

** From the May 2003 issue of “Greater Cincinnati GLBT News”: **

Cincinnati’s First Pride Parade

by Bruce Beisner

Thirty years ago last month, gay and lesbian Cincinnatians held their very first Pride Parade. Over the past 3 decades, the event has grown, declined, disappeared, and been reborn. As you march with thousands of other people this June, remember that it all started with a little noticed, but very important, happening back in April of 1973.

Following the Stonewall Riots and the growth of the anti-Vietnam War movement, “hippie” culture began to strongly take hold in the Cincinnati area in the early 1970s. Out of this “leftist” and “druggie” crowd came the city’s first gay organization. The Cincinnati Gay Community, or CGC, was established in 1972 by a small group of die hard activists. Among the founding members were Michael Weyand, Terry Flanigan, Carol Kipp, Dick Jasinski, Ronald Carter and Jack Ferguson.

The CGC advertised in the University of Cincinnati’s newspaper and soon had over 200 people attending their regular meetings, which were held at St. John’s Unitarian Church. The group was made up of mostly gay white males many of whom were college students, although a handful of women and African Americans became involved. CGC sponsored theater productions and social activities and sent speakers to sexuality education classes at UC and Miami University. About a year after it was founded, the leadership of CGC decided to build on their successes with a Pride Celebration on April 6, 7 and 8, 1973 which would include a parade.

The first ever Cincinnati Pride Celebration began on Friday night with a spaghetti dinner at St. John's Unitarian Church that was attended by over 150 people. Following a brunch on Saturday morning at the popular gay dance club Badlands, the first Pride parade stepped off from Washington Square Park in Over the Rhine. Having secured a parade permit, about 70 people marched with signs and banners through downtown to Fountain Square.

In a 1986 presentation to the UC Gay Academic Union, Terry Flanigan recalled that “there was much heckling along the route,” and that “while press releases were sent to all the local media, only WCPO- Channel 9 covered the event, and their coverage was very brief and really didn't capture the spirit of the day at all.”

Following the parade there was a rally on Fountain Square which featured live music, political speakers, and several theatrical skits.

Although privately a friend of many gays, Cincinnati Mayor Theodore Berry, the city’s first African American mayor, refused to publicly issue a proclamation of this first Gay Pride Day. It would be years before the event would receive official recognition from the City government.

On April 15, 1973, gay and lesbian activists held their first “Red Shirt Day” at the Kings Island amusement park. On May 8 of that same year, about 150 people participated in the first state wide Pride march in Columbus.

Despite the success of Cincinnati's first Pride Parade, the CGC fell apart amid heated disagreements only a month later.

Center note: By the mid 1980s Pride was organized by the Greater Cincinnati Gay & Lesbian Coalition (GCGLC). In 1993, GCGLC became the Gay & Lesbian Community Center of Greater Cincinnati, now located in Northside and online at cincyglbt.com.

Pride continued under the mantle of the Center from 1993 through 1995 but Cincinnati's passage of notoriously anti-gay Issue 3 (Article 12) in November 1993 had a chilling effect on the local Gay & Lesbian community activism. Small Pride events were held locally during 1996, 1997, 1998 and 1999, including a Pride Festival at Lunken Playfield in Mt. Washington, but no Gay Pride Parades. Attempting to provide Gay & Lesbian visibility in Cincinnati during the traditional Pride season, the Center continued to sponsor "Aware on the Square" every June.