

Ten Years of Gay Pride

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✓ **W**HEN TIME FOR THE group pictures rolls around, those willing to have their faces go in the records will have to cross a line. The boundary is as much psychological as physical for Santa Cruz gays and lesbians, who will mark the 10th anniversary of their first Lesbian and Gay Pride Week Saturday with a march through downtown.

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Ten Years of Gay Pride

An increasingly sophisticated community celebrates its beginnings this week

by Jim Kinsella

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The event, which will be repeated in more than 80 cities across the U.S. this weekend, represents the most overt sign of the gay political movement. Modern gay activism has its roots in the 1969 police raids of The Stonewall Inn club in New York City's Greenwich Village. Instead of submitting to arrest on grounds that the practice of homosexuality was illegal, hundreds of gays reacted violently, surrounding the club and entrapping the police inside. The protest and subsequent organizing eventually led to the enactment of pro-gay ordinances in New York.

One example is the parade itself. The event has expanded to include as many as 800 homosexuals and supporters in 1981. This year's parade organizers expect to draw a crowd of 600 to 1,000.

Other examples include the lobbying of county supervisors to declare Gay Pride Week in 1975. At that time gay organizing centered around the Lesbian and Gay Men's Union at Cabrillo College. "It was the first time that local gays got together on a large scale," said Shawn Laughingtree, an original member of the group.

In 1978 gays united again, this time against the Brigg's Initiative (state proposition six) which would have virtually outlawed gay and lesbian

ized 250 supporters who attended a Capitola City Council meeting in protest.

"I looked around that room," remembered Laird, "and thought, 'We have power, we are visible.'"

Over the last decade, the community has become not only more visible but more rooted, said Solomon. "In the beginning the students were the most active. We're more established now, more professional."

A sign of these roots is the Freedom Democratic Caucus (FDC), a gay political group celebrating its first anniversary this month. This group was preceded by the Charlie Parkhurst and Harvey Milk gay coalitions.

In the last year the FDC has sponsored candidate forums for both the city council and county supervisor races as well as informational sessions on aging and AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). On the state level the members have lobbied for passage of California Assembly Bill One, a gay anti-discrimination bill which Gov. George Deukmejian vetoed this spring. The FDC also expects to have a presence at the Democratic Convention in San Francisco this summer, with Laird attending as a Hart delegate.

The group has drawn support and

in other areas, such as allowing couples to share in the same insurance and pension benefits as their heterosexual equivalents. The county had such a policy, under which couples who shared a relationship for at least one year could also share in the employment benefits.

The policy was negotiated out of the county employees' contract after one worker had brought several people onto the same policy in one year. "I think they threw out the baby with the bath water," said Laird.

The traditional rallying point for gays and lesbians remains the same as a decade ago: anti-discrimination in housing, jobs and benefits such as insurance and pensions. But in Santa Cruz, the community is most active when it's faced with a particular issue such as the Brigg's initiative, said Laughingtree.

The biggest issues for local gays and lesbians this year have been within the community. AIDS, a debilitating and fatal disease which mostly affects gay and bisexual men, worked to strengthen the community, said Solomon. He, along with leaders of the FDC, helped to coordinate an informational session last year.

"The issue matured the community, and helped to establish groups for gays to meet each other" outside of the traditional bar and bathhouse set-

ting, said Solomon. To date there have been four AIDS victims in Santa Cruz, according to Solomon.

Socially, some say there is a rift in the community between gay men and lesbians at the Blue Lagoon, the only exclusively homosexual bar in town. Women, who make up almost half the crowd on some nights, claim they've been unnecessarily hassled for identification in an effort to discourage them from entering the bar. The conflict is presently being mediated by Laird and others.

Despite the impediments, the community is politically and socially better organized and represented than ever before, with gays and lesbians in highly visible areas of local government such as the city council and local commissions.

The Santa Cruz Lesbian/Gay Freedom Foundation hopes to increase the community's visibility. The group, whose core of six members organized this week's parade, plans to establish a contact phone line, P.O. Box and community center for gays and lesbians as well as to sponsor social and cultural events throughout the year.

The ultimate aim of the gay and lesbian activists in Santa Cruz is to make their organizations anachronistic. "But I don't see that happening in my life time," said Solomon.

"When 10 percent of the population doesn't fit the norm, there'll be some backlash," said House. •



Lesbian/Gay Pride Parade, 1981

There are approximately 4,000 gays in the city of Santa Cruz alone, according to sex therapists Masters and Johnson's estimate that 10 percent of any given population is homosexual. About 25 percent of that group actually participates in the local gay community socially or politically, said Santa Cruz Mayor John Laird, who is openly gay.

Uniting such a community, which includes a diverse mix of people from Republicans, Democrats, religious people and atheists allied only by their sexual preference, is a Herculean task, said Laird.

Though the struggle by gays and lesbians in Santa Cruz never reached the feverish pitch of the Stonewall riots, red-letter events over the last decade have united the community.

teachers, on grounds that they would "advocate" homosexuality.

Laird remembers that the initial polls showed support for the measure 2-to-1 statewide. In one of the largest outpourings of solidarity, locals hit the streets, walking precincts to spread the word. And closeted gays went public in an effort to de-mystify homosexuality. The initiative was eventually defeated, losing by a 2-to-1 majority in Santa Cruz.

The community again rallied in 1980, opposing the arrests of a group of men who Capitola police claimed were having public sex in the beach restrooms. The local daily subsequently ran the men's names on its front page. In response, Laird and Jerry Solomon, a local psychologist and gay activist, began an educational campaign. The effort organ-

recognition from almost all of the local politicians, including State Sen. Henry Mello (D-Watsonville), Congressman Leon Panetta (D-Monterey) and State Representative Sam Farr (D-Monterey), who've either appeared at or sent representatives to the FDC's forums, said FDC spokesperson Wanda House.

But neither the city of Santa Cruz nor the county have an anti-discrimination law, though the county has a fair employment policy. Laird said the city shouldn't consider going through the process unless there are enough people who feel they have been discriminated against in housing or employment. At present, said Laird, the numbers aren't there.

But he does agree that there is a need to legitimate gays and lesbians