



BGLAD Newsletter

June, 2000

Bisexuals, Gays, Lesbians and Allies At DuPont

Contact: BGLAD.BGLAD@usa.DuPont.com

See us at www.DuPontbglad.com

Dr. Thomas Connelly Sponsors BGLAD

Dr. Thomas Connelly, Vice President of Fluoropolymers recently became BGLAD's DuPont sponsor. BISC members met with Tom several times during the spring: the following interview was assembled from the conversations which took place at these meetings.



News: Tom, you've recently become VP of Fluoropolymers. Tell us about your history at DuPont.

(Continued on Page 3)

Interview with Our Sponsor	1,3-5
Auto Industry Offers Partner Benefits	2
BGLAD Member News	5
Millenium March on Washington	5-9
BGLAD in South America	9
The Moral Response to Homosexuality...	10-11
Six Months of Change	12-13
Mel White on Anti-Gay Churches	14-15
Cummins Engine Retains Benefits	16
Membership Update.....	17



Photo by Firooz Zahedi

4th Annual BGLAD Speaker Event!
Betty Degeneres will be speaking at the
DuPont Country Club -- Tuesday, October 3, 2000.

This Newsletter is published by BGLAD--Bisexuals, Gays, Lesbians and Allies at DuPont. If you wish to receive the Newsletter, please send a confidential email to BGLAD.BGLAD@usa.DuPont.com or via paper mail to P. O. Box 2192 Wilm., DE 19899-2192. All mail received by BGLAD is confidential. The leader of BGLAD (the Network Liaison) is Carol Lowrie (carol.l.lowrie@usa.DuPont.com). The editor of the Newsletter is Michael Leach (michael.b.leach@usa.DuPont.com) and an assistant is being sought. The Newsletter is published six times per year. Submission of relevant articles and information is very welcome. See us at www.DuPontbglad.com

DETROIT, June 8 — Detroit's Big Three automakers today said they will extend health-care benefits to the partners of employees.

Health-care benefits for partners of gay employees is seen as a low-cost way to lure new workers in a tight labor market.

The decision by General Motors Corp., Ford Motor Co. and DaimlerChrysler AG covers about 466,300 hourly and salaried workers, and could signal that such benefits will become standard in corporate America.

“This is really a landmark,” said Kim Mills, education director with the Human Rights Campaign, a gay rights group in Washington. “We’ve never really seen an industry get together as a group and say we’re going to institute these benefits.” The coverage of medical, dental and prescription drug costs is scheduled to start Aug. 1. Individual coverage plans will vary by automaker. The companies said the benefits are a low-cost way to lure new employees in a tight labor market. “It’s also the fact there are more openly gay people out in the workplace who are asking for this benefit,” Mills said.

Committed Relationship for 6 Months

Employees will be required to show their domestic partner relationship meets eligibility requirements that include being of the same sex and having shared a “committed relationship” for a minimum of six months, the automakers said in a joint press release. Opposite sex domestic partners are not eligible. The programs do not cover current retirees, but workers and their partners who receive the benefits will keep them after the workers retire. Numerous other large companies, from United Airlines, a unit of UAL Corp. to IBM Corp., have launched similar programs. There are than 90 Fortune 500 companies that offer domestic partner benefits, either to same-sex or opposite-sex partners, according to Human Rights Campaign. Including other private companies, nonprofit organizations, colleges, and state and local governments, there are 3,419 employers providing domestic partner health benefits, the group said.

Benefits Push Came From UAW

Representatives of the automakers said the cost of extending the coverage be minimal. Other companies have found about 1 percent of their population applies for the benefits. At Ford, the only company to provide specifics, the extra benefits will cost less than \$5 million a year, said David Murphy, vice president of human resources. Ford spends a total of \$2.4 billion a year on health care. The push for the extra benefits came mainly from the United Auto Workers union. Murphy said Ford has received letters from employees and others in opposition to extending the coverage to gays and lesbians. He said Ford decided to make the offer out of a sense of fairness to all of its workers, and because there is a business case for offering benefits that will attract quality employees. Ford will consider extending the coverage to its international workers, said Murphy, and may explore in the future offering it to opposite sex partners. (end)

Interview With Our Sponsor (Continued from Page 1)

Tom: I started with DuPont in 1978 at the Experimental Station, working in the Elastomers SBU. After research and plant technical assignments at both the Experimental Station and Chambers Works, in 1981, I was appointed research supervisor for neoprene, at the Louisville Works. Two years later, I was senior supervisor for Teflon® copolymers technology at the Washington Works. In 1985, I became global product manager for the Permasep® business, based at the Glasgow site. In 1987, I transferred to the U. K. and two years later to Geneva, Switzerland. In early 1992, I moved to the Delrin® business where for the next five years I served as business director. Early in 1994, I moved to Hong Kong where I continued my Delrin® role, while adding responsibility for the Engineering Polymer business throughout Asia, except Japan. I returned to the U.S. in 1997 as Kevlar Business Director at Spruance, and then Technical Director of Fluoroproducts in Wilmington.

