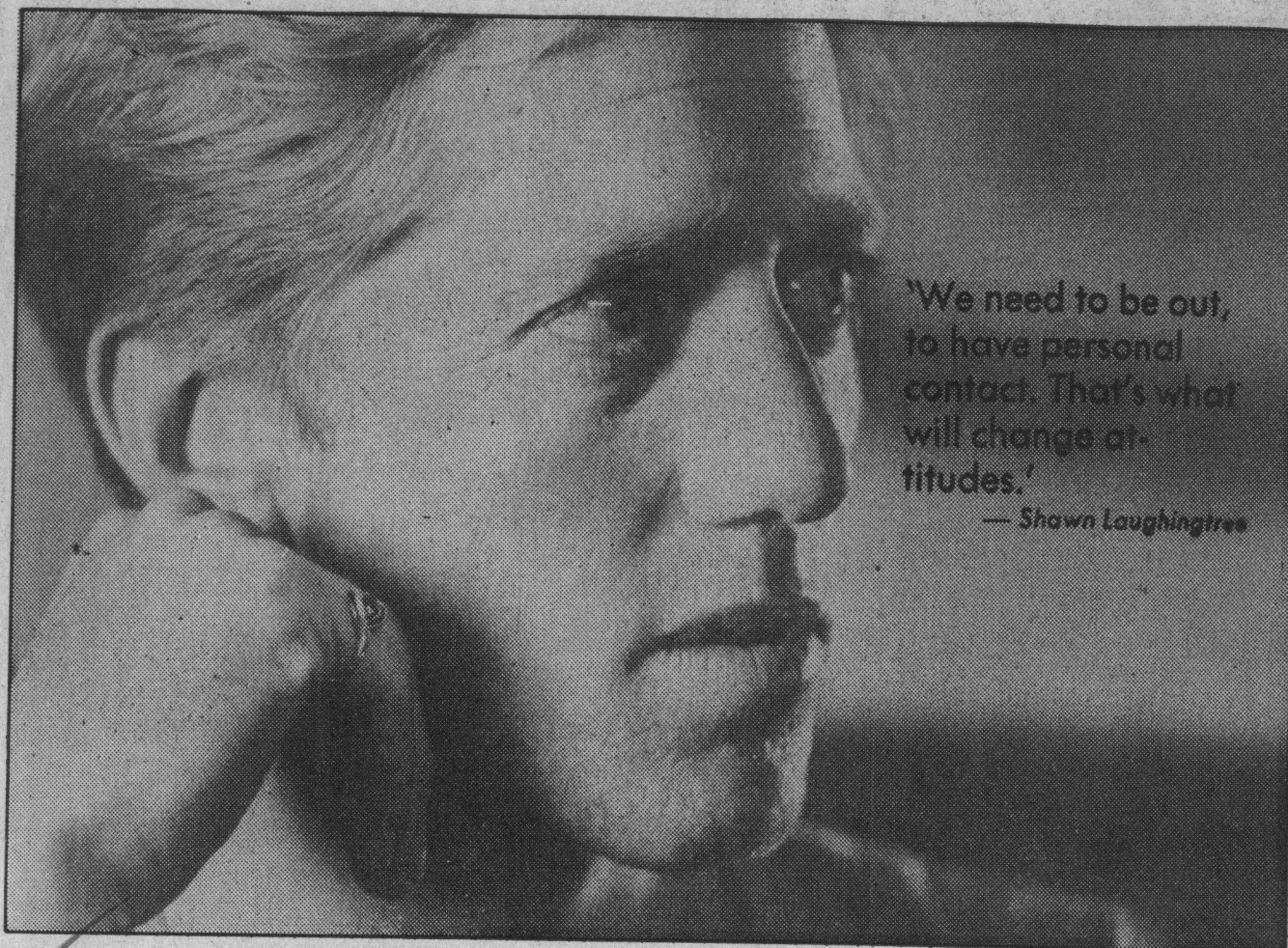


Gay/Lesbian Pride organizers mark 10th year



"We need to be out, to have personal contact. That's what will change attitudes."

— Shawn Laughingtree



"I'm a lesbian, but it's so little a part of what I am."

— Toni Cassista

Photos by Dan Coyro

By DENISE FRANKLIN
Sentinel Staff Writer

FOR THE TENTH consecutive year, local residents are celebrating Lesbian and Gay Pride Week with workshops, entertainment and the grand finale — a parade and rally starting at 11:15 a.m. Saturday.

Gay Pride Week began in 1975 when, on June 23, the then-Board of Supervisors signed a proclamation which stated, in part, that "gay people face daily assaults on their self-esteem and identity because of negative myths and societal expectations and ... gay people are a positive, contributing segment of the community ..."

The proclamation was con-

America and have equality," he told Lans. "I guess I'm one of those low-down people you were talking about who believes in equal rights and equality."

By having an officially-proclaimed week of gay and lesbian activities, this county joined a nationwide effort to commemorate an incident which was one of the driving forces behind the creation of the gay/lesbian rights movement — the Stonewall Inn riot in New York City, according to Shawn Laughingtree, a local preschool teacher who's helped to organize the lesbian/gay pride weeks here since 1975.

The Stonewall incident was a confrontation between gays and New York City police on June 28, 1969 at

of this week's activities sponsored by the Santa Cruz Lesbian and Gay Freedom Foundation.

Stonewall didn't start the gay/lesbian rights movement, but brought together local movements across the country into one national force, according to Laughingtree and Cassista.

The first two years of the annual gay/lesbian pride celebration here consisted of community potlucks, day-long workshops and a dance and day in the park, Laughingtree related.

