Courage celebrates 'coming out' all week

By Rebecca Flores
Daily Reporter

This week, Courage, the gay and lesbian organization at NT, is hosting Coming Out Week, focusing on educating students about famous gays and lesbians.

Tables set up in the University Union until Thursday display photo albums and newspaper clippings about gay and lesbian groups. Purple Coming Out Week posters around the Union display profiles of famous gays and lesbians.

"We're putting it out there for everyone to see. You have to be in your own little world to miss us," said Courage Vice President Scot Maitland, Plano senior.

Today gays recognize National Coming Out Day. The Oct.11 date was privately declared by Rodney Wilson, a St. Louis history teacher.

Louis started the movement because he failed to find any notable history about gays or lesbians who had contributed to society.

Maitland said, "We're currently trying to educate people. Many great people have been lost to HIV and with them, their history."

Maitland said he's unaware of any organization that seeks to have this day acknowledged as an official national holiday by the government.

"We're working to locally educate people. We hope that colleges and high schools will take up the initiative to educate on it and how it affects them," he said.

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>
> **Scot Maitland**
> Vice President of Courage

This is the second year that gays and lesbians have celebrated their history on Oct. 11.

"There's not a lot of information out there. And there's a lot more to us than just what we do in the bedroom, although that may be what defines us," Maitland said.

Around the country, gays and lesbians celebrated National Coming Out Day on Sunday, although the official day is today.

Texas had the largest festivities, topping New York, San Francisco and Washington D.C., according to reports by the Human Rights Campaign.

North Texans and joined in at the Texas State Fair. Metroplex businesses and organizations donated money and materials for the event called "A Family Outing."

Tom Yates, a Dallas sales manager and National Coming Out Day Committee member said, "It put us in main-stream society, where everyone else was."

Maitland said, "It gave us the freedom to feel like full-class citizens. We don't normally feel that way."

Many gays and lesbians are afraid to freely express their sexual orientation because they're afraid of being physically harmed, Maitland said.

"According to a report in 'Nightline,' eight men were murdered last year just because they were gay," Maitland said.

Human rights campaign leaders took their turn on stage as they spoke about the importance the day. A couple of comedians worked the crowd and were followed by two famous lesbians, Chastity Bono, daughter of singer-actress Cher and U.S. Rep. Sonny Bono, R-Calif. and Candace Gingrich, sister of U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga.

Bono and Gingrich gave their life stories and how they finally made themselves and others acknowledge their sexual orientation differences.

"Many people think we want special rights. We're not seeking affirmative action," Maitland said.