



Community Connections

The Newsletter of New Mexico GLBTQ Centers
Spring 2009

LGBT Community Centers Promote Equality

By Katherine Palmer

The necessity for LGBT community centers across New Mexico was never more evident than in the current legislative session. On February 26th, this year's version of the Domestic Partner Rights and Responsibilities Act (SB12) failed to pass the New Mexico State Senate by a vote of 25-17. This was a disappointing day for New Mexicans and a blow to all of us who care about fairness and equality. Even more disappointing, this was the third straight year we have failed to accomplish securing basic equal rights for members of the LGBT community and others who would have benefited from this bill securing equality becoming law.

People will give you reasons why this important legislation continues to fail every year. They include – it's not needed (You can obtain the rights included in the bill already by going to a lawyer), it is limited (It will only be effective in New Mexico and there are still inequities at the federal level) and it will destroy the family and the sanctity of marriage. However, the real and fundamental reason this bill does not become law is because the opposing forces continue to pressure their legislators to vote against it. Despite the lack of rational arguments, they succeed because of their organizational structure across the state.

An analysis of the Senate vote on SB12 shows that 19 of the 25 "No" votes and only 4 of the 17 "Yes" votes came from areas outside Albuquerque, Santa Fe and Las Cruces. In these rural locations the opposition came from organized religion, at every level, who contacted their representatives and demanded they vote "No". Despite efforts by Equality New Mexico and national groups like the ACLU and HRC, our LGBT community was not able to match their efforts.

The reason for their success is simple. In every rural location, they meet daily/weekly in physical locations (churches). They share a common bond and have common goals which are reinforced on a regular basis. They form a defined community dedicated and focused on their common welfare. Politically, they have the ability to utilize their resources and mobilize their constituency because they know them and interact personally.

The tragedy is that the LGBT community has no community. While there may be organizations and events in the major cities like Albuquerque, the only time our

community comes together is at PRIDE celebrations held in major cities within the state. Although these events show solidarity, they do not create commitment. Regrettably, our attendance at the Roundhouse during the legislative session is limited primarily to residents of Albuquerque and Santa Fe and it's too few and too late.

LGBT community centers provide the setting to bring us together. The power to change hearts and minds is in the voice of local individuals and community centers have always played an active role in uniting those voices for change. Centers bring together more LGBT people on a daily basis than any other organization and have the potential to be the voice that legislators hear on issues facing our community. Within our centers, in every town in New Mexico, we can work together on the issues important to our community and plan how to achieve them. We can form defined communities dedicated and focused on our common welfare. By sharing what is happening and working together, we have the ability to mobilize our constituency because we know and interact with them. Politically, we could focus on the legislators within our centers district to let them know we are here and these are the issues we want them to support.

LGBT community centers in states like Colorado, Florida and New York have had success in political activism. Let's add New Mexico and have the members of every LGBT community center continuing the fight for fairness and legal protections for *all* New Mexico families.

Flagship Regional Center To Open In Las Cruces in 2010

By David Stocum

This center will function as the administrative headquarters for the statewide New Mexico GLBTQ Centers, Inc, and the pilot center for program develop for the six regional centers to be created over the coming years.

New Mexico GLBTQ Centers Southern Regional Center will be the first gay and lesbian community center in southern New Mexico.

The previously announced June 2009 opening was postponed due to handicapped accessibility issues with the proposed center building and community concerns regarding sustainability. The Board of Directors decided to return to the originally planned time line and to allow the organizational planning, program development and fund development to be done to insure the sustainability of the centers. Board President Richard Scramstad said, "We were seduced by some opportunities and got away from our original, well thought out, careful planning process." He continued that, "by returning to that process we will have a better center when we do open in the second half of 2010."

New Mexico GLBTQ Centers' vision is for six Regional GLBTQ Community Centers, satellite centers, remote events, mobile outreach to rural areas; quality needs based

programs and services, a New Mexico where EVERYONE is equally respected with a model repeatable in other rural states. This vision supports our mission to reduce homophobia and enrich the lives of individuals living in New Mexico who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning through education, advocacy, support, example and collaboration.

New Mexico GLBTQ Centers is being advised by CenterLink, the national community of LGBT community centers.

Needs Assessment Enters Survey Phase

By David Stocum

The New Mexico GLBTQ Community Needs Assessment has moved into the final data collection phase, an online survey. After conducting several focus groups earlier this year, the main data collection phase of this comprehensive needs assessment began on April 5th.