News: You were single when you left the U. S.?

Tom: I lived outside the U. S. for ten years. When I was living in Geneva, I met Patricia. We've been married for 8 years and have two children, Louise and Thomas. It has been a very broadening experience learning the culture and language of a French-speaking spouse -- it's been extremely important in shaping my development from a Toledo, Ohio boy.

News: What has been your experience with homosexuality?

Tom: I had a number of gay colleagues and friends in university. I retrospect they were friends first and gay second. The attitudes in Europe were more accepting and acquainted with gays and lesbians and they deepened and shaped my positive views about the diversity of peoples, beliefs, and cultures. As an ally of BGLAD since 1998, the Barney Frank incident at DuPont was my first business leadership involvement with BGLAD. I was disappointed with the negative emails, and at the same time I understand the deep feelings and concerns of many DuPonters. In Fluoroproducts, I talked with John Jessup [former sponsor of BGLAD...ed] about the Frank incident and learned about BGLAD and began to form a mental picture of DuPont's approximate point on the diversity journey. A few months later, Chad Holliday asked if I would succeed John as BGLAD's sponsor, and I was delighted to agree.

News: Are you clear on BGLAD's aims?

Tom: My brief is to help the Network and DuPont along the journey of understanding. I recognize that this isn't an honorary position nor is it a symbolic or titular job. My role involves the hard work of helping others to see the business and personal sides of our diversity policy and to take the actions needed to enable everyone who works here to feel safe and valued and able to have a fulfilling job and life. How will I do the job? One important part is talking and listening to my peers, counseling them and helping them see bisexuals, gays, and lesbians through my experience.

News: The BGL community was really hit hard by the Barney Frank situation: we couldn't believe that DuPonters could send signed hate mail with little or no response from management. How do you explain what happened?

Tom: Things change very slowly. People do not easily discard life-long learnings. DuPont does not demand that people's beliefs change: our Company does insist that everyone at work be treated with respect, safety, and integrity, regardless of what is believed about sexual orientation. Maybe it takes a generation for things to change...we are still struggling to treat women and blacks and others who are different from the majority with equity and support. Multiple truths can co-exist -- what's true for me isn't necessarily in conflict with your beliefs. People in different regions and countries have strongly held beliefs around sexual orientation. It is a long process to change beliefs, particularly in cultures that struggle with change. A commitment to education, and some patience are needed. Behavior is different: we can insist on the right behaviors in the workplace now. The change timeline for behavior is within our control.

News: Ignorance and fear can drive people to do cowardly things, hateful things.

Tom: There is no sense in greeting intolerance with more intolerance. I believe in the core values of DuPont and superior business results and the rest doesn't matter. If we reward people for these two things, we'll prosper. There is no room for a serious violation of core values. Like safety, we take a hard line: you can get fired for a safety violation. Other companies don't do that and it's ok. At DuPont, safety cannot be violated. Each individual must decide that if they're in conflict with the basic values of DuPont, including non-discrimination, and live up to DuPont's expectations or withdraw. There are shocking racial things still happening: it will take time and sustained energy to overcome the ignorance.

News: In 1993, DuPont changed the non-discrimination policy to include sexual orientation. It was not easy for the BGL community to be included in the policy and inclusion was a milestone that we thought meant BGLs were accepted in DuPont. The Barney Frank hate mail seemed to say "it was all a mirage".

Tom: The Barney Frank thing was like taking the temperature of the organization. There is no excuse for the responses that resulted. I see the inappropriateness as being impersonal, -- not targeted at an individual but rather at an idea -- an idea that was as startling and fearsome to those who responded as their opinions were to BGLs in DuPont. Folks, we are all DuPonters and that must bring us and keep us together.

News: One of the big issues for BGLAD is benefits for our partners. At one level, we want the health benefits for our partners and feel we are second-class citizens because we cannot provide for our loved ones. On another level, it's a question of equity. Another perspective involves the business considerations: productivity, recruiting, retention. How do you view partner benefits?

