

UNIVERSITY

Student to participate in gay forum

U.S.-Soviet symposium targets AIDS, homophobia

By Daralyn Trappe
Emerald Reporter

When Marina Wolf went to the Soviet Union last summer to take part in a study program, she was a lesbian who was not yet out of the closet.

Since then she has come out. She will return there this summer, with a new perspective, to take part in the first U.S.-U.S.S.R. symposium on gay and lesbian issues.

"The first time I went, I wasn't out, so I didn't really pay attention to the cultural issues (and) to gay and lesbian issues," she said.

Wolf, a University student studying Russian, is one of 50 people from the United States who will participate in the International Gay and Lesbian Symposium in Moscow and Leningrad from July 23 to Aug. 1.

The event is sponsored by the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, formed last summer in Moscow.

"It really is the first of its kind between Soviet and American activists," Wolf said. A member of the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Alliance, she applied to go when a notice was sent to that office.

Wolf said she expects homophobia and AIDS to be the main topics of discussion.

"The problem with the Soviet Union is that up until a few years ago they didn't even acknowledge that they had any such thing as a homosexual in their country," Wolf said.

"Even though information has come out that says that they have people with AIDS there, the official state line up until recently is that they don't have gays, they don't have AIDS," she said.

Jim Toevs, co-chairman of IGLHRC and one of the symposium organizers, said AIDS is a serious problem in the Soviet Union.

"They're very much in denial, and the treatment is very primitive," he said. "The social situation and the government approach doesn't encourage people to get tested, and if they do test positive, they're not treated well."

Toevs said societal views of gays and lesbians in the Soviet Union are similar to the attitudes that were prevalent in the United States 50 years



Photo by Andre Kaniere

This summer, University student Marina Wolf will join 50 other people from the United States in attending the first U.S.-U.S.S.R. symposium on gay and lesbian issues.

ago. The political climate is improving somewhat, he said, but economic hardship is the underlying reason the Soviet government is not opposing the conference.

"The Soviet Union is so desperate for currency, they would let the devil himself in if he was going to pay in money," Toevs said.

In addition to providing moral and educational support to the gay and lesbian movement, participants will focus attention on repealing a law in the Russian criminal code that makes sex between men punishable by up to eight years in a labor camp.

"Right now there's a handful of people who are willing to be open, to be out of the closet and work on homophobia issues," Wolf said. "They want to start a movement, and we're going over there in part to give them some of our experiences and share with them ideas for working in an activist role."

Wolf said she is one of a few U.S. students who will be in attendance, and she hopes to focus attention on young people in the U.S.S.R.

"I plan on getting together with the other students who are going and plan out a presentation to the Soviets on ways to organize student groups, because with any liberation movement, the young people are very important and often times get overlooked," she said.

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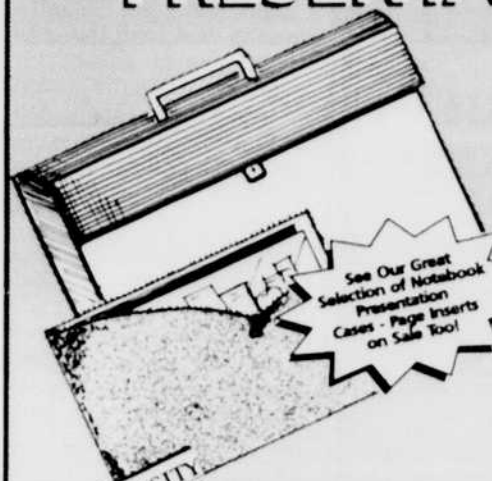
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