

THE TENNESSEAN

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Film trains teachers on tolerance of gays

Movie focuses on pupils in grades 1-8

By **BETH WARREN**

Staff Writer

MURFREESBORO — A documentary film on how teachers can promote tolerance of homosexuals to elementary school students is coming to MTSU next month with the Southeast's first screening of *It's Elementary*.

Legislators, county school boards and other educators will be invited to view the film at Middle Tennessee State University on Feb. 15 as part of the sixth annual Southeastern Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual College Conference, organizers said.

"It's a hot-button issue. I can hear it now: 'Oh, they want to teach homosexuality to elementary students,'" said Michael Grantham, a member of MTSU's Lambda Association of gay, lesbian and bisexual students, faculty and staff. "Tolerance — not homosexuality — is taught, and that's the key issue."

Debra Chasnoff, an Academy Award-winning documentary filmmaker working in San Francisco, directed the film, which is stirring debate among educators in several major U.S. cities and in Canada.

"We made this film to help open up the dialogue in this country about whether and how we should be addressing this issue in elementary classrooms ... and to counter mass information and hysteria of the Religious Right," Chasnoff said.

EDUCATION

Whom to call

The sixth annual Southeastern Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual College Conference will occur Feb. 14-16 at Middle Tennessee State University. Cost, which includes keynote speakers and the *It's Elementary* documentary, is \$30 for adults, \$18 for high school students. To register, call MTSU's Lambda Association at 780-2293.

Violence against gays and suicide among homosexuals, Chasnoff said, are reasons to teach tolerance.

Filmmakers took cameras into classrooms in several states where teachers talked about homosexuality to students in grades 1-8. The lessons were geared toward the students' ages — with first-graders reading *Heather has Two Mom-mies*, while eighth-graders discussed same-sex marriages.

Scott Link, president of MTSU's Baptist Student Union, said he's not sure how he feels about the issue.

"It's an interesting dilemma," Link said. "On one hand, if you don't discuss it, you might have someone who thinks it's OK to take a baseball bat to someone who is different. ... But you have to be very careful that you don't cross the line and say we're going to accept this as a viable, alternative lifestyle." ■