

Local News

By Joyce Arnold Ph.D.

PFLAG Nashville Works for the Community

Across the nation, local chapters of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, PFLAG, are busy with the nationwide project that encourages its members and others to get involved in the political process. The Mother's Day / Father's Day Congressional Visits project is one in which each chapter makes local decisions about how best to work toward the goal of informing and educating elected officials about their LGBT and supportive constituents.

Don Shockley, who shares PFLAG Nashville's co-chair responsibilities with H.G. Stovall, talked with *Freedom Press* about the recent projects and goals of the local group. Education is a consistent theme, including but not limited to elected officials. As is often the case with local community activists, it isn't unusual when PFLAG members are also active in other LGBT organizations. John Snyder is one such individual, active with PFLAG and with TEP (Tennessee Equality Project). According to Shockley, John "shared with Jody Huckaby (Executive Director of PFLAG national) the leadership of a workshop, 'Lobbying 101,'" which was a part of a training event sponsored by TEP and HRC Tennessee. "It was a practically-oriented training session. This follows a recent PFLAG Nashville monthly meeting presented by TEP." During the course of the current General Assembly session, several

local LGBT and supportive organizations have encouraged and supported just the kind of conversation with elected officials that the national PFLAG project considers.

In addition, Shockley said, "we now have Dr. Arnold Drake of Memphis (former chair of PFLAG's national board of directors) serving as PFLAG coordinator for the state of Tennessee. Many of the lobbying efforts currently are state-wide in character and Arnold keeps us informed and motivated on these issues."

Locally, Shockley points to several events, past and planned, which provide other avenues to educate and advocate on behalf of the Middle Tennessee LGBT population. "Nashville PFLAG hosted a bi-state (TN/KY) PFLAG conference on April 1-2. It was a remarkably successful event with 47 participants from seven cities," he said. "Our keynote speaker was Robert Minor, author of *Gay and Healthy In a Sick Society* and other books. Jody Huckaby, the new national executive director of PFLAG participated in the leadership of our conference--the first event of the kind he participated in after assuming his new position."

Stovall led a workshop "Safe Schools" at the annual "Yes 2 Kids" training event for public school teachers, counselors and others. This is a continuation of a PFLAG presence at the conference. "Outreach to the

schools has long been close to the heart of our chapter," Shockley said. In addition, he noted they had "presented gay friendly books to public school libraries, met with officials of metro and state, and so on."

Within the last couple of weeks, "PFLAG presented a program at Belmont United Methodist Church as the last night of a series of four on homosexuality and the church, all of which were very progressive in character. We are sensing that several mainline churches in the area are beginning to address the issue."

Looking ahead, the "next big project" is to bring a photographic exhibit, "The Shared Heart," to Nashville "some time within the next year." Initial contact has been made with photographer Adam Mastoon, who has indicated an interest in being in Nashville for the exhibit. "We applied for, and received a grant from the Community Foundation to assist us in the effort," Shockley said, explaining that "these are photographs of LGBT young people, accompanied by narratives, composed by them, about their lives. The collection was published as a book several years ago. We are in the early stages of this effort, but hope to see it through."

To contact the local PFLAG chapter, e-mail info@pflagnashville.org. For more information about PFLAG, see www.pflag.org.