Gay politics emerging, rally told
By Renee Graham

Unless local and national politicians make legislative steps for the passage of gay rights laws, they won't be receiving support from the folks in the homosexual community.

About 100 members of Syracuse's gay/lesbian community and their supporters cheered and applauded that message as they gathered at Columbus Circle Sunday for "Syracuse Pride '85," one of the final events of the local Gay/Lesbian Pride Week.

The rally, which commemorated the birth of the modern gay rights movement 16 years ago, came one day after George C. Worthley, R-Fayetteville, stated at a town meeting Saturday that homosexuals don't belong in public schools as educators.

"There's going to be a lot of deal making out there," said Harry Freeman-Jones, chairman of the Outreach Committee for the Gay/Lesbian Conference of Syracuse.

"You consider anti-discrimination laws for gay men and women and we'll consider signing your petitions. You consider the laws to protect jobs and housing for homosexuals and we'll consider giving you our votes during the elections."

"Don't forget how many of us are out here," said the local gay rights activist.

Lou Rattener, Worthley's press secretary in Washington, D.C., said the congressman released this statement today:

"Generally speaking, sexual preference should not be a barrier to a job, but I would prefer that homosexuals not be in day-to-day situations with impressionable young people in private or public schools, nor in positions of national security."

Syracuse Pride Week, which will be celebrated with parades and rallies across the nation this week, began after the "The Stonewall Rebellion" on June 27, 1969, in New York City's Greenwich Village, which has a large gay population.

During a police raid of the Stonewall Inn, angry patrons fought back, resisting arrest and intimidation for the first time.

A schoolteacher from the Syracuse area marches in the gay rally Sunday at Columbus Circle.

Gay politics emerging, those at rally told

The National Gay Task Force estimates every city's gay community as 10 percent of the overall population. In Syracuse, that figure would add up to between 25,000 and 30,000 gay men and women.

Many of those gay pride day and "Don't presume I'm straight" buttons at Syracuse's first outdoor gay pride rally, you just get tired of hiding, and you want to be in the world like everyone else," said Donna Morris of the North Side neighborhood.

"I'm a person demanding my rights, like everyone else. And if the leaders don't know I'm here, then I can't expect to get my rights."

Others spoke up for their rights by emphasizing their invisibility. Some faces were covered by bandanas and kerchiefs. One man donned a brown paper bag over his head secured with a necktie to symbolize the inability to be open about his homosexuality.

"I have to protect my identity because there are many people who don't want homosexuals teaching in schools," he said. The man, who wore the sign, "Support Gay Teachers Everywhere," teaches young children in a local school system.

"I hope that acts such as mine will force the legislators to change the laws," he said. "Then maybe I'll be able to be open about my homosexuality."

"Congressmen Wortley says he admits that he needs educating on the gay community, but he certainly doesn't want gays and lesbians teaching in schools," Freeman-Jones said. "If he doesn't want gay men and women in the schools, then he doesn't want Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, Tennessee Williams, Cole Porter, Noel Coward or Leonardo Da Vinci in the schools."

Standing in Columbus Circle, in the midst of the Onondaga County Courthouse and some downtown churches, Freeman-Jones also condemned churches that have dismissed homosexuality as a sin against man and God.

"The churches have played around too long," he said. "They don't know the damage they've caused to homosexuals. Every time a church leader mentions a reference to homosexuality as a sin against man and God."

"We have to sit with our people, and try to pull them through the crises they are dealing with because of these so-called 'religious statements,'" Freeman-Jones said. "Any institution that denies your right to love another person doesn't deserve another dime from your pockets or another moments of your time. Our people have been crippled long enough."

Freeman-Jones hopes the tide is changing for homosexuals in Syracuse. He envisions more political pressure from his community and encouraged gay men and women not at the rally to do their part to further equality for homosexuals.

"I appeal to the people, who have not come out here today, to act in some fashion," he said. "Write to your congressmen and representatives and let them know that gay men and women are tired of oppression and demand their rights."

"We cannot continue to be faceless nobodies without a voice," he said. "As persons of faith and conscience, we can't wait any longer."
Some of the 100 men and women attending a Gay Pride rally in Syracuse Sunday respond to a speech by Harry Freeman-Jones.

