

Pride on Display

by Katherine Brown, city editor
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The streets of Carrboro were overflowing with Pride on Sunday - literally. Members of the state's gay and lesbian community converged on the Carrboro Town Commons for the annual march and rally held by the N.C. Pride organization.



The event, North Carolina Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride 1997, spanned the entire weekend, and included entertainment such as stand-up comedy, bowling, and "Gay Golf."

But the major event of the weekend was Sunday's rally and march through Carrboro. An estimated crowd of more than 4,000, from diverse groups in and out of the gay community, rode, walked, danced and chanted their way through downtown.

Members of the St. John's Gay and Lesbian Christians group were followed by the Queen of Hearts and Miss White Trash, two drag queens from the FLEX night club. The Lesbian Avengers of Charlotte clapped and shouted, while the N.C. Pride marching band kept up a tune.

Straight friends, relatives and supporters were vocally present as well. Families marched with signs reading "Straight But Not Narrow," and, "I Love My Gay Aunt." People from Carolina Friends School and GLSTN (Gay, Lesbian, Straight Teachers Network) advocated "Teaching Respect For All."

Before and after the march, attendees visited booths with information, arts, crafts and T-shirts, and listened to speeches and songs on the lawn.

Earlier in the week, controversy arose when employees of the public works department refused to hang rainbow-colored flags around Carrboro because of their religious beliefs. The flags had been supplied for the event by N.C. Pride. Public Works Director Chris Peterson solved the problem by getting others to drive the truck while he hung the flags himself.

Carrboro Mayor Mike Nelson, who emceed at the event, said he was upset that a problem had arisen.

"I was personally offended and personally and politically embarrassed by (the actions of the public works employees)," Nelson said Sunday.

At the rally, though, there was an open, tolerant atmosphere.

Sudi Gregory and Bear Nash, both of Chapel Hill, said they had attended other rallies like this one. "My mom's gay and (Bear's) brother is gay," Gregory said. "We felt it was important to show support for our family members."

Carol Turner, who came from Charlotte, said the rally was important because of the need to support the gay community. She added that even in Charlotte, it was not always safe to be open about her sexuality.

"This is one of the few times you can come out in public and not be afraid of getting your ass beat," she said. "It's nice to have a few thousand people behind you."