Tom: DuPont is a business organization, not a social club. All decisions are about how to provide values that sustain our customers, employees, investors, and the environment at a profit. DuPont is under no moral stricture to provide partner benefits -- we are not primarily an instrument of social change.

We do need to clarify the case for partner benefits, whether for BGLs or for heterosexual couples. We need to talk about the changes in the supply of labor and how DuPont competes to attract and retain the best and brightest employees regardless of their personal characteristics. We need to consider the productivity lost in worrying about providing for our spouses and partners and consider whether other companies have higher productivity if they provide partner benefits. I'm very comfortable leading toward a goal that results in strengthening DuPont and its employees. I recognize that change doesn't happen overnight. I believe we need to make the business case around more flexible benefits and the impact of adding a significant other to the benefits plans, regardless of their sexual orientation.

News: Let's summarize: what are your priorities in sponsoring BGLAD?

Tom: First and foremost, I will work with my colleagues to support them as they enable the entire corporation to treat everyone with respect. Each of us is learning about life at his or her rate and I'll be there probing and helping folks learn from my experience as I will learn from them. I will be an advocate with other VPs, quietly driving the business case for partner benefits and for non-discrimination. I don't believe confrontations are effective learning methods, so I'm not likely to be militant with my colleagues. On the other hand, I will not countenance violations of our diversity principles. Lastly and importantly, I value BGLAD members' support of me as I grow in understanding and model my understanding to others. (mbl)

BGLAD MEMBER NEWS

Bonnie and Mary Attend Millenium March on Washington

My partner Mary was confined to a wheelchair for the March due to a back injury. With the help of the volunteers, we were able to be with the differently-able group. When the march started we were on the street and it really was not hard to push her wheelchair. However, when we made the turn onto the mall gravel path, it did get tough. The most amazing thing was that each time we came to a curb with no ramp in sight, many hands reached out from nowhere. All of these hands helped lift her in the wheelchair not because we asked, but because they cared.



We were able to look out over the crowd from near the stage. It was an unbelievable sight! Rainbow flags as far as you could see back to the Washington Monument, and the Mall was full of people.



We also had a great experience at the Equality Rocks concert the night before. The warmth of the crowd inside the stadium overwhelmed the few protesters outside.

Marching had a personal connection for us. Mary was a registered nurse. She had a great income and medical insurance. However, we could not 'claim' each other as dependents on our medical insurance policies. I know you have all heard the story. She has become differently-abled. She was allowed to 'buy' COBRA medical insurance for 18 months (9 months have passed). Since DuPont does not allow insurance for Domestic Partners, her insurance will run out unless she can qualify for Social Security benefits (this process may take years).

What is more frustrating, we are not allowed to file a joint tax return, we lose to the government too. It is so frightening to me: if for some reason I would no longer be able to

work or would die, she can not receive survivor benefits with the exception of my life insurance. This would not happen to the folks that work beside me.

This is why we marched. We have been together for 12 years -- can we not make it legal? We have children and grandchildren. I have been with DuPont for 20+ years.

I beg the leaders of our company to re-visit the Domestic Partner benefits policy, not just for same-sex couples but for all couples in committed relationships.

No one is asking for special rights, just equal rights. I will vote this fall -- please, if we all vote, maybe we can make a small change.

Bonnie



Impressions from the MMOW

Katie

My partner Chris and I went to the Millenium March on Washington on April 30. The previous march, in 1993, had been our first experience of a major gay rights event, and we had found it tremendously exhilarating.

This year we made the five-hour drive to DC with the same friends with whom we had gone in 1993. We stayed with friends of theirs who live a few blocks from DuPont Circle. I didn't know anything about DuPont Circle until we got there. When we were walking around Friday evening, I commented that it was really neat that all the stores had put up rainbow flags for the weekend. Then I learned that rainbow flags are permanent fixtures in that part of town!

Saturday morning we had planned to go to "The Wedding," which was to be held in front of the IRS building. Unfortunately, we got there a little late, and then we found out that the ceremony had been moved to the Lincoln Memorial, which is at least half a mile away. So we didn't get married. But we heard that several thousand other couples did.

In the afternoon we went to the street fair on Pennsylvania Ave. About half a dozen blocks of the street had been enclosed by a chain link fence. There were only a few gates. Everyone who entered was given a bright green wristband – tagged like a migratory bird, as someone put it. It felt a little creepy - were we walking into some kind of a trap? A gay concentration camp? But it was OK – just food, music, vendors, political groups. Lots of people were handing out stickers, like "Gore for President," and "I'm gay and I vote." I plastered my T-shirt with them.

