

OCTOBER 1 1988

NEWSLETTER

HOUSTON TEXAS

THE AMERICAN GAY ATHEIST

THE AMERICAN GAY ATHEIST NEWSLETTER IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY AT HOUSTON, TEXAS AND IS INCIDENTAL WITH MEMBERSHIP

DIRECTOR'S CORNER

There is so much to report that I just don't know where to start. So, you may find comments throughout this newsletter about the various activities and events in which AGA has been involved.

First, let's start with the Dallas Tavern Guild and the Texas Freedom Parade, Dallas' official Gay/Lesbian pride parade held each year in late September instead of in June as is customary everywhere else.

AGA was invited to participate in Dallas' Gay Pride parade this year by a couple of our supporters (note that I use the term "supporters" instead of members. Members pay their dues and financially help out; supporters usually like to tell us what to do but never offer any financial assistance). Since we have never appeared in a Dallas Gay Pride activity, we decided to fill in the parade application and get ready to make the 250 mile trip to Dallas and represent you there. The date of the parade was Sunday, September 25. We were actually getting excited about AGA's, as well as Atheism's, first appearance in a parade in the Dallas area.

On Thursday, September 22, a letter arrived from

Alan Ross, Coordinator for the parade and Executive Director of the Dallas Tavern Guild, sponsor of the parade, saying that our application for entry into the Dallas parade had been denied since our appearance might be viewed as a negative statement rather than a positive one.

Phone calls that evening revealed that what was really behind the decision to ban us even before we ever got the chance to march was the parade committee's fear that the presence of Atheists might insult the predominantly Christian community of Dallas. In fact, I was told by Bill Hargis, President of the Tavern Guild that, "the Metropolitan Community Church plays a very large role in every aspect of our community's affairs and we can not afford to upset them."

I would be damned if I was going to put up with this blatant religious discrimination from members of the Gay/Lesbian community, and I told Mr. Hargis on the phone that evening that I intended to be in Dallas on the first flight out (of Houston) the next morning and that I would get a judge to issue a TRO (Temporary Restraining Order) against the parade unless we were allowed to march as we had not violated any rules and regulations of the parade and our entry was in before the time of deadline. This is precisely what I did.

That Thursday evening I made more phone calls and found a Dallas attorney who was willing to defend our right to freedom of expression. Although not himself an Atheist, Wm. Nelson is currently representing a group of Gay men in Dallas in a suit against Dallas' Parkland Hospital for that hospital's refusal to continue to administer AZT therapy for AIDS.

In order to make a long story shorter, we did manage to obtain a TRO which allowed us to present ourselves in the Texas Freedom Parade. Papers were served to Alan Ross and Bill Hargis on Saturday morning at their homes. They could not be found Friday night by our server, an unusual occurrence as they are bar owners. There was even talk around Dallas on Friday to completely call a halt to the entire parade if "those Atheists" got the TRO. However, we knew that was just a bluff since the Tavern Guild would be setting itself up for many lawsuits from the various businesses and organizations signed up to participate.

After some very tense moments of Friday -- almost getting a homophobic Republican judge, not being able to get a bonding company to go the \$5,000 bond ordered by the judge, and literally working against the clock in all areas -- we managed to win this one!

2

Saturday was spent calling "supporters" and members in the Dallas area telling them of our win and asking if they would come out and proudly join us in the march. Two very enthusiastic "supporters" from Fort Worth who encouraged our participation back during the planning stages really let us down by not showing. An excuse of a son showing up on Sunday who had gone with them to last year's parade was given as a possible reason for not coming, and sure enough, these 2 supporters did not even show. You should know, however, that I was invited to their home on Saturday night for one of their regular parties. I did not attend as I had more important duties of which to attend.

Besides Mark

Franceschini, only Jay Campbell, the Director of the American Atheist's Dallas Chapter, and I joined in our march. As a result of his courage and willingness to come to the aid of Atheism, Jay is our ATHEIST OF THE MONTH.

The most discouraging aspect about this whole matter is that Mark and I are willing to put our necks on the line for Atheists' Constitutional rights, drive hundreds of miles, make signs, carry banners, get sneered and booed at, and not one Gay or Lesbian Atheist in the Dallas/Fort Worth area even so much as returned my phone calls or agreed to march with us in a Gay Pride parade! If it were

not for straight people like Jay Campbell, who recognizes a statement for Atheism, regardless of any attached sexual label, we might be ready to throw in the towel. And if it were not for others of you in other cities, some of you who have not even met any one of the Board members of AGA and who do not live in any of the cities in which AGA is actively involved, who send money whenever we need assistance, we would definitely throw in the towel. All I can say to those of you reading this newsletter in Dallas is don't complain to us about the god-damned Metropolitan Community Church playing such a large role in your community's affairs, and don't expect us to come running the next time you have some event in which you'd like our involvement. If we return to Dallas, we'll do so on our own and because we have determined that our activities will be good for the cause. We literally went all out for you on this one, and we have not so much as received a "thank you" from any of you in Dallas. Until I see some real concern on the part of you Dallas "supporters" and members, namely in the form of donations and dues paid on time, you deserve to choke in the vomit of your religiously-saturated Gay/Lesbian community.

MONEY

Of course, as you might imagine, our stand for our Constitutional right to freedom of expression cost us a pretty penny. The attorney represented us,

drew up all the necessary legal documents, and offered counsel for \$1,500.00. The cost of filing the TR0 at the Dallas County Courthouse cost \$281.00, and another \$60.00 went to the person who served the TR0's to the appropriate individuals on Saturday. Ordinarily, a Dallas County constable would have done this job, but they don't work of Saturday.

Signs which read, "AMERICAN GAY ATHEISTS, PROUD AND FREE SINCE '83," cost \$93.00. By the way, we made the signs ourselves from materials bought at Texas Art Supply in Houston. One way plane fare to Dallas on Friday cost \$54.00. It was necessary to rent a hotel room for two nights at \$53.00 a night, as not one Gay Atheist would offer lodging. Each local phone call made from the hotel room to encourage attendance and support for AGA at the march cost \$.50 each. There were a lot of long distance phone bills involving conversations between Alan Ross, Bill Hargis, Wa. Nelson, our attorney, as well as long distance calls while in Dallas to other members and "supporters" in the neighboring city of Fort Worth.

Standing up for Gay Atheist rights cost us over \$2,000.00 and all the bills are not yet in. We weren't kidding when we sent out our emergency letter of a week ago. Most of the money came from the pockets of Don Sanders and Mark Franceschini. At the time