

LGBA prepares to 'come out'

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The Lesbian Gay Bisexual Alliance is naming "National Coming Out Day" as its first major event for the fall. The annual event will promote the gay liberation movement at the University at Buffalo by celebrating and spreading gay awareness.

National Coming Out Day/Gay Jeans Day is Tuesday, October 11. The all-day event will feature a performance by popular Buffalo cross-dresser/drag queen Chevon Davis from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the Student Union lobby. During the day, tables will be set up with information about LGBA; t-shirts and buttons will be on sale. There will also be a window display in the UGL of gay symbols and their meanings.

A social meeting and buffet are scheduled to be held in the evening from 5 to 9 p.m. in room 145B Student Union. Admission is free for UB students and there is a \$2 fee for non-students.

Members of UB's gay, lesbian and bisexual community have strong feelings about the importance of this event.

"National Coming Out Day is a way to reclaim our identities from society. It's our Independence day; It's about being able to recognize, love and accept yourself," said Anders Butler Jr., former president of LGBA.

Coming out

However UB students in general have mixed opinions about National Coming Out Day.

Christine, a UB student, commented, "Why not? It will make people more aware of our society and that it's not just a heterosexual society."

Jason, another UB student, added, "I think the concept of a National Coming Out Day is kind of amusing, because sexuality doesn't exist just for a day, its a lifestyle. You should be aware of who you are all the time and be free to express it. Trying to sup-

press it is trying to avoid nature."

Other students were not as supportive. A UB English major said, "I think its kind of stupid to have a day just to express your sexual orientation."

The concept of Gay Jeans Day is often misunderstood. "Jeans are every day clothes, just as gays, lesbians and bisexuals are out there every day. It is a conscious way of connecting two every day things."

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The display of pink and black balloons can be traced back to World War Two. They represent the pink and black triangular armbands that gays and lesbians, respectively, were required to wear in the Nazi concentration camps.

History

UB's LGBA has its roots in the gay liberation fund which was started on campus in 1970. This was one year after the Stonewall riots which raged on campuses across the country, marking the beginning of the contemporary gay liberation movement.

UB's gay liberation fund was started to spread awareness about gay, lesbian and bisexual issues because the members felt there was a need for open-mindedness. Today's LGBA has the same purpose.

"We are only asking for respect and to be recognized equally as human beings, not as superiors, but certainly not as inferiors," said Butler.

Liberation movement

According to Margaret Cruikshank, an expert on the gay liberation movement, "Before this decade, for most college students, homosexuality was either shrouded in silence or mentioned briefly as a perversion - an illness or threat to society or simply as an embarrassment."

"But today because of the growth of gay liberation and because of AIDS, students are more likely than their counterparts decade ago to understand that gay rights is a major social and political movement and some of them will expect to read about it in college courses," Cruikshank added.

In addition to active promotion of the gay liberation movement, LGBA has made efforts to provide AIDS awareness education for the entire UB community.

"We hand out pamphlets, do AIDS community service and try to spread

gay awareness among students." One type of community service is the residence hall talks.

"We will do a RH talks for anyone, but the frequency is low because many students are resistant to go to an event with the gay stigma. But, they are successful and there will be more in the future," Butler said.

For members of UB's gay and lesbian community, the LGBA provides coming out support groups on a regular basis. These confidential sessions address the same issues that are raised by National Coming Out Day. The coming out support group can be reached at 645-6063.

Discrimination

Homophobic discrimination is not a new issue for gays. The LGBA itself has often encountered homophobic discrimination.

"We are only semi-visible and

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take a back seat in SA and in the community," said LGBA member Jeff Logan.

"Last spring the sports club coordinator wanted to take away the LGBA office and replace it with a smaller one."

Vandalism has also been a perpetual problem. Many members of UB's gay community have faced discrimination and verbal or physical attacks. The LGBA can provide legal aid in such cases.

Cruikshank believes lesbians and gays are hated for several reasons. These reasons included sexual anxiety in puritanical America, needing a scapegoat in times of rapid social change, fear of the unknown, new visibility and perceived power of homosexuals, perceived threat to the nuclear family, and AIDS.

The gay liberation movement has argued for the extension of health insurance coverage to domestic partners as is presently provided for family members. LGBA is hopeful that in the near future UB's student health insurance plan will extend coverage to domestic partners.

"Governor Cuomo has recently signed a bill that will extend to domestic partners, all health coverage presently available to spouses and this should cause changes at UB as well," said Dave Quirolo, LGBA treasurer.

According to a representative of UB's Student Health Insurance Program, "The university has not looked into the exceptions of coverage."

"The fact that they have not yet looked into the problem for gays and lesbians reflects the heterosexual dominance and ignorance," added Butler.

LGBA members also want to see an increase visibility of gays in multiculturalism.

Chris Cheung said, "Homosexuality crosses all races, creeds, and financial groups. At UB the only class concentration on this is 'Women plus Women' offered by the women studies department.

"We need to see more research focused on us in both the social and health sciences."