GLBT group reaches families

Northeast Missouri chapter of PFLAG hopes it will promote family acceptance

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Staff Reporter

A University professor and a La Plata resident have formed a local chapter of a national gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered organization.

“It was just a needed group for the area,” said Sherri Palmer, professor of psychology, about the new northeast Missouri chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), which also includes bisexual and transgendered persons.

Palmer, who has a lesbian daughter, is a member of the nationwide PFLAG. She tried to form a local chapter, but PFLAG regulations said she couldn’t until she recruited a co-founder.

La Plata resident Richard Rankin, who has three daughters, one of whom is bisexual, drove to Columbia regularly to attend PFLAG meetings.

When Rankin discovered Palmer was interested in forming a new PFLAG chapter, he contacted her through e-mail. “That’s a stack of forms, let’s just go through them,” Palmer said.

Although Palmer and Rankin have been communicating for about six weeks, they are just beginning to see results.

The chapter’s first meeting was Sept. 14, and about 15 people showed up. Palmer said it was a good turnout considering the meeting conflicted with a University guest speaker.

Palmer said she expects more people to come to future meetings.

Meetings will be from 7 to 9 p.m. the second Thursday of every month at Trinity Episcopal Church.

Rankin also conducted an interview with KTVO that will run Sept. 25 and Oct. 11.

On Oct. 11, National Coming Out Day, the chapter will also run an ad in the Index and in a local newspaper.

“We hope to use National Coming Out Day as our coming out day to spring ourselves on the community,” Palmer said.

Palmer said she has received e-mails from University colleagues declaring their support for PFLAG.

She also said complete strangers have given her hugs just because she was wearing her PFLAG logo pin.

Rankin said PFLAG provides an environment where GLBT people can experience acceptance and that many parents attend PFLAG meetings to talk to other parents of GLBT children.

“We’re here to support family members, GLBT people and their friends,” Palmer said. “Our meetings consist of mothers and fathers of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered kids.”

Palmer said Prism, Truman’s GLBT organization, has been very supportive, and the two organizations might collaborate in the future, although nothing is official at this point in time.

Senior Greg Wisa, dance committee chair for Prism, echoed that sentiment.

“I’m sure that we’ll be doing something in the future but nothing specific yet,” Wisa said.

He said the organizations might march in the homecoming parade together, and Prism might make a donation to PFLAG.