By CAROL L. CLEAVELAND

Karen and Rita have a routine they go through every time a heterosexual steps by for a visit. It's called "straightening up" the apartment — hiding the gay books, records and posters, and making sure the bed in the extra room looks slept in.

"If you want to have a fight, you go sit in your parked car so that the neighbors won't hear it," said Karen, a 25-year-old Syracuse who works downtown, who for the last year has lived with a woman she met at the 1984 Empire State Gay Games.

Karen and her lover, Rita, both asked that their real names not be used. They are afraid their families will discover them, and that they could lose their jobs if their employers discover they are lesbians.

"I'm an honest person, but it's the one thing I have to lie about," Karen said.

She's known she was gay since age 16, when she and her high school best friend began having a sexual relationship that lasted close to a year. In those days, she knew no other lesbians. She had no one to talk to. The other girls on her track team made "Debbie Fike" jokes in her presence.

But things are better now, Karen said. By playing sports on several predominately gay teams andarts teams and athletics a

Freeman-Jones was too busy.

This man's face got red and his eyes watered. He slammed his fist on the table and said he wouldn't save me anymore," Freeman-Jones said. Freeman-Jones' initial reaction was, "Oh my God, that's sick. I was disgusted by it." Freeman-Jones entered Boston University's School of Theology in 1988. He became involved in the anti-war movement and began to scrutinize social mores in ways he hadn't before. One day, his friend Bob Jones pulled him aside and confided that he was gay. This time, Freeman-Jones' reaction was sympathy instead of disgust.

"I heard the comments that people were making, like, 'If he ever makes a move toward me, I'll punch his face in.' That really made me sick, hearing that from educated seminarians," he said.

One year later, Freeman-Jones found himself telling his friend that he loved him.

A Gay Marriage

They announced their love to all of Boston in 1974, when they participated in a marriage ceremony that made the front page of the Boston Globe. They were photographed kissing. The Methodist minister who performed the ceremony was fired for his conduct.

During their three years, they lived in a moral community. Freeman-Jones said, "One of the neighbors who had been his best friend was full of lesbians," Mischel said.

On a few occasions, the neighborhood kids stood on the fence, anti-gay slogans in the dirt on his car seat. On summer days they ran up to the screen door and shouted, "Is this the queer factory?" Freeman-Jones, now a member of the was homosexual at a time when there was virtually no support for anyone making that choice. It was dreadful," said Jenny, who asked not to be identified by her real name. "I lived in Boston at the time and there was no such thing as a women's bar.

Role Playing

The sole gathering places were bars in which men and women stood on opposite sides of the room. People of the same sex weren't allowed to dance with each other or hold hands.

Michele, a health professional who was afraid to be identified for fear of losing her job, moved into an apartment that she had lived in several years ago. Again, she and her lover made the papers.

"I'm your lover, on a job. People there knew she was a lesbian," Michele said. "One of the neighborhood boys who had been his best friend was full of lesbians," Mischel said.

On a few occasions, the neighborhood kids stood on the fence, anti-gay slogans in the dirt on his car seat. On summer days they ran up to the screen door and shouted, "Is this the queer factory?"

Eventually she drifted out of that community and married a man she had had a few homosexual experiences himself. The marriage grew stale, and in the "70s, Jenny left her husband and returned to the women's community. Her children, who were ages 4 and 6, went with her.

"They just kind of grew up with it," she said. "It's never been a big deal. They always knew it was there."

Seeing to Fit In

As a child, after befriending two men, Jan Phillips decided she wanted to enter the convent. Her parents were Republicans who lived by a home rule that religion, politics, and sex were not to be discussed.

Phillips attended school at St. Anthony's of Padua and joined a high school religion class. She had a boyfriend, "because you needed a date," but she was attracted to her sexuality. She did not want to "lose my girlfriends," she said. "My boyfriend always asked me why I was gay in a positive light. Feminist music by such artists as Holly Near was now sold at many record stores.

These days, Jenny said, lesbians "come out in a warm, caring community."

Jim, a 36-year-old gay from a large East Coast city, said that it wasn't difficult to make friends in Syracuse's gay community when he moved here several years ago.

