

The Behrend College Collegian
published weekly by the students of Penn State Erie, The Behrend College

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EDITORIAL

Activity fee increase would be beneficial to students

A decision will be made in the near future on whether or not raise the student activity fee. This decision is a university wide decision, but the decision on how much to raise is made at Behrend.

All of the money raised by the student activity fee stays at Behrend and benefits Behrend students. Currently we pay fifty dollars a year. At other schools, such as Pitt Johnstown, this fee can top \$200.

The decision to raise the fee in small increments, as suggested by some of the members in the Student Activity Fee Allocation Committee, is the most logical one. The fee needs to be raised to accommodate the grow-

ing number of Behrend students and to supply them with a range of activities suitable for all majors and interests.

An increase of one or two dollars will hardly be felt among the other fees charged along with tuition. There have been complaints that students don't get any benefit from the money they pay. However, the amount of return a student gets from the fee is entirely up to the student.

A student who is involved with activities will see where their money is going. Clubs and organizations are funded through the fee and bands and entertainment that come to campus are paid for this way as well.

Anti-gay protest drives rift in Charlotte, N.C.

By Randall Bloomquist=Special to The Washington Post

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Meet Charlotte, North Carolina, the golden child of American cities. Over the past 10 years this once-sleepy crossroad has become one of the country's hottest urban areas, and with good reason. The mild climate is delightful. The economy is thriving, thanks in large part to the city's new status as America's second-largest financial center after New York City. New residents are arriving in droves to find a magnificent skyline, affordable housing, NFL and NBA franchises, friendly neighbors who are active in charitable or community groups and an ease of life unknown in larger, older urban areas. Forbes magazine says Charlotte has "the No. 1 pro-business attitude" among American cities. The U.S. Conference of Mayors calls it the "Most Livable City in America." This burgeoning metropolis of 628,000 people seems poised to make good on all the promise of Southern cities and to mature into a truly livable big city, one free from the traditional woes of the first generation of American urban centers: congestion, unemployment and divi-

siveness.

But Charlotte has lately developed a troubling condition that threatens to stunt its growth. For well over a year, Charlotte's power structure has been mired in a series of controversies stemming from the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners' obsession with homosexuality. The issue, manifest in various forms since late 1996, has diverted local leaders from serious growth-related issues, endangered the city's national reputation and raised questions about Charlotte's ability to make the transition from insular small town to cosmopolitan big city.

Charlotte's debate over homosexuality dates to a local theater's production of the Pulitzer Prize-winning play "Angels in America" in the spring of 1996. The show's sold-out four-week run was marked by a white-hot debate over the propriety of using public money to help stage a production featuring male nudity, themes such as the AIDS epidemic and depictions of gay life. The controversy raged on local editorial pages and radio talk shows and at office coffee klatches. Several performances were picketed by both opponents and supporters of the show. The uproar was loud enough

to draw the attention of a number of national media outlets, including The New York Times and "Good Morning America."

In December 1996, newly elected Mecklenburg County Commissioner Bill James, Republican, responded to the "Angels" flap with legislation to deny county funding to any arts or education group that provides information on homosexuality or other "crimes against nature."

While that initiative was narrowly defeated, the commissioners' debate over the measure heralded a new era in Charlotte politics. For example, Commissioner Hoyle Martin, Democrat, declared, "If it were up to me, we'd shove these people (gays) off the face of the earth."

Early last year, Martin introduced

legislation that forbade the county to fund any performing arts group involved in the "sponsorship, recognition, endorsement or support of homosexuality." The measure also denied county money to groups that offer confidential counseling identity issues. In its original form, the resolution opened with a series of declarations both comic and scary, including: "Whereas, the gay community ... believes they have a right to recruit children for experimenting with anyone, including homosexual adults ..."

