

Queer Nation decides it's time to bash back

By Joyce Price
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In Seattle last week, 50 homosexual males — many of them dressed in women's clothing — hugged and kissed at the municipal airport and handed out condoms and leaflets to travelers.

In Chicago recently, six homosexual couples staged a "kiss-in" at the

cosmetic counter at Bloomingdale's until they were escorted out by security guards. Undeterred, they then went to the cafeteria of a large downtown office building, where they resumed their public display of affection.

"A lot of the people eating lunch got up and left, but there were no

see BASH, page A6

BASH

From page A1

security hassles," said Travers Scott, a member of the Chicago chapter of Queer Nation, a newly formed militant homosexual organization responsible for the actions in both cities. "Employees at Bloomingdale's clapped for us, but a few customers got nasty."

An offshoot of the equally militant group ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), Queer Nation was launched in May in New York.

The organization — made up of young homosexual males and lesbians open about their sexual preferences — is springing up in cities plagued by anti-homosexual violence, which it's fighting by confronting heterosexuals on the streets, in "homophobic" bars and dance clubs, and at shopping malls and other public places.

"We plan to confront homophobia wherever we find it," said Tom Flint, a member of Queer Nation's Seattle chapter. He acknowledged such confrontation could be dangerous in some of the blue-collar bars the group plans to visit. "That's why we'll be going with a large number of people — 70 or so," he said.

Matt Nagel, Mr. Flint's roommate and official spokesman for Queer Nation's Seattle chapter, put it this way: "We're going to homophobic bars, we're going to pack them, we're going to be openly affectionate, we're going to dance together and make it uncomfortable for all the straight people there."

Mr. Flint said there have been problems in Seattle with "gay-bashing" by skinheads and mem-

HOMOSEXUAL ACTIVIST GROUPS

The following organizations have been formed to further the rights of homosexuals.

Act Up (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power): Militant organization, founded by outspoken homosexual playwright Larry Kramer to draw more attention to the AIDS crisis. Act Up has led disruptive protests at the Food and Drug Administration in Rockville, at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York and at various AIDS gatherings.

Human Rights Campaign Fund: Nation's largest homosexual political organization. Based in Washington, this group advances homosexual civil rights and lobbies Congress for such legislation. Its political action committee provides financial support for political candidates sympathetic to concerns of homosexuals.

Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund: Based in New York, this organization defends the civil rights of homosexuals in areas such as employment, housing, education, AIDS and child custody.

National Gay & Lesbian Task Force: Another large D.C.-based group for homosexuals. Tries to publicize homosexual issues and concerns. Lobbies for civil rights legislation and often works closely with women's groups and minorities.

Queer Nation: An offshoot of Act Up, started in May in New York and expanded to other cities, including Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, Seattle and San Francisco. Fighting what it calls a rising tide of "gay-bashing." Queer Nation members confront heterosexuals in bars, shopping malls and other public places.

Sources: Encyclopedia of Associations, Insight magazine and other media accounts

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bers of the Aryan Nations group. "In May, the FBI arrested three people in Aryan Nations and charged them with conspiracy to bomb the largest gay bar in the Northwest. It's called Neighbors, and it's here in Seattle. The trial is going on right now in Boise, Idaho," he said.

Because of such difficulties, Mr. Flint said, Queer Nation has started street patrols of homosexuals specially trained by the Guardian Angels. "We aren't out looking for trouble," he said, "but we'll intervene when aggression occurs."

Jay Blotcher, spokesman for Queer Nation's New York chapter, said in a telephone interview yester-

day: "We fight against people who bash. They have to throw the first punch. Violence is not at the core of our being, but we won't shirk from defending ourselves."

During a march in June, some members of Queer Nation got involved in "skirmishes" with bystanders, who threw bottles and abused them physically or verbally. "This was a march to protest bashing," Mr. Blotcher said, "and I feel the anger was justified."

Members of Queer Nation also have encountered problems — "ranging from sneers to verbal abuse" in some of the heterosexual bars they've visited, he said. In one

case, a bouncer tried to bar them.

The forays to straight bars are important, Mr. Blotcher said. "There's no reason gays and lesbians should be relegated to gay bars."

Queer Nation also believes it's important for homosexuals to come out of the closet. "We want to encourage people to come out and be visible," Mr. Flint said. "We want to let people know we contribute to the community."

Gregory King, spokesman for the Human Rights Campaign Fund, the nation's largest homosexual political organization, said: "Queer Nation serves a useful purpose. To a large extent, homophobia is based on a lack of knowledge that gays and lesbians exist."

"We need to be integrated into society," Mr. King said. "Shock troops," such as Queer Nation, can help achieve that, he said.

Mr. Scott said Queer Nation is frequently criticized for going too far. "Some feel we're shoving it into other people's faces. They say heterosexuals don't hold kiss-ins. But we have to do things that are so outrageous and extreme so gays and lesbians can go anywhere they want and others won't bat an eye."

Marvin Liebman, a leading conservative who recently acknowledged his homosexuality, said he's not an extremist but does not condemn Queer Nation's tactics. "The civil rights movement had extremists like Stokely Carmichael... and those people really moved things."

George Duff, president of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, said he has no objections to Queer Nation's activities in that city as long as they don't turn disruptive or harmful.