

Festival celebrates gay pride
Second annual event attracts large crowd to Shockoe Bottom market

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Linwood Alford passed out business cards and fliers to those attending the Gay Pride Festival at the 17th Street Farmer's Market, with hopes of generating interest in his organization, Open Door Resource Center Inc.

It's a group that helps those affected by HIV and AIDs.

A recent transplant from Atlanta, Alford said the event was a great way to get his message to the community.

"We'll definitely be out here next year," he said.

The Shockoe Bottom market in Richmond was packed yesterday for the second annual Gay Pride Festival.

Vendors sold food and handed out T-shirts and other items.

Members of the Gay Community Center of Richmond, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, and other groups handed out information.

David Ryder, chairman of Gay Pride Virginia, said he hoped to draw more than 5,000 people to this year's event and noted that one aspect of this year's festival is the presence of corporate sponsorship, something he didn't have last year.

Sponsors such as Wachovia, Pence Auto Group and others were on hand as vendors.

Last year's event "got a lot of attention for a lot of great reasons," Ryder said.

The festival comes on the heels of a federal bill passed last week by the Senate that adds gender and sexual orientation to the categories covered under federal hate-crime laws. The House passed a similar bill in May, but President Bush has threatened to veto it.

Hate-crime laws now apply to acts of violence against people based on race, religion, color or national origin.

It's a tremendous piece of legislation, Ryder said.

"Because Washington is embracing it at the federal level," he said, he hopes "Virginia will soon follow in step."

A special guest for this year's festival was Councillor Marc Cranfield-Adams, mayor of the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames.

As a gay man, Cranfield-Adams was a guest speaker yesterday who talked about the differences between the two Richmonds when it comes to gay rights.

He spoke about freedoms that exist in his country for gay people, including the rights of marriage for same-sex unions and workplace protection from discrimination.

"The challenge is to try to change the laws," he said later at Café Gutenberg in Shockoe Bottom. "If you believe in something you fight for it."

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