On April 2, after another loud, divisive community argument, the nine-member commission adopted a measure that achieved Martin's goals without singling out gays. By a 5-4 vote, the panel simply cut all county funding to the Arts & Science Council, which serves as a sort of United Way for the arts in Charlotte. Under the new law, the commissioners themselves must approve all county arts spending on a project-by-project basis. In doling out that money (\$2.5 million in the current fiscal year), the commissioners must adhere to language that forbids underwriting for groups that "promote, advocate or endorse behaviors, lifestyles and values that seek to undermine and deviate from the value and societal role of the traditional American family" or offer "exposure to perverted forms of sexuality."

In the days after the vote, there were

rumblings of a backlash against the commissioners' action. The gay community vowed to be more active. (No small promise, given that most Charlotte gays are more deeply closeted than an overcoat in July.) The president of the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce publicly questioned the wisdom of a vote that might make the city less attractive to relocating businesses. Progressives swore they would organize and mobilize, just like the conservatives. Some previously silent clergy warned of a slide into intolerance. Hugh McColl, the influential chief executive officer of the financial giant NationsBank who sees Charlotte as his living monument, let it be known among city leaders that he was determined to limit any further damage.

Such chatter did not impress Martin and his allies, who continued to divert the city's attention with regular sorties against homosexuals, whom Martin says hope to turn Charlotte into "the Sodom and Gomorrah capital of the East Coast, as is San Francisco on the West Coast." In May, Commissioner Bill James took the Mint Museum of art to task for showing a documentary film about how homosexuality is taught in schools around the country. James declared that such works offend the majority values in Charlotte and thus should not be shown in a public venue — even when the exhibit is privately funded.

Republican Commissioner Joel Carter created a brief stir with this assessment of possible opposition in the 1998 election: "They're automatically going to be branded homosexual if they come after me too hard." In an interview with the Leader, a local weekly newspaper, Carter also referred to homosexuals as "queers."

Then, in December, Martin joined with the board's Republican minority to oust the panel's Parks Helms, Democrat, and replace him with Com-

missioner Tom Bush, Republican. The reason: Helms allegedly encouraged openly gay businessman Andrew Reyes to run for public office.

Bush, a chief beneficiary of the mania, now says it is time for the city and its commissioners to move on to more pressing issues such as roads and schools. There are no looming artistic flash points because, in part, the arts community got the message loud and clear. Faced with a budget shortfall prompted by the commission's funding cut, Actors Theatre of Charlotte had to drop one of four productions from its 1998 schedule. The group, in a don't-rock-the-boat move, canceled a play called "Dream of a Common Language," which features both male and female nudity. A recent Charlotte Observer poll found that 54 percent of Mecklenburg County residents thought addressing homosexuality should be a low priority for the commission. On the flip side, 37 percent thought it should be a medium- or high-priority topic for the panel.

Whatever happens next, some damage has been done. A new virulence has been introduced into the city's once genteel public discourse; the arts community has been cowed; a segment of the population feels stigmatized; business leaders worry that the controversy is a step away from the city's progressive tradition. And Charlotteans, who want so desperately to be denizens of a world class city, have been forced to confront an embarrassing narrowness that has left them looking less like Atlanta and more like Cobb County, Ga., which lost its piece of the 1996 Olympics because of similar anti-gay sentiment. Anti-Gay Protest Drives Rift in Charlotte, N.C. (Charlotte, N.C.)

Randall Bloomquist moved to Charlotte from Washington in 1996 to become program director at WBT, a news-talk radio station.

A day in the life

BRIAN ASHBAUGH

Not enough student involvement in anniversary celebration

The 1998-99 school year will mark Behrend's fiftieth birthday and temporary plans are being considered to help celebrate this golden anniversary. Among the events on the itinerary are a black tie dinner scheduled for August of this year, an all class reunion introducing alumni to the new Behrend, campus tours planned for February of 1999, and a traveling video exhibit around Behrend and the Erie area. These ideas, although tentative, appear to not be centered around the Behrend community and the invaluable students that occupy it. Furthermore, other suggestions could be made to emphasize the student population and bring a little nostalgia to the forefront.

First of all, the black tie dinner is an event that is not geared toward students being that it is in August and will most likely carry a price tag, but this is a good way to kick off the fes-

ivities for school officials. An effort should be made to integrate current students with faculty members and the "decision makers" that determine the function of the College. An open student/faculty meal could remedy this situation with University speakers and food catered by Housing and Food Services. Interaction between the groups is a healthy part of scholarly life.

