

Anti-gay videotape may have hurt local Heart Strings AIDS benefit

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Dr. Frank Simon, who has campaigned aggressively against pornography and abortion, sent graphic anti-homosexual videotapes to politicians and business leaders in December and January in an effort to derail Louisville's proposed gay-rights ordinance.

In so doing, Simon also may have hampered fund-raising efforts by organizers of last weekend's Heart Strings AIDS benefit.

Cash donations for Heart Strings were about 18 percent less this year than for a 1989 Louisville performance by the same group, although in-kind donations increased. Although some corporate officials blamed the recession for the reduced giving, Heart Strings organizers have ex-

pressed concern during the past month that an anti-gay backlash may have played a part.

Simon said he sent three versions of the tapes to several Louisville aldermen and to more than a dozen business executives in an effort to defeat the ordinance, which died after one of its seven sponsors, Alderman Paul Bather, withdrew his support. But Simon, an allergist, said he didn't intend to hurt fund-raising for Heart Strings.

The videotapes, produced by a California-based organization known as Springs of Life Ministries, depict nude and partially nude men and women — some engaging in simulated sex — marching in a gay-pride parade in San Francisco.

One of the tapes also features an interview with a former San Francisco physician who warns that what "homosexuals do in the privacy of their

own homes causes death among the general population."

The tape also features footage of men in women's clothing and several shots of bare-breasted women. One marcher is shown carrying a sign that says, "God is Gay." A group of lesbians is identified as "Seminary Lesbians Under Theological Stress" marching under a banner reading "SLUTS."

Dr. Lorraine Day, identified as the author of "AIDS: What the Government Is Not Telling You," tells of homosexuals who have sex with small animals and inflict violent injuries on their human sex partners. "They care nothing for their sexual partners," she tells an interviewer who is not identified. "They are constantly looking for more excitement and are frequently high on drugs." Her views

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have been widely criticized by gay-rights organizations and medical professionals, although in 1983 Day accurately predicted that medical personnel could be at risk in treating people with acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

Simon defended the accuracy and fairness of the tapes. But Andy Blieden, co-chairman of a steering committee for the AIDS benefit, said they are designed to encourage "gay bashing."

Bill Horn, a spokesman for The Report, a publication of Springs of Life Ministries, said Simon ordered more than 100 copies of the three tapes, which are available for a single-copy price of \$25 apiece.

Several aldermen said they were shown the videotapes by opponents of the gay-rights ordinance. Among those identified by the aldermen as having shown or distributed the tapes were Simon; Lily Bifone, who, before moving from Louisville last year, headed an anti-pornography group called Citizens for Decency Through Law; and the Rev. Bob Russell, senior minister of Southeast Christian Church.

Liberty National Bancorp Inc. received several such tapes, said Joyce Hatfield, personal secretary to Joseph W. "Billy Joe" Phelps, chairman and chief executive officer. But she said she didn't know who sent them. Phelps acknowledged that he had talked about the tape at a social function a few months ago "after a few martinis," but he said the conversation was private. He said yesterday that nobody had sent him a copy of the tape and that he wouldn't comment on the matter further because it is "none of your business."

Louisville Gas & Electric Co. Chairman Roger Hale received a similar tape in January, but its source was unclear, said Paul Heagen, director of corporate communications.

In a March 24 letter to national organizers of the touring Heart Strings production, Kate Clarke, the local executive director of Heart to Heart/AIDS Support Services, alleged that one of the videotapes was distributed to "corporate bigwigs" by a well-known Louisville developer as part of a campaign to defeat the gay-rights ordinance.

The letter, a copy of which was obtained by The Courier-Journal, also contended that the developer

had threatened to pull \$10 million in assets out of the Bank of Louisville if the bank didn't get Bather — one of its employees — "off the soapbox."

Bert Klein, president of the Bank of Louisville, denied that the developer had threatened to remove any assets. And Bather said in December that bank officials had not pressured him to change his position. Although a bank memorandum distributed to branch managers said Bather had "committed to the bank's management that the bill would not be passed," a spokesman said the bank had no official position on the proposed ordinance.

In her letter, Clarke describes but doesn't name the developer who she said distributed the tape "to every pastor, every bank president in town."

Although Clarke asserted in the letter that "it is definitely a fact," she acknowledged in an interview that she had no proof of the developer's involvement and had heard of it only by rumor.

The Courier-Journal reported on March 13 that local organizers of the AIDS benefit were having trouble raising corporate contributions.

Representatives of several corporations attributed the problem to the recession.

In her letter, Clarke said she intentionally kept the videotape's existence from reporters to avoid "negative press" and a public linking of the gay-rights bill and the AIDS fund-raising event.

Although the local Heart Strings committee had hoped the event would clear at least \$200,000 in cash for AIDS services in Louisville, the fund-raising effort has fallen short. As of Monday, donations for the event totaled \$165,731 — \$71,527 in cash and \$94,204 in the form of in-kind gifts such as hotel rooms and advertising.

(The Bank of Louisville was the only bank to make a corporate cash gift this year, Clarke said — \$250.)

In 1989, the last time Heart Strings performed in Louisville, the organizers raised \$103,000, or \$87,000 in cash and \$16,000 in in-kind contributions. "I'm disappointed as far as our corporate contributions go, but I'm very pleased with the individual support that we have gotten from Louisvillians who really care," Blieden said.

Information for this story was also gathered by staff writer Mary O'Doherty.