

Lies!, Lies!, and More Lies!

'HELPS' Ministry Acknowledges Concealing 'Help' From Others To Fund Anti-Gay Drive

By Ron Gunzburger

A local Religious Right non-profit group — HELPS Ministries of Broward — now admits that it engaged in a campaign financing scheme that helped hide the identity of the true donors who gave \$100,000 to the anti-gay Equal Rights Not Special Rights (ERNSR) political committee. ERNSR led the recently failed effort to repeal the sexual orientation provision of Broward County's Human Rights Ordinance.

As first exclusively documented in the October 22 issue of *The Express*, HELPS Ministries of Broward was seemingly used as a "pass-through" to hide the actual source of \$100,000 made in direct monetary and in-kind contributions to ERNSR.

HELPS Ministries has "helped hundreds of men and hundreds of children through the various ministries," explained Pastor Mark Davis of HELPS Ministries, in an email to *The Express*.

"HELPS is a separate not-for-profit corporation that rents space from Calvary Chapel, receives some support from Calvary Chapel, and provides some ministry services for Calvary Chapel," continued Davis, who also serves as Administrator of Calvary Chapel, a large fundamentalist church in Fort Lauderdale.

According to official records maintained by the Florida Secretary of State, Davis is Director/Officer and Registered Agent for HELPS Ministries. Despite his apparent authority as leader of the organization, Davis wrote that his comments were, "My opinion and not necessarily any official position for the Church or HELPS."



Pastor Mark Davis

"As a Church, we have attempted to steer away from political issues that only alienate and divide the community but we do take a stand on moral issues," explained Davis.

Davis admitted that the \$100,000 that HELPS Ministries contributed to ERNSR came from contributions given to HELPS Ministries expressly for the purpose of being passed on to or expended on behalf of ERNSR. HELPS Ministries "was the entity that received \$100,000 in designated gifts from local people who live in Broward County with a desire to support the Equal Rights [Committee]," stated Davis.

Davis would not identify the person or persons who contributed the \$100,000 to HELPS Ministries and earmarked it for the ERNSR campaign.

"None of this money was from out of state and we were legally required by the donor restrictions to use the funds to help the Equal Rights [Committee]," Davis continued. "None of this money was from the normal operating budget of HELPS or from Calvary Chapel. It was received as a designated gift."

"You cannot do that," said Phyllis Hampton, General Counsel of the Florida Elections Commission. Hampton explained that Florida law prohibits pass-through contributions. "A person or entity cannot give a contribution to a political committee in the name of another," she added.

Florida Statute 106.08(5) states that a "person may not make any contribution through or in the name of another, directly or indirectly, in any election." Violation of that law in the form of two or more contributions is

a third-degree felony. HELPS Ministries made six separate contributions to or on behalf of ERNSR, according to ERNSR's financial reports.

The law also states that anyone who "aids, abets, advises, or participates in a violation" of 106.08(5) is also guilty of a third degree felony. A third degree felony is punishable by up to five years in state prison.

Pursuant to another state law, it is also a first-degree misdemeanor if ERNSR filed financial disclosure reports that knowingly misrepresented the actual source of the contributions.

Non-profit organizations are also generally prohibited from contributing money to registered political committees. By contributing money to a political committee, a non-profit group risks losing its federal tax-exempt status.

Davis insisted the funding scheme was lawful: "We had a legal review of the law and have been advised that receiving donations for an issue campaign is quite a bit different from an election. We are not allowed by law to assist in an election but we can assist in an issue."

Davis indirectly confirmed what a confidential source told to *The Express*: that it was apparently a subtle power struggle within the anti-gay movement that brought about this campaign financing scheme.

"The main reason for the designated donation was to allow us to oversee the expenditures and make them as needed rather than giving all of the money to Equal Rights in one shot. The donors involved had a greater trust level with us and wanted to make sure the money was spent on a local effort and

not on a national effort," explained Davis.

The source, who was associated with ERNSR, stated that the money to ERNSR was supposed to be passed through HELPS Ministries because the real donors "didn't trust [Center for Reclaiming America President] Janet Folger to know how to spend it right in a campaign." Folger, who is affiliated with Dr. James Kennedy's Coral Ridge Ministries, was a founder and strategist for the ERNSR campaign.

HELPS Ministries spent the bulk of the \$100,000 in the form of in-kind contributions used to directly pay the costs to the California firm hired by ERNSR to manage the Broward petition drive.

According to Hampton, the Florida Elections Commission "cannot initiate an investigation until [it] receives a sworn complaint" alleging a violation of either Chapter 104 or Chapter 106 of the Florida Statutes.

Leaders of the opposition Americans for Equality-Empower Broward group say they will demand that state and local law enforcement authorities investigate these purported illegal actions.

"We plan to look into this and take appropriate action with the proper government enforcement agencies," said attorney Robin Bodiford, Chair of Americans for Equality-Empower Broward. "Our supporters had nothing to hide and we lawfully disclosed the names of all of our contributors. It is simply outrageous that our opponents apparently felt compelled to engage in deceptive tactics to hide the source of their campaign financing."