We looked at new sections of the AIDS quilt which were displayed on the Mall. I have never known anyone with AIDS, and yet I always cry when I see the quilt. A group of protesters had set up signs nearby. One said, "The wages of sin is death. Romans 6:23." The words were aligned in four rows so that "AIDS" could be read vertically. Several people were trying to argue with the protesters. That was pointless.

Sunday morning we met up with other Unitarian Universalists at the All Souls UU Church. A group from this church had organized a march contingent. Most of the people who showed up were local – DC, VA, and southern PA – but there was also a couple from Minnesota.

By the time our group got downtown, the march had already started. Someone apparently knew where our appointed spot was and told us when to jump in. Chris and I helped carry the "official" UU Association banner. We wore hand-painted T-shirts bearing our church's name (Athens & Sheshequin, PA) and logo (chalice with multi-colored flame), which we had made specifically for the march. Other marchers carried their church's banners.



There were two groups of counter-demonstrators along the route, maybe ten to fifteen people in all. They carried signs with the standard scriptural excerpts. Some wore T-shirts that said “Got AIDS yet?” One person had a megaphone. As we approached him, someone in our group started singing “We Are a Gentle, Angry People,” a song by Holly Near that is in the UU hymnal. We sang that one and other UU songs, making up new verses when necessary to fit the occasion. Sometimes the spectators joined in. When we reached the Mall, the pace of the march slowed, and our singing became less purposeful. When we saw a group from West Virginia, we sang “Country Roads.” Then we sang “Oklahoma,” even though we hadn’t seen anyone from that state.

In the crowd on the Mall, a man dressed as Tinky Winky was dancing. Chris and I rushed over and had our picture taken with him. That picture now sits on my desk at work, next to my Tinky Winky doll.

There were many speakers on the Mall Sunday afternoon, but we missed most of them because we only stayed for an hour. We did hear several high school students – two from the Gay-Straight Alliance at the Salt Lake City high school that made national news several years ago, and the football team captain from Massachusetts who recently came out. It was very heartening to see gay kids with positive self-images and supportive environments. Most of us would not want them to go what we went through.

While the national gay community was divided on the value of this year’s march, and some people objected to the corporate sponsorships and commercialism, we enjoyed it thoroughly. It

felt like a VERY large family reunion. (Amazingly, we saw a few people we knew!). It is incredibly energizing and affirming to be part of a crowd of several hundred thousand "out and proud" gay people.

We just heard about a gay pride march in Harrisburg in July. I think we will probably go. Gay rights marches are addictive!

BGLAD South America Report from Vital de Carvalho

During February, I talked to the HR Director of Brazil about spreading the network over the region, and asked for her help. She totally agreed - just asked for some time to talk to people within HR to know more about networks and DuPont's treatment for intra-company networks

During March, she, her boss (HR Director South America), and the VP Finance made a presentation to the South American Leadership team about networks in general, and about our network, specifically. They agreed to support networks in general and decided that those networks may need a sponsor. For BGLAD specifically, there are already two volunteers to become sponsors. Also, we talked about some membership and library policies for the region.

During April, I personally met almost all BISC members and attended the monthly BISC meeting, which I enjoyed a lot! While I was in Wilmington, there was a Finance meeting in Brazil (we have those meetings monthly in Brazil, and everyone from Finance is required to attend), and the VP Finance presented the decision to support networks.

Late in April we started evaluating the use of webcams and internet video conferencing to have the BISC meeting. I have personally tested one with Chris and it worked very well!

During May, in another Finance meeting, I was invited to present something about diversity and BGLAD. I gave a presentation, and talked a little about BGLAD. And I have to confess: I was amazed with the interest people showed -- really gratifying! Just after the presentation, we got three new ally members - isn't that great? Besides that, they are now expecting me to talk during the next meetings, which may be transformed into a kind of "BGL Seminar" or something like that.

Last week, I spoke with Leslie about the Sexual Orientation Seminar. I sent e-mails to BGL groups in Brazil, asking about similar seminars. I have already received two very positive answers - one group has already developed something and the other is willing to support the development.

Things are off to a great start here in Brasil! You can see the presentation material I used on the BGLAD web site.

Vital

GAY WORLD NEWS

THE PLAIN DEALER Friday, May 12, 2000 EDITORIALS & FORUM

The Moral Response to Homosexuality

Out for breakfast one morning I overheard a comment. A fellow said jokingly, "We can't put down blacks, Jews, women or immigrants at work anymore without getting into trouble. Thank God we still have the homosexuals!"