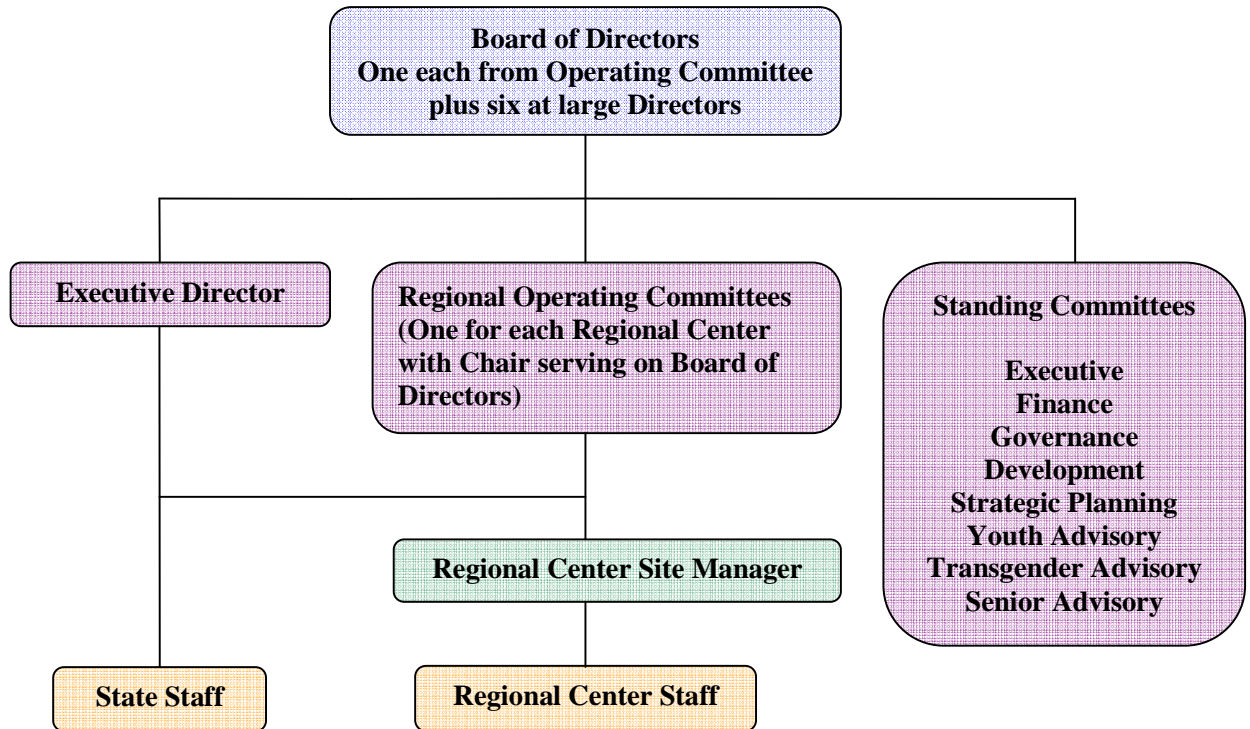
Funded by the Gamma Mu Foundation, The New Mexico GLBTQ Community Needs Assessment is designed to be the first comprehensive look at New Mexico's GLBTQ community. The purpose of the New Mexico GLBTQ Community Needs Assessment is to determine the current state of life for the GLBTQ community of New Mexico, and to assess community attitudes and identify social service, mental and physical health, educational and social needs of the GLBTQ population of the state. The results of this anonymous survey will be used for program development by New Mexico GLBTQ Centers, to educate public policy makers, and to inform and support efforts to reduce homophobia. It will be a baseline for evaluating the progress the community makes toward full equality and quality of life in New Mexico.

Special thanks to Susan S. Turner, LISW, LCSW and Cooper Lee Bombardier who helped make four focus groups possible during the first quarter of 2009. These focus groups provided valuable insight and information used to create the survey instrument being used online to collect data on the community's needs.

The data collection phase will last through the Pride events in June. You may participate by completing the survey at <http://NMglbtqCenters.needs.sgizmo.com>. The survey is completely anonymous and results will only be reported collectively as totals of the responses received. At no time will you be asked to give personally identifying information and no individual responses will be reported.

Findings will be released later this year in a series of town hall meetings and shared with other GLBTQ and ally organizations. New Mexico GLBTQ Centers will also give each member of the New Mexico House and Senate a copy of the final report.

New Mexico GLBTQ Centers Organizational Chart



Stronger Organizational Structure Developing

By Richard Scramstad

Earlier this year during the attempt to open our flagship center in June 2009 the Las Cruces GLBTQ community voiced some valid concerns about the sustainability of New Mexico GLBTQ Centers. Those questions and others are being used by the Board of Directors to create a stronger organizational structure to ensure the longevity of the organization. The organizational chart above reflects the current thinking of the board and will be gradually built out from a six or seven member B of D and one ROC to a full board of 12 and six Regional Operating Committees over the next several years.

As Board President I am currently having discussions with several possible board members in Las Cruces, Albuquerque, Santa fe and a couple of other parts of the state. The goal is to have the Board of Directors' six at large seats fill by June's Pride events.

Once the board is complete the new board will be tasked with reviewing and revising as needed the By-laws, our current Business Plan and creating a process to create from the business plan a Strategic Plan. The new board will also review the Regional Operating Committee structure created based on the Las Cruces feedback and reactivate the Southern New Mexico ROC to begin planning for the opening of the Southern Regional Center in Las Cruces in 2010.

We are still seeking candidates for the Board of Directors if you are interested or know someone who might be contact me at president@newmexicoglbtcntrs.org.

Just Over The Horizon (things we are working on as coming attractions)

We hope to announce a new member benefit plan that individuals can take advantage of immediately upon joining. These benefits will be available statewide and not dependent on a regional center being open.

NM Centers is working with a group from Colorado to bring a successful program geared toward rural gay and bisexual men to New Mexico in early 2010. It would be our first non-center based statewide program.

Needs Assessment results presented at Town Hall meetings starting later this summer or early fall.

If you received this newsletter from a friend or in hard copy format we invite you to join our email list at www.newmexicoglbtcntrs.org to get the latest information about NM Centers first.

Thank you for your support of New Mexico GLBTQ Centers