Rutgers Alumni Leading the Way to Economic Recovery

Across the nation, Rutgers graduates use their expertise in a variety of fields to help put the nation’s economy back on its feet

ALSO INSIDE:
- Interview with SAS Dean Doug Greenberg
- Traffic Reporter Heather O’Rourke
- LGBT Activism & Community Building at Rutgers
- Cap & Skull Decades Dinner
- RAA Happenings
- Sports Update...and more!
Through the late 1960s, most members of the LGBT community lived “in the closet,” forced there by a society that not only demonized and ostracized them, but also legally persecuted them. This began to change on June 28, 1969, when police raided the Stonewall Inn, a bar catering to mostly gay men, in New York City’s Greenwich Village, initiating what became known as the Stonewall Rebellion.

Gay liberation groups, such as the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and the Columbia Homophile League, the first LGBT student organization, founded at Columbia University, sprang up across New York City to steer the tensions found on the street into community activism. In December 1969, Rutgers College sophomore Lionel Cuffie and fifty other Rutgers undergraduates, with the assistance of members of the Columbia Homophile League, founded the Student Homophile League of Rutgers (SHL), the first gay-and-lesbian-oriented student group at Rutgers University and the second in the nation. Cuffie hoped that the SHL, “would ultimately aid in the breakdown of social and political persecution and discrimination directed against minority groups.”

The group soon found a home for its activities in the Rutgers Student Center on the College Avenue Campus. The SHL became increasingly active in the early 1970s and quickly gained popularity on campus and within the local LGBT community, but its increased visibility was not without controversy. In May 1970, the SHL and Rutgers College Programming Board co-sponsored an exhibition, on loan from the Gallery of Erotic Art in New York, entitled “The Homosexual” in the Student Center. Some material offended several students and led to a physical confrontation, negative publicity and complaints from legislators. University President Mason Gross successfully fended off these critics and supported the SHL’s right to freedom of speech and expression.

As the 1970s progressed, the LGBT movement grew and diversified. Several subgroups emerged within SHL, such as...
the R.U. Fags (a radical action caucus), the Livingston Gay Men’s Collective and the SHL Black Caucus. Apart from SHL, several feminist and/or lesbian groups were founded, including the University Coalition of Lesbian Women, the University Coalition of Lesbian Feminists and the Lesbian Feminist Coalition. However, the SHL remained the visible focal point of the movement on campus and, during the decade, grew to be one of the largest student organizations.

The group carried its mission forward on and off campus through social and educational programming. The SHL developed the New Brunswick Gay Switchboard to provide a helpline and peer counseling. SHL used its growing political voice to advocate for equal rights and the repeal of anti-gay legislation and to organize five successful, well-attended conferences on Gay Liberation and Culture from 1971 to 1975. In 1974, the SHL partnered with the Graduate School of Education to hold a “Gay Liberation and Education” symposium.

As part of its fourth “Conference on Gay Unity,” the SHL declared April 19, 1974, to be National Gay Day. It quickly became known as “Blue Jeans Day” after the SHL, in a Targum ad, encouraged LGBT students to wear blue jeans as a sign of pride and to raise consciousness among the entire student body. A second Blue Jeans Day, held in April 1976, was marred when a College Avenue fraternity hung an effigy from a tree in front of their house with a sign, “The only good gay is a dead gay—back to your closets homos.” This event led to years of conflict between SHL, which changed its name to the Rutgers Gay Alliance (RGA) in 1975, and the fraternity, which subsided only after the University intervened in 1979.

In the 1980s, the RGA became increasingly focused on social issues affecting the LGBT community. Responding to the growing national concern over HIV/AIDS, its members campaigned for AIDS awareness and activism. During the 1982-1983 school year, the group changed its name again to the Rutgers University Lesbian/Gay Alliance (RUGLA). The name change, along with increased participation in the “Take Back the Night” anti-sexual assault marches, was part of an initiative to become more active in feminist and lesbian issues.

RUGLA succeeded in making LGBT concerns a central focus of the entire University in 1988 with the creation of the President’s Select Committee for Lesbian and Gay Concerns. University President Edward Bloustein established the committee in response to RUGLA’s petitions and the findings of Dr. Susan Cavin’s 1987 study The Rutgers Sexual Orientation Survey, which shed light on the obstacles and homophobia faced by members of the LGBT community on campus. The committee resulted in numerous institutional changes, including the establishment of the Office of Diverse Community Affairs and Lesbian & Gay Affairs (later LGBT Concerns) in 1992.