That started me thinking. There have been gay or lesbian members of every church where I have been pastor. Every workplace, every extended family, every public or private gathering is likely to include them. They have always been a part of just about everything. The real question is whether we are mature enough to admit their presence. And, are we moral enough to treat them with the same respect and consideration we generally feel all people deserve?

Human beings have their sexual orientation imprinted in their psyches by natural processes that we are only now beginning to understand. As growing children, most of us "straights" discovered an overwhelming attraction to the opposite sex. This was not our choice. It was simply a fact of our developing God-given biology. Gays and lesbians discover the facts of same-sex attraction in the same way. Though a few anomalies can be cited, gays and lesbians do not choose their sexual orientation any more than straights do. The notion that homosexuals somehow represent a threat, or are sick and need to be cured, is rooted in fear, ignorance and prejudice. Such attitudes are mean-spirited, hurtful, foolish and always wrong.

"But, what about the Bible?" In the long history of intolerance, the Bible has been used as justification to punish heretics, burn witches, enslave blacks, denigrate women, persecute Jews, Muslims or generally "kill the enemy." Later generations of Christians are embarrassed by these perverted usages of scripture. As a Christian, I am offended when I see those who exhibit little dedication to religious matters among the most vocal in using scripture to denigrate others.

I have seen the same scenario play out in every community where I have been a pastor. A homosexual church member grows up in a hostile and homophobic environment. They say to themselves, "I will do as society dictates. I will fight my sexual orientation. I will simply simulate the straight lifestyle. Who's to know?" They marry, have children, and somewhere along the line the psychological pressure of living a lie causes their same-sex attraction to be revealed. Shocked family and friends ask, "Why did they marry, have kids and involve other people's lives?" The answer is obvious: They were just trying to do what social norms said they should do. The commonly heard "moral guidance" from the religious community is of little help because it denies a basic biological reality. The "don't ask, don't tell" position simply perpetuates denial. Suggesting to people who actually exist that everyone should just pretend they do not exist is foolish, demeaning and self-defeating. Equating homosexuality with alcoholism or

kleptomania, as some so-called moral leaders have done in recent years, is a false comparison that reveals and reinforces deep-seated hostility and prejudice.

Basic Judeo-Christian teaching presupposes that human beings form couples for companionship, for the expression of physical love, and for the orderly care of children. Long-standing homosexual couples have shown themselves at least as lasting and as successful as heterosexual couples in all of these areas.

Religious thinking that admits that one's sexual orientation is not a choice but insists that falling in love and desiring a same-sex spouse is a sin is a self-contradictory stance that simply does not work. The suggestion that celibacy is the only moral option may work for some homosexuals. But why should we expect celibacy to work for gays and lesbians any better than it works for heterosexuals?

A lifetime of consideration has led me to the conclusion that the only moral guidance that makes any sense is that both church and society should encourage homosexuals to fulfill their human need for intimacy and companionship by forming lifelong relationships blessed by the church and recorded by the state, just as we recommend for heterosexuals.

The gays and lesbians I know have the same agenda as the rest of us: using their God-given abilities to live meaningful and productive lives. With few exceptions, homosexuals are seeking understanding for their sexual orientation - not recruits. They do not represent a greater threat to children or to family values than do heterosexuals. If anything, it is the gay and lesbian population that is threatened - by neglect, hostility, intolerance and physical violence. A bumper sticker I saw recently reads, "Nobody ever died of homophobia." Sadly, hate-crime statistics show otherwise.

Every generation seems to have those who persecute others for being different. History shows us that we can mix a few phrases from scripture with hateful attitudes and find all the justification needed to imprison heretics, burn witches, enslave blacks, persecute Jews or demean women. Christians believe that hostility toward others not like ourselves is due to a distortion in human personality called "sin." Homosexuals cannot change their sexual orientation, but homophobes can repent of their sin.

