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Gay and Lesbian Pride Week to celebrate strength, diversity

By Scott Harding
Of the Emerald

There are many signs of University acceptance of gays and lesbians, say leaders of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance. But there also are compelling reasons for the group to hold its annual Gay and Lesbian Pride Week.

"It's sad in a way that we have to have Gay Pride Week," said Leah Juniper, co-director of GALA. Actual and threatened discrimination against gays and lesbians, in housing and employment for example, are primary reasons for such events, she said.

A picnic and potluck at Skinner's Butte Park Sunday marked the start of the weeklong (May 4-11) occasion, which features lectures, an art show, films and panel discussions. Most events will be held on campus.

Juniper likened the gay community's struggle for societal acceptance to the struggle undertaken by blacks and women in their quest for full voting, occupational and social rights. Like the post-war civil rights protests, she said, the gay community also must be vocal.

"You have to make a lot of noise. You have to make people realize the extent of discrimination," she said. "We don't want privileges, we want our rights."

Like other oppressed groups in the United States, gays and lesbians often hold cultural and educational events to focus public attention on their status and the daily prejudice they encounter, she said.

"If we weren't so oppressed, we wouldn't have to be so visible. We're not attempting to alienate the community," Juniper said. Rather, the various events of Gay Pride Week are designed to acknowledge that

Schedule of events

Monday: Rally at 12:30, EMU Courtyard. Panel discussion on "coming out" from 2-4 p.m., EMU Forum Room. Keynote address by Leonard Graff, 7:30 p.m., Room 229 Law Center.

Tuesday: Panel discussions — contact GALA for details.

Wednesday: Free films at 7:30 p.m., Room 123 Science: "Michael: A Gay Son" and "Silent Pioneers." Afternoon panels.

Thursday: Free film "Lianna," 7:30 p.m., Room 150 Geology. Panel discussion.

Friday: Rally at 11:30, EMU Courtyard. Afternoon panels. Pat Bond performs "Beloved Hick" at 8 p.m., EMU Forum Room. Tickets in advance only at EMU Main Desk and Mother Kali's Books.

Saturday: Gay 5-K run, begins 10 a.m. at Celeste Campbell Senior Center. Call GALA to preregister. Dance with TRANSISTER! 9:30-12:30 p.m. at Condon School. \$2 admission.

Sunday: Lesbian and Gay Parents picnic, 12:30 to 3:30 p.m. at Lamb Cottage, Skinner's Butte Park.

Contact GALA at 686-3360, Room 319 EMU, for details about events.

gays and lesbians are more diverse than the images perpetuated by media and cultural stereotypes, she said.

"We're viewed as this homogenous group, which isn't true," she said. For example, political, occupational and cultural preferences are as diverse among gays as they are among "straights," she said. Derogatory images of gays — effeminate men and masculine women — also are superficial, she said.

"All types of people are gay and lesbian," Juniper said.

Gay Pride Week also will serve as a celebration for the Eugene gay community, "so we can gain strength from each other," said Judy Finch, co-director of GALA.

Many of the cultural events are designed to offer support to the gay community by providing a forum to discuss and celebrate the gay lifestyle. GALA is offering the most comprehensive celebration for gays and lesbians in the Eugene area, Juniper said.

"We want to tell gays and lesbians, 'Yes, you have a reason to be proud, there is a reason to celebrate and be strong,'" she said.

Two events of significance are tonight's keynote address by Leonard Graff, director of Gay

Rights Advocates in San Francisco. He is expected to discuss current legal issues affecting gays and lesbians. Friday, May 9, Pat Bond will perform her one-woman show that examines the 40-year relationship between Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena Hickock, the first woman reporter for the Associated Press.

Both activists encouraged all segments of the community to attend. Ideally, they said, the week's activities will have an impact on non-gays by addressing their fears — what is often called "homophobia."

"If we can clear up some myths for people, if we can help educate and dispel some misconceptions, even for one individual, then that's one more person who doesn't laugh at an AIDS joke or believe that lesbians want to be men," Juniper said.

The discussion of social issues related to the gay community, such as AIDS, is intended to improve the dialogue on those subjects, she said. Other scheduled topics — anti-semitism, drug and alcohol abuse, apathy and activism — show the interest and willingness of the gay community to address themes with political significance.

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