



Gay day may be mayday for businesses

Kelly Smith
December 5, 2008

Computers will turn off and bosses will be blown off as the homosexual community and their straight allies engage in a national gay rights boycott. Millions will not call in sick to work—they will call in gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or just friendly.

On Dec. 10, participants in the Day Without a Gay will join in a 24-hour nationwide strike and economic boycott to support civil rights for all Americans in the wake of the passage of Proposition 8, which amended California's constitution to ban same-sex marriage, similar to bans already in place in Arkansas, Florida and Arizona.

Organizer Sean Hetherington, 30, was inspired to create the boycott's Web site, daywithoutagay.org with his boyfriend Aaron Hartzler, 33, after reading an article in the *L.A. Times* by columnist Joel Stein asking gays to stay home and watch the market decline. While they created the site to get the word out about the Day Without a Gay event, it also provides links to other protest opportunities and future gay rights demonstrations.

But sitting on the couch and disappearing is not what Hetherington thinks will make an impact. Instead, the site asks that participants use the time to volunteer for local services organizations ranging from gay-straight alliances and HIV/AIDS service centers to nursing homes and homeless shelters.

"Massachusetts is the gayest state on the planet right now, but it's not like that everywhere else," Hetherington said. "If you're a gay person in Wyoming and your partner gets sick, your marriage is void and you don't have access to them in the hospital. It's important that we all get together and do everything we can."

He said volunteering would provide a solution to this separation of the states.

After the nationwide Nov. 15 protests against gay marriage bans like Proposition 8, Hetherington said Day Without a Gay will help to change the image of the gay community by showing that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people have a positive presence in the world. But while Hetherington recalled the disappointment he felt the night his home state of California voted yes on the proposition, he also said the ensuing hubbub has re-energized the gay community.

"I wonder if it's actually better that it passed because it has made activism sexy again for the first time in a long time," he said.

Although Hetherington and Hartzler are from California, the Web site allows people to organize themselves state by state. Their goal was to erase the sense of hopelessness in the LGBT community and put a new spin on activism. The couple borrowed the technological idea from JoinTheImpact, a group that helped organize the national protest against the change in gay marriage statutes on Nov. 15.

But now that they have received such a large response through the press and the Internet, the goal now is to increase visibility.

"Every time someone is holding up a soup ladle and giving service and the media is around taking pictures of it," Hetherington said. "I hope the moms are seeing those pictures and thinking, 'I don't think it's such a bad thing that my kid knows a gay person.'"

For many college students at Emerson and elsewhere, however, Dec. 10 coincides with final exams.

Jennifer Barry, president of Emerson Alliance of Gays, Lesbians and Everyone, a student organization which promotes the acceptance of queer culture throughout the Emerson community, said while she supports the cause, she cannot participate realistically.

"I would love to take part in it and some may look at it as a cop out," the sophomore political communication major said. "But it's a really inconvenient time. A lot of people have finals that day. The next couple weeks are going to be crazy."

For those who can't call in "gay" for academic obligations such as this, Hetherington stressed the other ways the collegiate can get involved. For Emerson students, he said taking a lunch hour to e-mail a senator about discrimination in the work place or organizing a fundraiser with college gay-straight alliances, like EAGLE, can still make a difference.

"Your generation is on the cutting edge," Hetherington said. "College-age students are the ones who have so much excitement and enthusiasm and the internet viral capabilities to really get the word out there. This is your time."

During EAGLE's final meeting of the semester on Dec. 11, the group will work on Project Postcard, a plan that asks supporters of gay marriage to write a letter to president elect Barack Obama in support of equal rights during a time when war and the current economic crisis may take the forefront.

"As a community, we want to show that this is an extreme priority that shouldn't be put on the back burner," Barry said. "We're not just gonna sit around for the next 20 years-we want change now."

Helping gays in other ways

The fight for equal rights extends beyond Dec. 10. If you are bogged down and battered by finals as winter break approaches, there are plenty of other ways to lend a hand and a voice in the fight for gay equality. Daywithoutagay.org offers four things you can do to participate in Day Without a Gay even if you can't miss work or class.

Spread the word

You can join the Day Without a Gay Facebook group or follow Day Without a Gay on Twitter, a free social networking and micro-blogging service, at twitter.com/daywithoutagay. You can also invite friends or contact your local media.

Help seek out and post volunteer opportunities in your area

Take advantage of local volunteer opportunities. Contact any non-profit organization, and see if they could use some volunteers on Dec. 10. Contact groups like your local gay-straight alliance or HIV/AIDS Services.

Educate others about the Employment Non-Discrimination Act

If Senate passes ENDA into law, it will be illegal to discriminate against gays, lesbians, bi-

sexuals and transgender individuals in the workplace. To learn more, visit these websites: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force at thetaskforce.org or the ACLU EDNA Web page at aclu.com.

Contact your state representatives to voice your support for ENDA

By e-mailing or sending in a letter to your local House Representative or Senator the additional support will help push the bill through that will create an equal environment for all people in the workplace.