"It's a small community in a small town," he said. "I was able to find a house to share with other gay men, and that makes life a lot easier."

Still, he said, gays in Syracuse need other gathering places besides bars.

There is no gay restaurant in Syracuse and that's a shame. It's sad because that's another healthy environment where people could meet and be together," he said.
ceived the marriage proposal in the mid-1970s, when she was 22. She was surprised by the proposal and initially didn’t think she could be married to a woman, but she later changed her mind and accepted the proposal.

She credits her family for their support and encouragement, and she says that her parents never discouraged her from pursuing her dreams. She also says that she was lucky to have a community of friends and colleagues who supported her throughout her journey.

She is currently working as a consultant for a local non-profit organization, helping to develop programs and initiatives to promote gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights. She says that she is glad to be able to give back to the community that supported her and to help others who may be facing similar challenges.

She says that her family and community continue to be a source of strength and inspiration for her, and she hopes to continue to be an advocate for LGBTQ+ rights and gender equality for many years to come.
Gay Pride Rally Defies Ruling on City Permit

By ERENDA CAWTHON

The Gay/Lesbian Pride Rally went off Sunday without a hitch — and without a city permit.

More than 100 gay men and lesbian women gathered at Columbus Circle in defiance of a federal court ruling that allowed the Gay/Lesbian Conference of Syracuse and the Greater Syracuse Chapter of the National Organization for Women to hold rallies in the circle, but only if they signed a modified waiver accepting liability for accidents caused by their own negligence.

The two groups took the city to court last week after the Department of Parks and Recreation refused to grant them permission to use the park unless they purchased $1 million worth of insurance coverage — at a cost of more than $1,000 — or accepted liability for all accidents, even those caused by the city’s negligence.

Leaders of the conference claimed the city’s request was a violation of their First Amendment right of free speech.

Shortly before the rally began Sunday, a police car drove slowly around the circle. Captain Frank Sardino was on hand to observe the crowd, but he refused to disclose what instructions he may have received from Police Chief Leigh F. Hunt.

Preparing for the worst, Gay/Lesbian Conference officials instructed supporters on passive-resistance techniques.

"If the police begin making arrests, just go limp," one official told rally marshals, who wore lavender arm bands. "Do not fight or curse; do not resist."

But police did not interfere as William Dowsett, president of the conference, and Joanne Staunton, a member, stood at a makeshift podium and declared "Gay and Lesbian Pride Day," part of a week that has been celebrated in most major metropolitan areas since 1973.

The Rev. Betty Bone Schissel, an Episcopal priest and feminist, offered a prayer for compassion "for those who still don’t understand."

A few men and women in the crowd, who wore paper-bag masks to avoid identification, stood as silent reminders of the closeted lives of many gay men.

One man wore a bag urging the children to "support gay teachers."

A woman who'd drawn a face on her bag said she came to the rally — even under the threat of arrest — "because I feel this is an important statement for gay people to make. We belong here like everyone else. I think this is an effort on the part of city government to ignore us."

"The woman said she was hiding her face "because my father doesn't know yet, and this is not a good way for him to find out."

Speaker Jan Phillips, a member of Syracuse Cultural Workers, told the crowd that although she "came out" in 1973 and frequently discusses her lifestyle with others, "I hear from lesbians in the community, 'I don't dare come out. They are afraid to share information with the people in their lives because of the consequences."

Phillips urged gay men and women to stop hiding their sexuality even though, she said, gays are regularly attacked "and it's a matter of life and death. Am I safe? Can I walk down the street if I'm a gay man or woman?"

She said it's time for gays "to not be afraid anymore that we will lose our jobs by coming out. I think it's time that we take some risks. That's what I'm here to encourage people to do."

Harry Freeman-Jones, a past president of the conference and a longtime advocate of gay rights, issued a call for political action that drew enthusiastic cheers.

"Let no candidate assume that he or she has the support of this (gay) community automatically without affirming a commitment to gay rights."

— Harry Freeman-Jones

The Rev. Betty Bone Schissel and two masked demonstrators join in the Gay/Lesbian Pride Rally at Columbus Circle.

LESBIAN

AND PROUD

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Cherie Ackerson of Syracuse at Sunday's rally.