

# Mid South

Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee

## News Tips

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## Missing mail worries Nashville gays

A pre-addressed newsletter mailing vanished from Nashville's gay center, causing concern, but there is no fallout yet

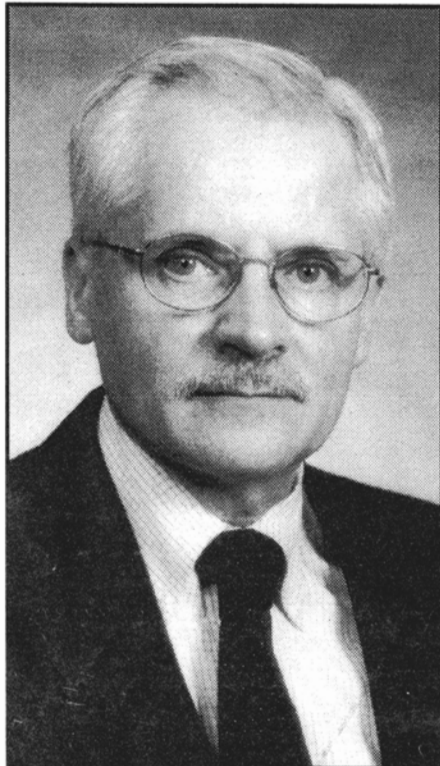
by PAIGE PARVIN

More than a thousand Nashville area gays and supporters of the local gay and lesbian community center may have felt uneasy over the last couple of weeks, ever since a mailing containing their home addresses mysteriously disappeared from the center.

Some 1,100 pre-addressed newsletters published by the Nashville Center for Lesbian, Gay, Bi & Transgendered Life were apparently stolen from the center's library sometime around Sept. 11. Most of the bulk mailing was to reach the homes of lesbians, gay men, transgendered people and community friends on the organization's mailing list.

Instead, the boxes vanished before they were mailed.

"The one concern people have had is, it would be possible for someone to use those mailing addresses in some way," said Executive Director Joyce Arnold.



Nashville activist Wayne Rosing understands the importance of keeping addresses confidential, as a former victim of vandalism. But he says he's not too concerned about the newsletters taken from the gay and lesbian center.

"We have taken precautions all along in terms of protecting people's privacy, but unfortunately no matter what our precautions are, these things can still happen."

A gay man whose home address was on one of the newsletters expressed mild discomfort over the incident.

"I am not so concerned with the fact that my name is out there," said Wayne Rosing, co-chair of the local chapter of Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays. "But it's the fact that my home address is now in someone's hands and I don't know who that is."

The boxes of newsletters were in the center's library, Arnold said, when she locked up the building around 10 p.m. on Sept. 11. When she returned later the following morning, she noticed they were gone, ahead of schedule.

As it turned out, they hadn't been picked up by the volunteer who was planning to mail them later that day. It's still unclear who took the letters, but the mailing never reached its intended recipients.

Center board members have contacted those on the mailing list to alert them of the possible theft, Arnold said.

Most have responded with concern, but they don't seem overly worried, she said.

"What this has really done is energize people," Arnold said. "We have gotten a lot of phone calls saying, how can I help, what can I do? Things like this tell us something important, and alert us that we need to stick together."

Arnold said she reported the incident to police, who will now regularly patrol around the Berry Road building, a free-standing, converted house.

"Since there was no forced entry, there's not much else we can do," Sgt. David Gross told the *Tennessean*, Nashville's daily paper, which first reported the theft.

The pre-addressed, bi-monthly newsletters are generally kept behind locked doors, Arnold said, and the computerized mailing list requires a password for access.

## INFO

### Nashville Center for Lesbian, Gay, Bi & Transgendered Life

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A week before a gay Pride celebration in Nashville, some 1,100 newsletters from the city's gay center disappeared, leaving some gays concerned that their privacy could be breached.

More than a dozen organizations meet each month in the center, Arnold said. Over the years, as many as 50 keys may have been given out.

Now, the locks have been changed. "Because we didn't have a full-time staff, we have tried to make the center accessible," Arnold explained. "Unfortunately, now we are going to have to make it a lot less accessible."

In the future, she added, the volunteer responsible for mailing the newsletters will take them home before delivering them to the bulk mail station, rather than storing them at the center. Arnold, who works part-time for the center, is also exploring the possibility of having an alarm system installed.

## So far, no fallout

So far, no one has contacted the center to report anything unusual that could be related to the missing mail. The center staff has urged members to report immediately if they receive anything out of the ordinary, or are targeted for vandalism or harassment.

But since the boxes were swiped over a month ago, Arnold is hopeful nothing will come of the incident.

"We feel somebody probably took it and dumped it, as a kind of malicious thing," she said. "If someone does receive something hateful, it would be fairly obvious what hap-

pened. That would be a giveaway."

The newsletter contained information about recent and upcoming center events, including the "Our Pride Encompasses Nashville" Gay Pride celebration held Sept. 16-17.

For some of those on the mailing list, it may be that their concerns about the stolen newsletters are more subtle than fear of harm or vandalism.

Many are probably at least partially closeted, at work or in their families, Arnold said. They may worry that knowledge of their ties to the gay center could be used in ill-intentioned ways.

"I can say there are a lot of people on our list who are closeted or are very selectively out," Arnold said. "But I don't know that it's any worse here than anywhere else."

The center itself has had little trouble with vandalism, according to Arnold.

But Rosing, the PFLAG co-chair, has. A frequent writer of letters to the editor in the *Tennessean*, Rosing said one of his letters in support of gay issues was published earlier this summer, and ran with his home address printed at the bottom.

The next day, his mailbox was yanked out of the ground and thrown into his yard, Rosing said.

"It's a good sign those letters have been out there a month and nothing like that has happened," he said.