-depth national surveys.

"We need to put a steering committee together," stated Susan Glickman, State director for people for the American Way. "We're on the ground floor of a Florida network." On November 1, the media will be given a list of religious right candidates. The education of the media is the goal. The religious right is a new phenomenon that the media doesn't know how to handle.

Florida is ranked third in terms of censorship nationwide. Examples since 1992 include: The American Family Association, challenging the right of high schools to teach about the Holocaust, warning that it may lead to "the acceptance of homosexuality." In Haines City, a group of

parents called on a ban of the book "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," for its discussion of lesbianism. All totalled, there have been 22 challenges by religious right groups, of which there are at least 56 different groups in Florida. Gays and Lesbians relaxed after the proposed Caton amendment was rejected by the Florida Supreme Court, and have allowed the Alachua Co. Anti-gay initiative ballot to go virtually unchallenged.

Nationally, states face an uphill battle to defeat anti-gay initiatives. Anti-gay rights initiatives are favored by 43% of Americans. Interestingly, only 40% of voters favor civil rights for gays, though 76% believe that gays should not be fired or discriminated against due to their sexual orientation. This can set the ground work for what's being touted as "The new civil rights movement."

Yes, the majority of American voters do want to end discrimination against gays and lesbians. But, current discussion has focussed not on discrimination, but on lifestyles. Furthermore, voters are not aware that gays do not currently possess civil rights protection. 70% think that gays are covered, or they have no idea.

A national survey of gay rights, conducted in March,

1994 concluded that "knowing gay people changes perception [favorably]." While this isn't earth shaking news, the same polls indicate that 52% of those who know gay people favor ensuring them civil rights. In addition, voters who believe that gays are "born that way" strongly favor extending civil rights laws, whereas only 21% of voters who believe sexuality is a choice are in favor of gays having all civil rights.

This survey also concluded that when communicating with the public, the term "gay people" is received more positively than "national gay rights groups." Also, when discussing the religious right, using terms such as "fanatics" or "fascists" can do more harm than good. The term "radical right" should also be avoided, because there are many religious people, but most of them are certainly not religious zealots.

"Values are the framework for this campaign," said Matt Freeman, director of research and program develop-

ment for People For the American Way. "At this time the public disagrees on what values are right." Indeed, 1/3 are for God and Family, 1/3 are for responsible and hard-working people, and 1/3 are opposed to community intolerance.

"If you can get the facts in front of the

people, you can win," continued Freeman. "In public, don't exaggerate the rights' importance. By large, the public doesn't like the religious right (39%). Only 17% favor the religious right, and 42% HAVE NO OPINION." As incredible as that last figure is, it truly states the need for educating the public against hatred and bigotry.

Gay and Lesbian issues took the forefront at this 3 hour meeting through 2 speakers. One was Tim Cavanaugh, Assistant Director of the Human Rights Campaign Fund, who had just returned from Gainesville. "Alachua County is important," emphasized Tim. "If the Right wins there, they'll have more momentum. Anti-gay initiatives in Alachua County and state wide ballots would be easier to fight if coalitions were already in place." All the more reason to develop a Florida Network A.S.A.P.

Very stimulating was another speaker, Todd Simmons of Tampa Bay's Human Rights Task Force. "Human rights ordinances protect everyone," remarked Todd. "It's a trap to call them Gay Rights Laws. It makes the issue ripe for the special rights status argument, which isn't accurate at all.



Organizers of new Florida Network to fight anti-gay legislation (l-r) Susan Glickman, Todd Simmons, Tim Cavanaugh & Matt Freeman.

Tampa Film Fest Zooms In On Diversity

By Steve Meunier

The Fifth Annual International Gay & Lesbian Pride Film Festival, undoubtedly their best effort yet, was held in Tampa from Sept. 30 - Oct. 9. Packed into those 10 days were 25 feature films, short films galore, guest filmmakers, film historians and film critics.

Other entertainment included Tampa Bay's Gay Men's Chorus, Crescendo: Tampa Bay's Woman's Chorus, Belinda Womack, and Tampa Bay's Rainbow Pride Band. Outdoor festivities featured Romanovsky and Phillips, Orlando's own Improvabilities, and Lesbian rock group The Fallopian Tubes. Oh, did I mention all these singers



Singing Artists, Romanovsky & Phillips at the Tampa Film Fest.

and entertainers were provided for FREE showings? The outdoor festival also featured great food vendors of restaurant quality, and the art on exhibit was what it should of been, creative, but not trendy. How did the film festival

committee manage to assemble such a diverse, artistic, and dedicated melange of gay and lesbian genius's? Though fate and luck may have played a part in the festival's execution (as it does in actual filmmaking), I was in awe of the incredible, awe-inspiring spectacle of prime Lesbigan films. Bottom-line: it was a very good time.

This reporter was able to attend the entire weekend celebration. That's when many of the "big guns" of Lesbian & Gay filmmaking were in attendance. Films included "Chicks in White Satin", a documentary of 2 lesbians tying the proverbial knot 'at an intricate Jewish wedding, with both womyn in gowns. The audience hooted approval when both bride's mothers danced together.

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