Rev. James W. Watkins is the former pastor of the Old South Church, UCC in Kirtland, Ohio. Over a 30-year ministerial career, Rev. Watkins has been pastor of six churches. In addition to his pastoral work, Rev. Watkins is an author, humorist, educator, speaker, and community activist. His work may be viewed at: <<http://www.mainstreamop.org>> He can be reached at 440/974-5123 or e-mail: <watkinsjw@juno.com>

Here are some of the headlines in the first six months of 2000 from countries around the world

Australia

- 34 laws found discriminatory against gays and lesbians
- Property Relations act passed - same-sex couples have same rights as hetero couples
- Catholic Bishop Pell endorses "Courage" group -- urges gays and lesbians to "turn straight"
- 50,000 gays in Melbourne's Pride March
- Federal Police extend benefits to same-sex partners
- Equal Opportunity Act to be amended to prohibit discrimination on sexual orientation

Africa

- Mugabe: "Homosexuals are repugnant, immoral, an abomination"
- Single gay man wins four-year battle to adopt a child
- Woman from Kisii tribe granted divorce from her wife -- abuse and lack of male heir cited
- South Africa passes anti-discrimination bill -- excludes people who are HIV positive from insurance provisions
- Bristol-Myers donates \$100MM to fight aids

Asia

- Tens of millions of Chinese listen to VOA program on gays and lesbians -- many call in
- Gays form LGBT national network in India -- creates digest of gay friendly commerce
- Japanese court permits transsexual to attend high school again, as other gender
- Advertisement for lesbian movie already playing in Hong Kong banned -- showed two women holding each other; Hong Kong's first pride day set for June 18
- Gays in Singapore file for public gathering permit -- previous requests rejected

South America

- Buenos Aires police terrorize La Fulana Feminist Community Center for Lesbians
- Acorda Coracao anti-gay group murdered sixth victim in Rio -- 169 gays murdered in 1999 in Brasil
- Seven gays killed in El Salvador -- head of Entre Amigos gay group threatened -- police refuse to protect Hernandez and family
- Gay U. S. journalist Larry Lee was murdered in Guatemala City, where he was based
- Ciudad Juarez gay group forms -- TV interview and call-in show viewed favorably

Canada

- Ontario given six months to amend laws requiring "spouse" to be of the opposite sex
- Supreme Court includes right to sue for spousal support for homosexuals
- Only 17 of 60,000 soldiers claimed medical benefits for same-sex partner in 1999 -- have had the right since 1996
- Gay mayor of Winnipeg wears bullet-proof vest -- first politician in Canada to do so

- Toronto school board sponsors poster campaign "It's OK to be Gay" - Muslim Education Assembly president protests "it's not normal"
- CTV network fires anchor for discriminatory remark
- Homophobic customer(s) deface books in Chapters bookstores -- police on the lookout

U. K. and Europe

- Czech Republic to grant same-sex couples all matrimony rights except adoption
- House of Lords again killed measure to equalize gay sex age of consent to 16 years -- Blair may override -- measure would make England same as rest of EU
- Protestors invade Daily Mail, Britain's most insidiously homophobic newspaper
- Split over homosexuality, Lutheran bishops in Norway take modern sex-education class to get more "contact with the real world"
- Riots occur in Italian cities after Pope's apologies failed to atone for Church's homophobia
- Latvia's entry into EU threatened by anti-gay laws and official behavior
- Yugoslav gay group treated as American-funded traitors
- Henk Krol, founder of Dutch gay newspaper knighted by Queen Beatrix on 20th anniversary of publication
- Britain lifts ban on gays in the military; institutes sexual behavior code of conduct applicable to all sexes
- Scottish Parliament recognizes partner's right to be consulted when other partner becomes incapacitated
- British tourist murdered in Cyprus -- gay accountant agreed to have sex with the men who killed him
- Gays are welcome in the French army -- "army must be reflective of French society"

- Lesbian mayor of small Welch town appoints her lover as mayoress
- Dutch clinics ordered to provide in-vitro fertilization to same-sex couples
- German government proposes to treat same-sex couples no differently for tax purposes
- Finland to enact registered partner scheme -- other Scandinavian countries already have such laws
- Bank of Scotland scuttles plans for JV with Pat Robertson because of his strident anti-gay comments and Scottish backlash
- Belgium launches "Accept Your Gay and Lesbian Children" campaign
- Germany passes same-sex union registration law - excludes adoption right

VIRGINIA CROWD DRAWS HUNDREDS MEL WHITE TELLS CROWD TO STOP SUPPORTING ANTIGAY CHURCHES

by Bill Roundy Washington Blade, April 14, 2000

The Rev. Mel White, speaking at a conference in Charlottesville, Va., said, "Virginia has become a center of great untruth ... and this untruth is literally killing us."

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. - Speaking to a Gay-supportive crowd gathered in the sanctuary of an Episcopal church in central Virginia, the Rev. Mel White read from some of the hundreds of letters he has received lately.

