

Kirksville PFLAG branch disbands

BY KELLY SCHUTE
Staff Reporter

After almost a year and a half of existence, the local chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays has stopped meeting.

Professor of psychology Sherri Palmer, former president of the Kirksville group and member of the nationwide PFLAG organization, said she officially had to let the group dissolve because of members' inability to keep it going.

"In order to have an organization, you have to have a president, a secretary, a treasurer, generally a board of directors that has a chair and some board members," she said. "... That's a lot of people that need to be willing to put in a lot of time, and I didn't have that. I had people who were interested enough and willing to take those roles, but everybody works, everybody's busy, and it was just very difficult to find times for the people to meet and to do jobs, so as the president, I ended up having to do everything."

Palmer said that although members were not able to devote enough time to the workings of the group, this did not signify that members were not dedicated to the purpose.

"All the people who were involved and helping and interested, everybody was very interested in keeping the group alive, so it wasn't that they were lacking the interest or desire," she said. "It was mostly a lack of time."

In addition, Palmer said that the makeup of those who came to meetings was not consistent with the intent of the group, so it ultimately was not serving its primary function. The purpose of PFLAG is to support family members and friends of GLBT individuals, but Palmer said the group was not reaching that audience.

"In the two years I've been involved in PFLAG here in Kirksville, I've had a lot of GLBT kids, mostly gay and lesbian, bisexual and allies, come to the meetings," she said. "I have not yet encountered any parent wanting assistance, wanting help, wanting any of [the brochures]. ... I haven't had anyone call the hotline asking for help. ... So that, coupled with the hard time I had with people doing the tasks of the elected officials, and me having to by default do everything, it sort of caved in."

Despite the fact that meetings no longer will take place, Palmer still will make herself available to the community. She also said she would use the donations the group has accumulated to purchase books for the local library and for the high school library to provide literature for those struggling with the acceptance of gay friends or family members.

"I've disbanded the official organization, but I'm staying on as the member representative of the national organization," Palmer said. "So I'm going to still have my Web site, which is pflag-nemo.org. ... I'll still have that with information and links to other things. I'll still have my phone number out there as a hotline for people in need, and people can still contact me. ... I'm going to keep it going on my own."

Professor of English Linda Seidel, a former PFLAG board member, said one of the publicly visible influences the organization had at the University was bringing speaker Mark Adams to the University last semester. Adams is an author and the gay son of a conservative preacher, and PFLAG joined with the National Orga-

nization for Women and Trinity Episcopal Church to bring him to the campus.

"That was really a collaborative effort to bring him," Seidel said.

She said she attributes the collapse of PFLAG to the dynamics of the Kirksville community but not to any absence of need for the group.

"It's difficult to sustain a progressive activist organization around here," Seidel said. "As a member of the local NOW chapter, we are also struggling to keep going. ... I think for a group like that to flourish, you just need a larger population to draw upon. I don't think it's that people aren't interested or that there isn't a need."

Seidel said that by nature, PFLAG is an organization that exists mainly as a source of help that can respond when there is a need, but this makes it difficult to sustain.

"I think Sherri's concern was that there should be a resource for people because you never know when trouble's going to come up," she said. "... It's a shame not to be able to keep an organization going because you might need that organization at some point. But I'm not so sure that PFLAG was viable."

Junior Deidra Kendall, historian for the University's gay-straight alliance group Prism, said Prism members were supportive of PFLAG from the beginning, attending meetings and donating money to get the organization off the ground. However, despite Prism's involvement, PFLAG wasn't meeting its objectives. With the group's disbandment, Kendall said the community would be the one to suffer.

"I was pretty sad ... just to know that yet another organization failed in the community, especially one that's for Kirksville and not just Truman, that parents didn't really take the resource," she said. "Because you know they're out there, and they didn't take the opportunity given to them. ... People knew that it was there. They just didn't want to go, and that's their loss."



Heather Turner/Index

Student Senate passed a resolution Sunday that implements requirements for all students who want a refund of their \$2 Student Governance Fee.

Refund now will call for survey, meeting

BY JOHN MOENSTER
Staff Reporter

The Student Senate passed a resolution Sunday to revise the process of receiving a refund of the Student Governance Fee.

That action comes after much debate about whether it is fair that the Senate has to award a refund for the Student Governance Fee but SAB and FAC do not.

Previously, the resolution stated that if students wanted to receive their \$2 refund, they had to complete a satisfaction survey. This process had to be completed each semester, and the survey would be available to the public. The article stated that members of Senate could not receive a refund without first resigning from their position.

The resolution now states that, in addition to completing the survey, a voting sena-

tor must contact any student wishing to receive a refund to discuss his or her grounds for requesting a refund. Not only does a Senator have to resign in order to receive a refund, the new final clause states that any student who requests a refund cannot serve on student government.