Robin Bodiford

PWAC Elects New President

The Unsung Heroes Awards Follow Election

By Michael James

At a special session on Wednesday, October 24, the full membership of the People with AIDS Coalition of Broward County (PWAC) met and elected Greg Scott as the organization's new president. If not for a single write-in vote his election would have been unanimous.

An experienced activist, writer and community leader, Scott pledged to revive the organization's membership, which has suffered over the past few years.

Scott said, "First and foremost, the directors and I believe we must assure the coalition meets the needs of its current members." He went on to state that PWAC was the best equipped local organization to

address the needs of "lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered residents of all colors and backgrounds — a population disproportionately affected by HIV even as we mark dramatic changes in what we call the Face of AIDS."



Greg Scott

PWAC board chairperson Nick Trivisonno stated that recent challenges have aided in strengthening the organization and revitalizing their mission. He said, "Although we're now entering a new phase in planning and board development, self-empowerment, advocacy and healing remain the three mainstays of this coalition's mission."

The special election was held after long-

time president Samantha Kuryla unexpectedly resign last month citing personal reasons.

The announcement came almost two weeks before yesterday's Unsung Heroes Awards Dinner and Art Auction. The annual gala is designed to honor "the frontline soldiers in the ongoing war against AIDS."

The same evening Scott was announced as the coalition's president, the directors announced the winners of the awards. The winners included: Joey Wynn of the Broward County Health Department as the PWA advocate of the year, Dr. Margaret Gorenssek of Cleveland clinic as Medical Professional of the Year, Dan Romaniello of CenterOne as Service Provider of the Year, and Winston Christian of Poverello and CenterOne as Volunteer of the Year.

Event chair Bob Rosenthal said, "It wasn't easy to choose four individuals from dozens

of deserving nominees, but these few did stand out."

The recipients received their awards on Sunday, November 4 at the Signature Grande Hotel in Davie during the Unsung Heroes Awards Dinner. The event, which was hosted by Rev. Gail Tapscott, featured Broward County Commissioner Ben Graber, MD as the keynote speaker.

Rosenthal said of all the nominees, "They are all people who've exceeded the expectations of those who rely on them, surpassed every standard required of them and demonstrated incomparable compassion to all who came to them."

Speaking of the coalition's current state and immediate future, Trivisonno concluded, "Recent challenges suggest we will only regain our full voice if we remember who we represent best."

Face to Face Will Feature Forum With Express Publisher

'Gay Businesses and Straight Dollars' Will Be Focus of Talk

By Michael James

The Express Publisher, Norm Kent, will be the guest speaker at the next 'Face to Face' Seminar at the Bank of America Tower in Downtown Fort Lauderdale, on Thursday, November 15, at 6 p.m.

Kent will deliver a talk about the gay business and financial community in South Florida, entitled "Gay Businesses and Straight Dollars," addressing the concerns many have in light of declining tourism and diminished revenues after the September 11 attacks against America. As *The Express* moves toward its third anniversary in January 2002, it has become the largest gay and lesbian newspaper in the state of Florida, frequently recognized in national publications.

A 1975 Hofstra University School of Law graduate, and attorney who has been

practicing in the field of constitutional rights and criminal defense for over 20 years, it was Kent who successfully pioneered the medical necessity defense in Florida for AIDS and cancer patients who sought to smoke marijuana legally. As a recovering cancer patient, he himself became a strident advocate for the medicinal use of marijuana, and now serves on the Board of Directors of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws.

A sports enthusiast whose book, *Baseball and Chocolate*, will be published early next year, Kent has also legally prosecuted class action suits preventing mistreatment of juveniles in detention centers and successfully challenged the unlawful arrests of gay men on solicitation charges.

Kent has also served as a Broward County Magistrate, and on the Board of Directors of the Starting Place, a teenage drug program, and Center One.

From 1989 -1996 he hosted his own morning drive talk radio show in South Florida, and currently operates Talent Management Associates for celebrity clients under his agency representation. His clients include Neil Rogers, Howard Finkelstein, Phil Hendrie, Al Rantel and Weaver the Weatherman.

Face-to-Face Florida, a professional networking group in Greater Fort Lauderdale, meets on the fourth Thursday of every month. A cocktail reception will begin at 6 pm, which

precedes the speaker's address at 7 pm., and the evening is concluded at 8 pm with questions from the audience.

The November 15 event will be held in the first floor conference room at the Bank of America Tower in Downtown Fort Lauderdale at 1 Financial Plaza. Free parking is available on the east side of the building, adjacent to the entrance.

Membership is not required to attend the event and guests are welcome. Annual membership to Face-to-Face Florida is \$55. Membership is predominantly gay, but all are welcome regardless of sexual orientation. Guests can attend for \$20, which includes drinks and hors d'oeuvres. Contact billylooper@bellsouth.net for more information or call him at 557.6990.



Norm Kent