"I am so confused," he read, "Sometimes I wish I would die, or be castrated, so I could be rid of these desires." "This comes from a 17-year-old boy," he said. He read another, from a Gay teenager whose father attends Jerry Falwell's church in Lynchburg, Va. The boy is also thinking about killing himself.

Some listeners dabbed away tears as White continued, recounting stories of young Gay people who feel rejected by their families and their churches, and sought some comfort by writing to the openly Gay preacher.

"It has to end," White intoned. "This endless debate in our churches has to end. We can't afford another day."

Formerly a ghostwriter for evangelical figures such as Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, White is now openly Gay, and his organization, Soulforce, uses non-violent direct action to try to end anti-Gay prejudice in churches around the country. White called on the 200 participants to work within their own churches to end anti-Gay bigotry. "If you contribute one dime to an anti-Gay church- stop it," White said. "Stop singing in their choirs, stop playing the organ in their churches. We have let them do this to us decade after decade, and it's time

to stop." It is particularly important that White's message be heard in Virginia, he said, because the state is now home to some of the country's most blatantly anti-Gay speakers: Robertson, Falwell, and Gary Bauer. "Virginia has become a center of great untruth," said White, "and this untruth is literally killing us."

White was a keynote speaker at the second annual Empowering Voices for Equal Rights conference, which drew about 200 people to St. Paul's Memorial Episcopal Church in Charlottesville on April 8. It was one of the largest gatherings of Gay and Gay-supportive people ever to take place in Virginia. Last year's Equality Begins at Home rally, for instance, drew about 150 people to Richmond. Last year, he noted, the conference was held in the basement of a small Unitarian church. This year, he said, looking around at the soaring windows and the spacious rows of pews, "We're in the sanctuary!"

Members of the conference were wildly diverse - from elderly grandmother types interested in learning more about Gay people to 16-year-old out Lesbians, transgender activists, and PFLAG moms. Elaine B., an elderly member of a Quaker church outside of Charlottesville, said that she came to the conference "because I am very interested in homosexuality, so I can be of more help to people who are queering it." Two members of her congregation are Gay, Elaine confided, "and they're an inspiration. They've been together for 20 years." Others said they came to bolster their position during arguments with Bible-thumping bigots, or to learn more about Gay people, having never met an openly Gay person before. Many of the participants came from in or just around Charlottesville, and almost everyone spoke of the area as an oasis of progressive thought

amid the conservative hinterlands of Virginia.

"Where I'm from, Waynesboro [about 25 miles from Charlottesville], is like Deliverance," said Joni S., a transgendered woman, referring to the film about murderous hillbillies. "Charlottesville is a bastion of enlightenment surrounded by ignorance." "Charlottesville has a pretty strong Gay and Lesbian community," noted Sarah W., an 18-year-old Lesbian and member of OUT Youth of the Blue Ridge, "but it doesn't really interact with the rest of the community."

One theme throughout the day was the way that homophobia affects everyone in society, not just Gay people. At a workshop entitled "Why Should Straight People be Concerned?" Jordan M., 17, a straight member of the Charlottesville High School Gay-Straight Alliance, said that homophobia affects everyone at his school. "Guys who don't play sports, or who are sensitive or artistic - they're automatically labeled as queers," Jordan reported. To avoid being perceived as Gay, he said, many teenage boys "feel obligated to act like jerks" and avoid singing in the school choir or trying out for school plays. "And you can't go down the hall and not hear someone called a faggot, or called a lesbian, or hear someone say, "That's so Gay!" "This affects everyone," he concluded, "because if you're not Gay, then you know someone who is, and you could be hurting them and not realize it."

Keynote speaker Dr. Alice Turner discussed her 10-year marriage to James Hormel, who came out as Gay after their divorce and now serves as the U.S. ambassador to Luxembourg. "I too am a victim of homophobia," she told the crowd. The painful secrets of their marriage, and the reaction of their friends after Hormel came out, were all rooted in homophobia, she said. Especially painful for her and the five children she had with Hormel, she said, were the lies that were spread during his battle to be appointed ambassador. "We've still got a long way to go," Turner said, but everyone at the conference can work to end the silence about Gay issues and

end homophobia. The church, she noted "is a place where reconciliation can take place."

Eight churches lent their support for the conference, and she said she believes the event may have inspired members of those churches to work to increase acceptance of Gay issues in their congregations. "Each of the churches is in different places, so the type of follow-up that is needed is different," she said. While the event did not draw too many people who were undecided in regard to Gay issues, she said, "I think that it empowered some of our allies."

