

Condoms No Longer Available in Many Bars

Different Groups Believe Different Tactics are More Successful

By Michael James

Several members of the community have realized that several bars and nightclubs in the Fort Lauderdale area are no longer allowing free condoms through their doors.

Eston Dunn of the Gay and Lesbian Community Center stated that they have provided free condoms to area businesses for many years. He said, "We're having a difficult time getting them into bars these days."

Local health educator Dr. Steve Fallon, of Skills 4 Life, has been active in condom distribution programs for several years. One of the programs he directed distributed over 22,000 condoms to gay men each year in what he terms "one-to-one" condom distribution. He said, "Whenever possible, one-on-one condom distribution at bar entrances is preferable to static condom 'candy jars.'"

Fallon continued, "Most of the bar and nightclub owners were amenable to allowing the outreach workers at their doors. In fact, only one club refused to ever allow the outreach." However, that attitude seems to have changed.

Wayne Galbreath, Community Outreach Coordinator for the GLCC stated,

"We're having a difficult time getting condoms into some bars." He went on to stress the importance of condom usage and said, "At one time HIV and AIDS was the focal point of conversation within the gay community. Now it is being swept under the rug [due to complacency]."

It has been stated by several other members of the awareness community that bar owners and managers say the presence of condoms within their establishments "breaks the mood."

Dr. Fallon said, "It's true that bar owners are rarely as proactive as we in the HIV prevention community would like." He went on to say, "Maybe the bars feel that if their patrons are thinking 'safer sex' then they won't drink as much than if they weren't."

The Center for Disease Control reports that sexual negotiations rarely pivot on the simple availability of a condom. According to the published materials of Francoise Kessler, PhD, only 17% of those who admitted to engaging in risky sex did so because there were no condoms immediately available.

Dr. Fallon stated that condom distribution programs serve a far more

crucial role in establishing the norms of behavior for a community. He said, "If a community lacks a visible condom distribution program, gay men take more risks because they get the impression that HIV must not be a big deal anymore. I don't think a candy dish full of condoms promotes safer sex. We have found that one-to-one distribution is much more effective." One-to-one distribution is done by standing outside of the bar and handing a condom to each person that leaves.

Dr. Helene Gayle, director of the National Center for HIV, STD, and TB Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention told hivplusmag.com, "Ironically, new treatments mean more, not less, need for prevention," explaining that more people living longer means more people around who can spread the virus. And if HIV prevention is to mean anything in this new era, it needs to move beyond "Always Use a Condom" or "Just Say No" sloganeering and examine what induces people to practice unsafe sex in the first place.

With the lack of reminders of the disease no longer visible in urban gay

neighborhoods, "many gay men no longer see HIV as a serious disease," says Thomas Coates, director of the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies at the University of California at San Francisco. "It's a combination of things—the success of the new drugs, as well as where we are in the epidemic. People are pretty weary, and just want it to be over."

On a positive note, Dunn said, "The guesthouses, such as the Royal Palms and the Cabanas have been wonderful on the condom issue. The guesthouses have been pro-active and have really taken the lead."

Stress the importance of condom use, Galbreath said, "It is important to use condoms when you're going home on a short term situation or anytime you have sex. Think of yourself and think of your partner."

Dr. Fallon concluded by stating that the best way to reduce the spread of HIV within the younger members of the community was through new educational strategies. His future efforts will focus on those under 30, stating, "If we educate the younger crowd before risky behaviors become habits, then maybe we can make a difference."



Students' Appeal for Safe Schools Prompt Action

Local Legislatures Announce New Bill to Stop Gay Harassment

With national attention focused on the escalating harassment and violence occurring on school campuses, students, parents, educators and youth advocates are applauding Thursday's announcement that a new bill will be introduced in the Florida legislature next year.

Sen. Walter "Skip" Campbell, D-Tamarac, and State Rep. Ken Gottlieb, D-Miramar made the announcement about sponsoring the safe schools bill in front of the House chambers, they were joined by students, parents, educators, and members of the clergy.

Presently, there are no Florida laws that protect students from this kind of bias-based harassment, and educators say they lack the training and clear legal guidance necessary to address the problem.

"When we speak of harassment and violence on school campuses, we are not talking about occasional teasing that all

students experience," said Nadine Smith, Director of Equality Florida. "We are talking about the relentless and degrading harassment that destroys a safe learning environment. The Florida Dignity For All Students bill gives our state the tools to create safe schools."



Sen. Walter Campbell

The announcement came just a week after Equality Florida's Youth Lobby Day in Tallahassee. Organized by youth, the event drew 80 young people, primarily students, from across the state to urge the introduction of such a measure.

"Schools aren't safe for LGBT youth," said Chris Vasquez, a senior at Edgewater High School who attended the Youth Lobby Day. "We went to Tallahassee to share our stories and spread that message. I am very happy that legislators have shown a commitment to Florida's youth and taken action."

Vasquez is one of the students present when Rep. Allen Trovillion, R-Winter Park, said that God was going to destroy them.

On Thursday, April 19, legislatures responded to such student harassment by announcing the sponsorship of a bill that would establish legal protection from bias-based harassment and violence for all students, as well as provide training and education to teachers and administrators in order to help them properly address the problem on school campuses.

A third component of the act would provide statewide data collection and documentation of the climate in Florida schools, so problem areas and incidents could be well documented.

Representative Gottlieb said that passing such legislation would "help reduce the problems of unchallenged harassment and increased violence in our schools

directed towards those in the sexual minority—those who are or perceived to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual, or students whose gender or expression identity do not conform to the expectations of others."

National studies reveal that nearly seventy percent of LGBT students report verbal, sexual or physical harassment and the average high school student hears anti-gay slurs 25 times a day. By passing the safe schools bill, the legislature can make schools "harassment free zones."

"This is an important step," said Rachyl Carey, a transgender student who was withdrawn from a Pinellas County high school because her mother feared for her safety. "All students need protection. All students deserve to be safe at school."

Gottlieb said, "Over the next year, I intend to reach out to Republicans and Democrats alike to urge their support of this bill."



Rep. Ken Gottlieb

Linda Jean Oliver
Michael J. Oliver
The Oliver Insurance Group

Allstate Insurance Company
1040 Bayview Dr., Suite 130
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33304-2532

Phone: 954.565.3100
Fax: 954.561.0544
Email: a097201@allstate.com
Email: a014934@allstate.com

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Cell: (954) 881-3117
shirespics@aol.com
http://shiresphoto.8m.com

Jack A. Fleischman, Attorney
FLEISCHMAN & FLEISCHMAN, P.A.
Criminal Defense
Trials & Appeals

2875 S. Ocean Boulevard Suite 104 Palm Beach, FL 33480 24 Hours (561) 585-3666

800 E. Broward Blvd. Suite 310 Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33301 24 Hours (954) 523-7223

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Poinsettia Press

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