In 1977, gays and lesbians again tried to get the Board of Supervisors to proclaim Gay Pride Week, but supervisors refused. That didn't dissuade the gay/lesbian community

initiative in 1978 which would have allowed school boards to fire known homosexuals and their sympathizers, and the assassination in 1978 of Harvey Milk, a gay and a San Francisco supervisor.

This year there's no particularly burning issue, so the local gay/lesbian community is going with the national theme — "Unity and More in '84."

"That's uniting together in strength and getting more changes, suppressing laws that discriminate against us, working to be more pa-

over," said Cassista. "When people stop looking at us as not part of society, it will be over ... We are very much a part of society. But because of how society looks at us, it keeps our brothers and sisters in the closet."

"I'm a lesbian, but it's so little a part of what I am," added Cassista, who is a student in UCSC's paralegal program, a member of the county Commission on Nursing Home Care and a volunteer ombudsman in nursing homes. "I do so much for the community. But people look at me

Activities still ahead

THE FOLLOWING is a listing of the remaining activities during Lesbian/Gay Pride Week which started Monday:

Tonight — Gay comedy will be performed by Kelly Kittell, Linda Moakes and Susie Berger at 8:30 the YWCA, 303 Walnut Ave. A workshop for lesbians who aren't

people face daily assaults on their self-esteem and identity because of negative myths and societal expectations and ... gay people are a positive, contributing segment of the community ..."

The proclamation was controversial. Members of the public argued against it at the board meeting and the County Clerk's Office was flooded with letters opposing the action for a couple months after the board's action.

Supervisor Dan Forbus, who was a member of that 1975 Board of Supervisors, was the sole vote against the 1975 proclamation. Even the late, conservative supervisor from Watsonville, Cecil Smith, voted in the affirmative.

Smith chided Hilda Lans, who today still is a frequent speaker before the board, for her opposition. "I have heard you stand there and say how happy you are to be in

cording to Shawn Laughingtree, a local preschool teacher who's helped to organize the lesbian/gay pride weeks here since 1975.

The Stonewall incident was a confrontation between gays and New York City police on June 28, 1969 at the Stonewall Inn Bar, a hang-out for gay men, particularly drag queens.

Since then, gay and lesbian groups throughout the country have sponsored gay/lesbian pride activities every June.

"What happened at Stonewall was people started fighting back instead of what people thought gay men would do — run away," said Laughingtree. "... They were typically thought of as sissies who don't fight.

"Members of the (gay) community felt alone. They felt there was nothing they could do. And then one day, they said 'forget it.' They were ready to fight to be what they wanted to be without being abused," added Toni Cassista, another key organizer

day in the park, Laughingtree related.

In 1977, gays and lesbians again tried to get the Board of Supervisors to proclaim Gay Pride Week, but supervisors refused. That didn't dissuade the gay/lesbian community from holding events and have the first parade that year.

In 1977, a major event hit the gay/lesbian community that stimulated a need to be even more visible — the successful campaign of Anita Bryant to defeat the pro-gay rights law in Dade County, Fla.

That year, approximately 300 marched in the parade to show their opposition to the repeal of the Dade County anti-discrimination law. Whenever there's an issue at stake, more people show up for the parade, said Laughingtree. Some years, numbers have reached close to 700.

Other issues that have brought gays and lesbians out in numbers include the unsuccessful Briggs In-

gay/lesbian community is going with the national theme — "Unity and More in '84."

"That's uniting together in strength and getting more changes, suppressing laws that discriminate against us, working to be more patient and understanding," said Cassista.

The absence of hot issues this year certainly doesn't mean the struggle of gays and lesbians is coming to an end, Laughingtree and Cassista stressed.

While Santa Cruz County residents tend to be more open in their attitudes towards gays and lesbians than, for example, those who live in more conservative communities, there's still plenty of prejudice here. "There are people who wait outside bars for gays and lesbians and bash them. Yes, here in Santa Cruz," says Cassista.

"When being a lesbian or a gay no longer is an issue, our fight will be

"I'm a lesbian, but it's so little a part of what I am," added Cassista, who is a student in UCSC's paralegal program, a member of the county Commission on Nursing Home Care and a volunteer ombudsman in nursing homes. "I do so much for the community. But people look at you like you're just a lesbian or a gay man and you have no hopes or dreams or plans in life other than being a lesbian."

It's like people tend to refer to John Laird as the gay mayor, Laughingtree noted. "He's the mayor. Not just the gay mayor. I don't get referred to as the gay child care worker."

The two believe gays and lesbians need to show themselves in society in order to eventually be accepted as equals. The Gay/Lesbian Pride Week activities, particularly the parade Saturday, gives them a chance to be visible.

"We need to be out, to have personal contact. That's what will change attitudes," Laughingtree stated.

ing of the remaining activities during Lesbian/Gay Pride Week which started Monday:

Tonight — Gay comedy will be performed by Kelly Kittell, Linda Moakes and Susie Berger at 8:30 the YWCA, 303 Walnut Ave. A workshop for lesbians who aren't in primary, committed relationships will take place from 5:30-7:30 at the Nelson Center, Center and Laurel streets.

Friday — A workshop for lesbian couples, but not restricted to couples, is set for 5:30-7:30 p.m. at the Nelson Center, Center and Laurel streets.

Saturday — Special training for parade monitors starts at 9 a.m. at the corner of Cathcart and Cedar streets where the 11:15 a.m. parade will start. Participants should congregate between 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. A rally begins at noon with Joyce Brown and Toni Cassista as masters of ceremonies.

For more information on any of these activities, call 429-9944 or 476-3309.