Annabelle L., a member of the vestry of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, said that the church which hosted the event had been supportive of the conference from the beginning. "We wanted it to be open, welcoming discussion for anyone," she said, "so they could show up and learn in a comfortable place."

In a workshop about Gay parenting and marriage issues, however, it became apparent that Virginia is still not the most comfortable place for Gays. Participants grouched that the state is among the worst in the country for Gay parents. One man said that he felt a moment of panic when a Blade reporter entered the room, fearing that if his name was reported in a local paper his adopted children could be taken away from him and his partner. "Central Virginia is going to explode into its diversity," predicted Michael Gray, a member of White's Soulforce group.

One woman looked around a workshop of Gay-supportive people, children of Gay couples, and Gay parents, and said that the conference gave her hope that all of Virginia could fully accept Gay families. "When a group like this happens today," she said, "it gives me hope that it could happen in our lifetime."

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Cummins Maintains its Support of Domestic Partner Benefits

COLUMBUS, Ind. - When Cummins Engine Co Inc. announced it would offer domestic partner health insurance to its employees, the firm may not have anticipated what would happen next. A debate ensued in the local newspaper between religious conservatives opposed to giving benefits to unmarried partners and local gay groups intent on equal treatment in the workplace. A conservative employee formed an ad hoc group opposed to the policy. Hundreds gathered at a rally outside corporate headquarters on March 26 to protest the policy. "We need to have the courage to say this needs to be reversed because it is wrong," said Mark Jones, a local minister. "I believe what I believe because it is the word of God," said Ben Manring, a Cummins employee. Supporters of the policy organized a counter-demonstration. Some held signs that read "The Christian Right Is Wrong" and "Thank God I'm Gay." "It's very important that ... the general public understand that people of faith are not all negative," said Jeff Minor, a pastor from another local church.

Some might have expected a strong response from conservatives. After all, Cummins is not a new high-tech company based in Silicon Valley. The main business of Cummins, based in Columbus, Ind., is making large diesel engines for agricultural production, school buses and tanks. But Cummins is a large multinational corporation. With plants scattered throughout the country, it competes for talent nationally. Its annual revenues exceed \$6 billion and it ranks No. 266 on the Fortune 500 list. Company officials said the decision to offer the benefits was a business imperative.

"This is not a comfortable position for a company to be in," said Kim I. Mills, education director for the Human Rights Campaign. "But with new Labor Department figures showing jobless

claims at a 27-year low, companies have to offer cutting-edge benefits if they want to stay competitive." Cummins was prepared to follow through. It informed its employees that it had no intention of reversing the policy and set out to educate the community on why the policy was necessary.

"We are moving forward with our plan to provide domestic partner benefits because it makes good business sense," Cummins CEO Tim Solso wrote to the local newspaper, The Columbus Republic. "To be the employer of choice, we must provide flexible benefits plans and programs to all employees." Solso also consulted former Cummins leaders for support. Former CEO and Chairman J. Irwin Miller tackled the difficult questions of sexual orientation and religion in a separate letter published by the Republic. "As for myself, I have read and studied all the frequently quoted passages from the Bible about this subject ... and considered them in their time and place," Miller wrote. "The subject of this policy is in harmony with my own understanding of the Gospel. ... This policy, in my opinion, does not judge any individual in the company but tries to see that all are treated equally and fairly."

"The leadership of Cummins for the last 66 years all believe that we are doing the right thing. We must rid ourselves of our inherited, even cherished, biases and prejudices," Solso concluded.

While the Cummins experience is rare, a little planning can go a long way to defuse bad publicity, according to Mills. "The vast majority of companies that implement these benefits do so completely out of public view," she said. "The lesson here is that Cummins was prepared to handle complaints and did a good job of articulating their position. And that can make all the difference," Mills added.

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Katie Replogle

Our membership is steady at 242.

NEW MEMBERS:

A warm welcome to our newest ally members:

Karen – WPMP – Barley Mill Plaza

A special welcome our first allies in South America:

Maria Jose – FIN – Alphaville, Brazil

Achilles – WPMP – Alphaville, Brazil

A fond goodbye to allies who have left DuPont: Jean M, Bob L, Susan B, and Fred T. Thank you for your support and best wishes!

<p>Remember that you can stay connected to BGLAD after you retire if you can receive email at home! Just send us your address!</p>
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Want information on BGL events in the Delaware Valley area? You should be on the Mid-Atlantic Chapter's mailing list. The contact is Elizabeth.A.Oneal@usa.dupont.com
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