

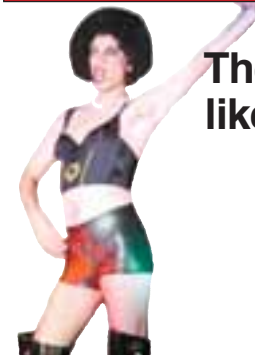
AUGUST

Vol. 3, No. 8, 2004

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OUT & ABOUT

NEWSPAPER



There's no time like the present
Our series on the history of gay nightlife in Nashville comes to a close

Rainbow Community Center struggles to find new vision and new name

by **Don Schlosser**
Staff Writer

In yet another attempt to keep the Rainbow Community Center (RCC) viable, all four members of the RCC board met with leaders of ten middle Tennessee GLBT service organizations in mid-July to solicit opinions about the center's mission.

Discussion at the two-hour meeting revolved around the recent dramatic growth of gay and lesbian organizations and businesses in Nashville and middle Tennessee, and a recognition of the need for increased coordination of events, building of relationships within the community, and a central hub for the wide variety of resources. Underlying the frank conversation was the shared awareness of the recent troubles the new board inherited, including a severe financial crisis that resulted in the dismissal of the Center's executive director, and

the closing of the Woodland Street location in January of this year.

"We have about \$12,000 in the bank, plus the physical assets, like the computer, and equipment in the storage unit," explained board member Richard Aries, when pressed by the meeting participants to disclose the exact nature of the current financial condition.

In its short history, the RCC has not been unfamiliar with challenges. Since its inception as a potential gay cable network, the parent organization, Nashville Lambda Communications, has conducted business under a succession of names as it has struggled to discover its role in the GLBT community.

Rumors of the Center's woes have permeated the larger gay community.

Jerry Jones, publisher of "O&AN" told the board: "Right now the other nonprofits see you as a competitor for money and volunteers; they need to see

you as a support. The center needs to change its mission from what it has historically been, from providing services, to providing support."

Board member Gary White tried to prevent the discussion from centering on the recent failures of the Center, assuring the representatives at the meeting, "We are not our own organization; we are your organization."

Aries emphasized an updated Web site and a proposed community survey as new efforts by the center to be aggressive about remaining relevant. General consensus of the invited participants, however, was that the 17-page survey was too lengthy and cumbersome and that its language might alienate certain segments of the community.

Several around the table suggested that the survey should be much shorter and specifically directed initially at polling the community about what function the Center should have.

In light of the pervasive negative image of the RCC in the GLBT community, the sixteen participants unanimously affirmed that the board should once again find a new name that would embody the new direction the center will embrace.

The recurring image that surfaced at the gathering was the concept of the Center being the hub of a wheel, and the variety of nonprofits as spokes around that hub.

Roxanne, representing the Tennessee Vals, advised, "Connecting the groups is the biggest and best thing you could be doing, to be extremely relevant and extremely necessary. RCC could become the focal point. There are biases in the groups, and the only way to get rid of biases is to get to know the people."

Pam Wheeler, who identified herself as being connected with the recently birthed Tennessee Equality Project (TEP) as well as the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), promoted the establishment of a monthly

was once again starting from scratch.

According to board member April Baker, "We are trying to find the answers. Do we have the resources to accomplish the goals, and do we have the sup-



meeting of representatives for all the organizations which comprise the Nashville GLBT community, saying "Everyone at the table has to buy in to support all the other groups at the table." Other possible functions of the Center discussed were being a clearing house for legal issues, housing issues, and educational issues; developing networks between the service organizations, health organizations, and political organizations; providing training for nonprofits, including grant writing and organizational development; and building alliances with the straight community. Other concerns voiced by the participants included the need to reach out to ethnically diverse segments of the GLBT community, including growing Latino, Thai, and Korean populations.

Many of the participants at the meeting praised the Center for the variety of services it has provided over the years and the generally positive effect it has had on the community, but everyone agreed that the Center

port of the community?" Mikhail Brown, representing Nashville Pride, suggested that the entire board go out into the community to meet with the various service organizations and tell them, "Here's what we've done, here's where we're headed, and here's what we can do for you."

Groups represented at the gathering included One in Teen, Nashville Association of Professional Persons (NAPP), "Out & About Newspaper", Tennessee Vals, Outloud, Nashville Pride, PFLAG, Oasis Center, The Tennessee Equality Project, Human Rights Campaign, and Nashville Family Pride

As the meeting was closing, H. G. Stovall, representing PFLAG, suggested that a date be set for another meeting, but White said that the board had a lot to discuss and decide before it could proceed with a structured response. ■

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