

Marchers celebrate gay pride weekend

by Roger Wistar

Reprinted from The Chronicle, Thursday, June 15, 1995

<http://www.chronicle.duke.edu>

Hundreds of people from across the state marched straight to East Campus on Sunday to begin a parade highlighting the North Carolina Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride Weekend.

The marchers, some sporting t-shirts and carrying banners with messages such as "Hate is rationalized, never justified" and "I'm a freak--touch me," took a circular route which began and ended at the entrance to East Campus, including a turn around Ninth Street.

Most of the weekend's events occurred at the Omni Hotel and Civic Center, but organizers made extensive use of the East Campus gazebo area on Sunday, where participants rallied before and after the march for several hours.

The weekend drew approximately 8,000 participants, double the participation of any of the previous Pride Weekends, which have been held in various locations across the state.

Members of the Duke Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Association joined students from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and East Carolina University. More than 75 students marched with a banner and chanted slogans like "We're here, we're queer. Our parents think we're studying."

Trinity senior Seth Persily, DGBLA president, said the march was a good opportunity to get to know students from other schools, and said he hoped that the other groups provided inspiration to members of DGBLA. "It was fantastic," he said.

Recent protest of a gay and lesbian film series at the Carolina Theatre had raised the possibility of similar action at the march, but there were no protesters in sight.

"It's great to see such a large turnout," said Melody Ivins, who works at the Regulator Bookshop on Ninth Street. "I marched in the first Pride march in Durham, and there were Christian fundamentalists screaming nasty things."

Fifty officers from the Durham County Police Department provided security and traffic control for the march. Police were prepared for a confrontation but did not expect it, said Sergeant K.W. May.

"We've provided protection for these marches for several years, and you won't find a more congenial crowd," May said.

Other Ninth Street business representatives praised the marchers.

"It's great that there are this many people who feel this strongly," said Kelly Kress, a manager of Ravena's Restaurant and Bookstore. "I had no idea it was this big."

Most participants in the weekend's activities said they were pleased with the reception they received from Durham and the University.

"I'm thrilled it's here at Duke," said Pride public relations chair Steve Heist, Trinity '93. "Duke has been really welcoming."

One participant, however, said she did not find Durham to be as open to the gathering.

"I think it's interesting that [NC Pride] is here in Durham," said Sheri Blackwood, a Charlotte resident. "Last year it was in an isolated part of Charlotte. This is in the in-your-face middle of town."

She said that she confronted a McDonald's employee whom she overheard saying, "There's a lesbian and gay convention at the Omni. Isn't that nasty?"

In addition to Sunday's events, those who attended the weekend participated in a variety of other activities, such as a Friday night comedy performance by Suzanne Westenhoefer. On Saturday, the Omni hosted a business and information fair and a series of workshops entitled, "Can We Relate?".

Participants also flocked to the Carolina Theatre to see the film series playing there. Attendance was twice the usual amount and ticket sales approached \$10,000, said Stephen Scott-Martin, executive director of the theater.