Behrend's first Ally Day

by Tom Keefe
Assistant News Editor

On October 11, Trigon (Behrend's gay, lesbian and bisexual organization) celebrated National Coming Out Day by sponsoring Behrend Ally Day.

Trigon advisor, Sue Daley said, "The main purpose of the day was to educate Behrend's students, faculty and staff about homosexuality and to recruit allies."

An ally is any heterosexual person who supports other persons who are gay, lesbian or bisexual.

Throughout the day, an art exhibit was on display in the Wintergarden. All of the artwork was done by local gay, lesbian, bisexual and ally artists.

There was also an information table set up in the Reed Building. Free ally stickers were available as well as buttons and T-shirts for sale. Students were encouraged to display their ally stickers in an obvious place, a place where gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals would see it and recognize that person as an ally.

Displaying the sticker allows homosexuals to feel more comfortable and safe. Trigon President Sharain Naylor commented, "When any gay, lesbian or bisexual person notices the sticker, he or she knows it is safe to be around that person."

In May of 1991, Penn State University established a policy prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Daley commented "With regard to that policy, Behrend needs more visible support for gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals and their allies."

Daley added that because of the lack of support at Behrend, many gay, lesbian, and bisexual students and staff may feel they cannot be open about themselves.

Pat Griffin and Charmaine Wijeyesinghe, experts on heterosexism and homophobia, said social and psychological isolation can take a huge toll on an individual.

Homosexual youths are 2-3 times more likely to commit suicide. They comprise 30% of successfully completed suicides annually.

Many people have difficulty accepting homosexuality because they are not exposed to gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals.

Griffin and Wijeyesinghe, commented, "Because of the possible backlash, lack of safety, and the ramifications of being openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual on campus, faculty, staff, and student role models may not be visible...Invisibility feeds homophobia because it allows people to assume there are no gay, lesbian or bisexual people on campus," the report stated.

The anonymous Trigon Vice President said, "Most people would be shocked at the people who are gay, people who are in fraternities, and who play sports and everything."

He went on to say how different Behrend is from University Park. "I was surprised to see the people at University Park [who previously attended Behrend] who came out because of the different environment there."

Sharain Naylor stated "I'd like to see an environment at Behrend in which other people can feel free to come out and that is a goal Trigon is working towards."

Jeff Zimmerman/*Contributing Photographer*

Time out: Assistant News Editor Tom Keefe, far right, glances over the Ally Day table in the Reed Union Building.

The homosexual community at Behrend has been, for the most part, tolerated by students, faculty, and staff, Daley said.

Up until Ally Day there were no reported cases of violence against homosexuals at Behrend.

The first case was documented on Ally Day.

Sharain Naylor was assaulted by John Rossamando, a student at Behrend. Naylor stated "It's not right that I should have to hide anything about myself...there's no reason for me to be oppressed...I know who I am...I know I'm a good person...why should I have to hide?"

Police and Safety are trying to resolve the situation.

According to Griffin and Wijeyesinghe, "A gay, lesbian, or bisexual person, or an ally may become tired and burned out from having to educate colleagues, be a role model for others, etc...this can affect physical and emotional health, motivation, etc."

Many times the work that gay, lesbian and bisexuals do is not appreciated. Sharain Naylor commented, "We always make more signs than we need because we know that by the first day more than twenty will be ripped down, and after we take down the signs that people have written on, there aren't many left."

Over 115 students, faculty, and staff members became allies.

Dr. Kathleen Campbell said, "I think it is a very important event to recognize the importance of full rights for every group on campus...I was proud to show my support."

Pam Leins, third semester DUS major added, "I believe Ally Day was a complete success."

David Shields, director of Student Activities stated, "The work that everyone put into the program was evident...It's a program that is long overdue."

At A Glance

Anchorage, Alaska: US officials decided this week which tribes will be eligible for federal programs. The Alaska Federation of Natives nominated 228 tribes. The US may also decide to fund education for the tribes.

Sacramento, California: Local students set up a hot line to anonymously report anyone who brings a gun to school.

Haiti: President Clinton ordered the withdrawal of non-combat troops from Haitian waters Tuesday, but warned he was "dead serious" about returning power to ousted President Jean-Bertrande Aristide. This decision came one day after the USS Harlan County was blocked from docking in Haiti.

Somalia: On Friday, President Clinton ordered 5,300 more troops to Somolia. He is sending them to "finish the work we set out to do." President Clinton also assured the nation that the troops would be withdrawn by March 31, 1994.

Detroit: The two former Detroit police officers convicted of beating a motorist to death were sentenced Tuesday. Larry Nevers received a 12 to 25 year term and Walter Budzyn received eight to 18 years.

Concord, New Hampshire: In another chapter of the story of former teacher turned murderess, Pamela Smart lost an appeal before the US Supreme Court to have her 1991 conviction overturned.

New York City: Jeers for "Cheers" star Ted Danson who is being critized for his performance in blackface at the New York Friars Club Roast for girlfriend Whoppi Goldberg.

Erie: The annual shutdown of International Paper's Hammermill plant was delayed until March 1994 due to economic problems. This decision has members of local union 620 deeply concerned over the future of the plant.

Wesleyville: Erie County Judge George Levin ordered the demolition of the former Penn Theater on Buffalo Road. According to borough officials, the building has been a safety hazard and an eyesore for several years.