Freshman senator JoEllen Flanagan, one of the authors of the resolution, said that a student would first complete the satisfaction survey. From there, Senate communications director junior Rachel Hanks would contact the student and request a meet-

ing to discuss why he or she wanted a refund.

"However, if a student refuses [the interview], which they do have the right to do, they would still receive the refund," Flanagan said. "... It is about keeping the student government more accountable. The students have

the right to a refund, and we don't want to make it any harder at all."

Freshman Tina Schutter, co-author of the resolution, said changes were necessary to improve Senate and to encourage more discussion between students and senators.

"We've had a lot of discussion in Senate about the refund and how we really weren't getting any feedback from the student body," Schutter said. "So I thought that since we have this policy in place, we probably should revise it to be more inclusive of the students' views, and that way we know why they are dissatisfied, so we can actually do something about it."

With these revisions going into place, many might be left wondering if the survey and interview really are worth the effort to get \$2.

"As a matter of principle, I think it's always worth it to get your money back if you don't like the way something is run," freshman Sean Cooksey said. "[The resolution] just adds to the red tape, and it adds to the intimidation factor by sitting down personally with someone. It's clearly a deterrent."

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Sean Cooksey
Freshman

Second annual Diversity Day sees changes

BY CHRIS BONING
Assistant News Editor

About 100 students mostly from the St. Louis and Chicago areas came to the University's Diversity Visit Day on Saturday. Organizers are calling the event a success despite some minor setbacks.

Jill Graves, associate director of recruitment, said the turnout for Diversity Day this year was slightly lower than expected because of some last-minute cancellations but still decent overall. She added it is important to keep in mind that the event is only in its second year, so it is difficult to determine what exactly a good turnout should be.

"We're still getting our sea legs with it," Graves said.

She said she thought Diversity Day 2008 was a success overall because many students who visited Saturday expressed interest in the University.

"There's no way to know truly if it's successful until we see how many applications it yields, we see how many enrolled students [come in], ... and we had a lot of juniors and sophomores that we

won't see for a couple of years," Graves said.

Because the event is new, the University still is deciding whether or not Diversity Day is an effective use of resources, she said. Graves said the Diversity Day program likely will change from year to year as its planners learn what works and what doesn't.

"One of the nice things about our office is we try to be very flexible and open to all of our staff and the students who work with us [and] their ideas and try to infuse those into the day," she said. "Will there be changes? Yeah, probably — there almost always is — but I don't know what those will be quite yet."

Graves said some changes already have been made to Diversity Day. This year the University chartered buses for students rather than have their families drive them to Kirksville.

"That was kind of neat," she said. "It was a different kind of event. It felt different because there were less parents."

Graves said she thought busing in students contributed to the high turnout because it gave some visitors the op-

portunity to check out the University who might not have otherwise had the chance.

The event also was spread throughout the weekend, with some students spending the night Friday and others staying Saturday night, she added.

Although the event is named Diversity Day, any student is welcome to visit, and all races and ethnicities were invited, Graves said.

"But one of the reasons that we have a diversity event that we're trying to incorporate [into] our visit days as one of the events is because of the Truman Strategic Plan," she said. "One of the very clear goals [of the plan] is to increase underrepresented students on our campus up to 10 percent of the student body."

Laura Bates, program coordinator for Multicultural Affairs, said the underrepresented student demographic includes anyone from marginalized communities, ethnic minorities, students from low-income families and first-generation college students.

Such students usually decide to come

to the University because of the generous financial aid packages offered to them and the support system here, particularly in terms of student organizations, Bates said.

"If you look at some of the organizations that we have on our campus, they usually are folks who come in knowing that's what they want to be involved with when they come to college, so having opportunities to meet them through events like visit days are really important," she said.

If underrepresented students have any hesitations about coming to the University, they're usually the same as any other students' worries, Bates added.

She said there currently are no plans to add another Diversity Day because just one requires a great deal of planning on the parts of the Office of Admission, Residence Life and other groups.

"To have that opportunity available to us is great, but we don't want to over-extend our resources," Bates said.

Bates said events such as Diversity Day require full support of everyone at the University.

"All people that were involved worked very hard to present a strong image for Truman that's going to make people want to be here," Bates said.

Senior Jayne Fields said she was a part of a steering committee that planned and coordinated Diversity Day. The other members of the committee included Graves, Bates and a handful of students, she added.

Fields said she supports Diversity Day but that she recognizes that because the event is somewhat new, it is still changing in format.

"It has a lot of potential to be great once we iron everything out," she said.

Fields added that there were a few glitches with the event, including not securing overnight hosts until the last minute and lack of enthusiasm for a dance that was put on for visiting students.

She said she thinks continuing to charter buses, especially for students from Chicago, will be beneficial for the future success of Diversity Day.

"I don't know that many families would have driven seven hours [to Kirksville]," she said.

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