Along with the student/faculty involvement, the alumni reunion is a key part of the celebration. This is set for June 3 through June 5, 1999. Former students will see what has been done with this campus and admire the expansion of the new buildings and renovated facilities. Almy Hall and the future housing complexes could be highlighted and become an integral part of the presentation to past graduates. Also, current

students and alumni should be able to hold an open forum to reflect on the prior Behrend community and compare it to the way it is today. New ideas may evolve from this type of interaction. After all, the people who have lived here and the current residents would know best about possible improvements.

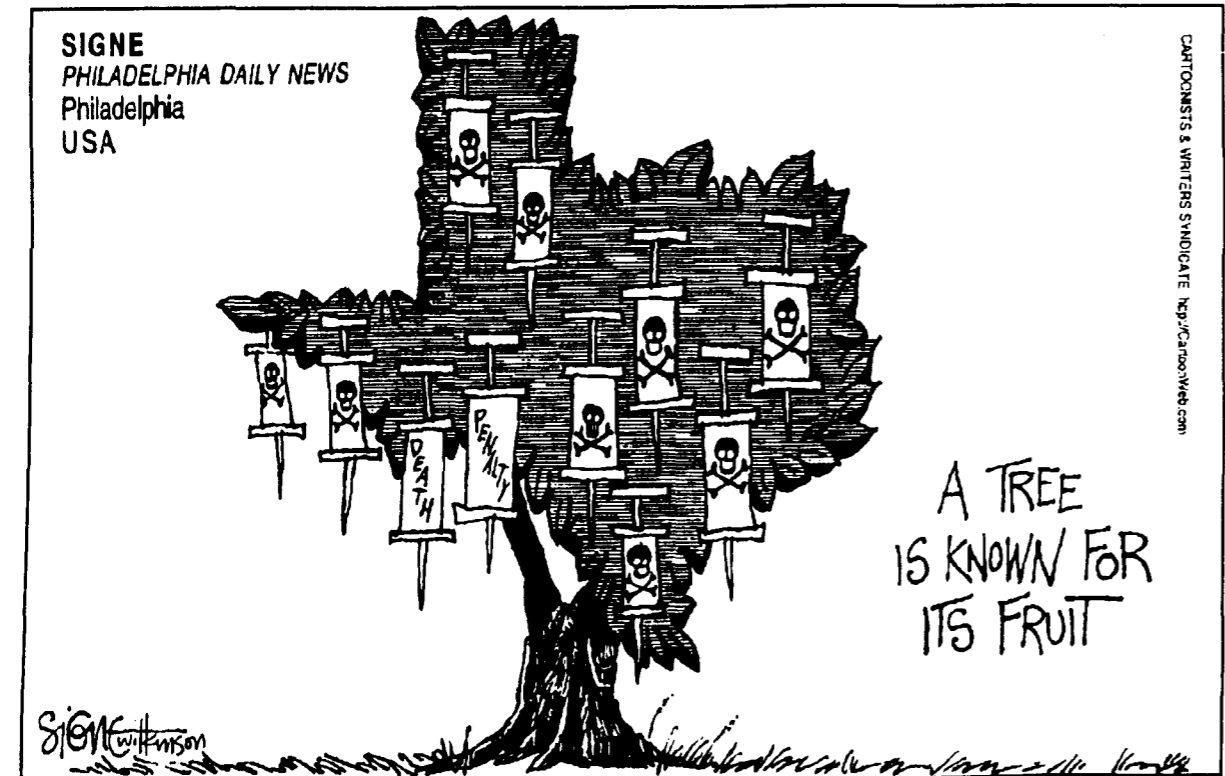
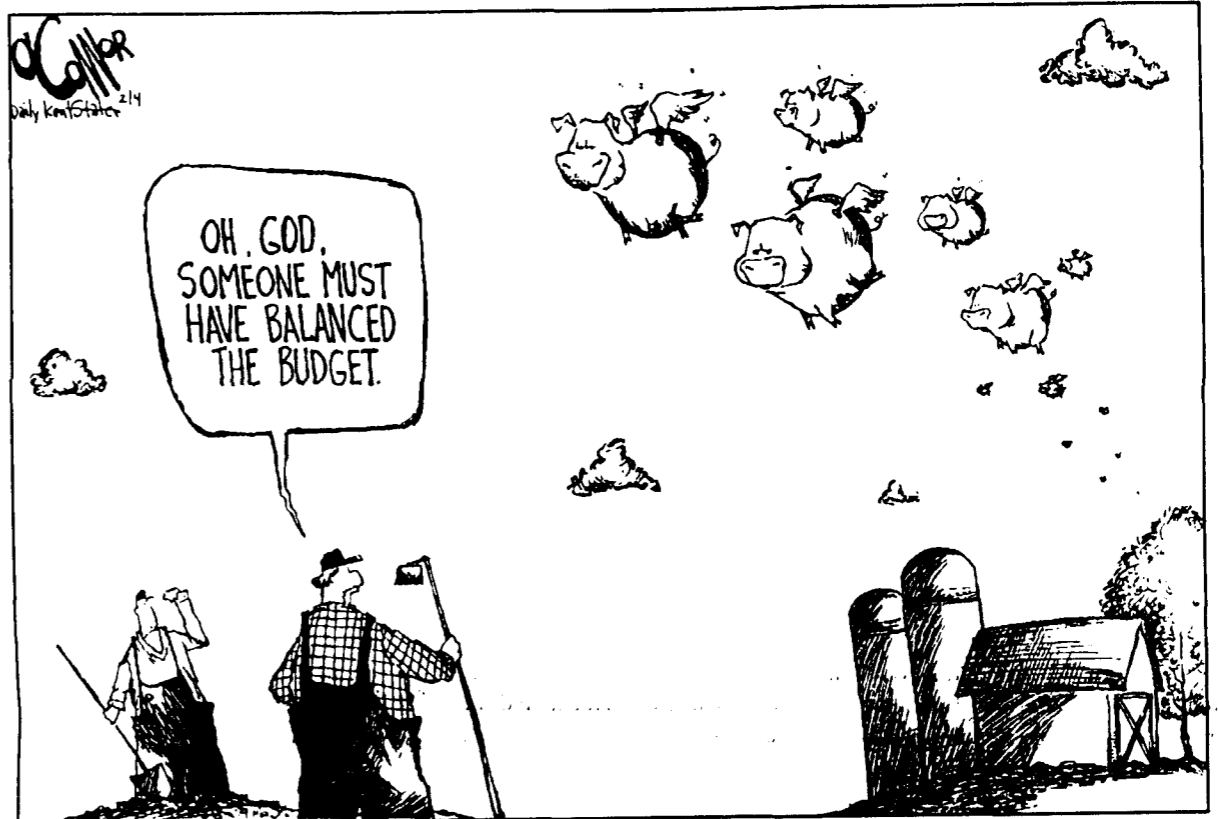
The campus tours planned for next spring may be more effective if they are moved to this coming fall. By the time February 1999 rolls around, the novelty of the anniversary may have worn off. The tours could be better served by holding them sometime during the months of September, October, and November when the foliage changes and the serenity of the campus can be used as a colorful backdrop for observers.

The traveling video exhibit is a wonderful idea for students who re-

ally do not know much about the history of Behrend. The exhibit will provide a better understanding of the origins of this campus and the Behrend family itself. Hopefully, this presentation will be kept on as a mainstay for prospective students who want to know what Behrend life is all about.

These are only a few suggestions to better celebrate the fiftieth anniversary and expand our general knowledge about the community in which we live. However, there is always room for improvement. It appears that the students, the lifeblood of the College, are being left behind. This should be of chief concern to the committees making these decisions. In the end, without the students that occupy the campus, there would be no Behrend history to speak of.

A Day in the Life appears every three weeks in The Collegian.



got something to say?

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