In 1990, RUGLA changed its moniker to BiGLARU and found itself in the center of a national news story. That year, then BiGLARU President James Dale, RC ’93, was quoted in a newspaper story about a gay youth and social issues seminar. Boy Scouts of America officials in the district where Dale also served as an Assistant Scoutmaster revoked his BSA membership after learning that he was gay. Dale fought his expulsion with assistance from Professor James Anderson,

continued on page 12
of sexual orientation. Despite this disappointment, BIGLARU and other LGBT groups flourished on the Rutgers campuses throughout the decade.

The Office of Diverse Community Affairs and LGBT Concerns, under Dr. Cheryl Clarke, GSNB '74, SSW '80, GSNB '00, a longtime member of and advocate for the Rutgers LGBT community, became an important center for both the movement and University. The Office hosted a yearly Queer Reception for all interested campus groups, alumni/ae associations and members of the community. Through the Office, the University provided resources for LGBT students and organizations. Student organizations active during the 1990s across the University celebrated the diversity of the movement, including: BIGLARU, Lesbian and Bisexual Women in Action (LABIA), the Rutgers Union of Gay and Bisexual Men (RUGBI), The Latina/o and People of Color Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Union of Rutgers University (LLEG0!), Council of Organizations United to Combat Homophobia (RCAB), the Rainbow Community Action Board (COUCH) and the Alliance of Queer Graduate Students. In Newark, the Gay and Lesbian Association (GALA) and, in Camden, the Lambda Alliance and the Lesbian and Gay Law School Association were also thriving student organizations.

The 1999-2000 academic year marked the thirtieth anniversary of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender activism on the campus. In celebration, the Office of Diverse Community Affairs and LGBT Concerns organized a year-long slate of cultural events on all three campuses.

The LGBT community at Rutgers could look back with pride on three decades of raising awareness and battling prejudice—stitching a Scarlet stripe onto the Rainbow Flag in the process—but they did not stop there.

LGBT from page 11

[In 2000], the LGBT community at Rutgers could look back with pride on three decades of raising awareness and battling prejudice—stitching a Scarlet stripe onto the Rainbow Flag in the process—but they did not stop there.

In September 2010, the University launched Project Civility, sponsored by the Offices of Student Affairs and Undergraduate Education at Rutgers-New Brunswick.

The project, founded by Senior Dean of Students Mark Schuster and Director of the Byrne Family First-Year Seminars Dr. Kathleen Hull, promotes understanding and seeks to decrease enmity among the multicultural and diverse Rutgers community. A series of lectures and other campus events have been planned that focus on promoting social responsibility and ethics among the student population.

The two-year endeavor also seeks to utilize small acts of kindness between individuals to foster a constructive atmosphere on campus for students to bridge their differences. For more information, check out the Project Civility website:

http://projectcivility.rutgers.edu

We would like to thank Associate Rutgers University Archivist Erika Gorder whose catalog for the 2000 exhibition "Celebrating the Tradition: 30 Year of Queer Activism at Rutgers" served as the primary source for this article.
Our Mission
We will bring together Alumni and Friends to foster a lifelong Rutgers bond, continuing their common interest in enjoying camaraderie, networking, and service in a volunteer organization, centered around our shared New Brunswick traditions since 1831.

Important Changes to Our Alumni Association

- The RAA headquarters has moved – WE ARE NO LONGER LOCATED IN WINANTS HALL. We are currently occupying rented office space off-campus in Piscataway.
- All RAA work is being conducted by VOLUNTEERS and part-time help (no staff support from the University).
- All financial transactions are being handled using the RAA’s own financial resources, separate from those of the University.
- Major events like Alumni Family Day and the Loyal Sons & Daughters awards banquet are now planned and run entirely by the RAA with only VOLUNTEERS.
- Dues are no longer collected, so the RAA has to fund its operating costs using subscriptions, admission fees and its own savings.

For more information call 732-932-7474 or visit us online at www.rutgersalumni.org

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