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VOL. 1, ISSUE 4 | MAR. 2, 2005

Wisconsin's Premiere LGBT News Leader

Gay Hate in City Hall Milwaukee Alderman's Anti-Gay Slurs Anger Community

By William Attewell, special to Queer Life

"Any man that would pull another man's pants down is a straight-up sick faggot."

Those words, spoken by Milwaukee Alderman Michael McGee Jr. on Feb. 10, ignited outrage in the LGBT community and put issues of hate speech, race relations and social justice on the front burner for community leaders.

The hate speech controversy erupted after the alderman spoke at a protest of about 100 people outside the Safety Building in Milwaukee about the lack of criminal charges in an October beating outside a police officer's home in Milwaukee's Bay View neighborhood.

McGee and others charge a racial cover-up in the case of Frank Jude Jr., a black man who was allegedly beaten by a group of white men who identified themselves as off-duty police officers.

At the rally, McGee also said, "At least with gays you don't know they are going to kill you until it happens."

McGee called Milwaukee County District Attorney E. Michael McCann "a dumb ass" and said the police officers involved were "hate mongers and KKK killers."

He also branded law enforcement officials in the case as "sissies," and added that he did not mean to offend all homosexuals with his remarks.

Since his Feb. 10 comments, McGee has repeatedly refused to meet with members of the LGBT community, and it appears he is not inclined to apologize for his language, according to several press reports.

On Feb. 14, McGee told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel that he stood by his remarks, adding, "My constituents are supporting me fully and are proud of what they saw and heard."

A Dramatic Turn of Events on Feb. 23

Events took a dramatic turn on Feb. 23, when openly gay State Sen. Tim Carpenter publicly confronted McGee at Milwaukee City Hall about his use of the word "faggot" and his subsequent refusal to apologize to the LGBT community.

McGee had called a press conference outside Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett's office in City Hall. After the press event, Carpenter confronted McGee — face to face — about the alderman's use of hate speech and his failure to respond to the LGBT community on the matter.

"Why are you disrespectful?" Carpenter said to McGee. "Why don't you return phone calls? When will you apologize for using the term faggot? You're an embarrassment."

With a fleet of TV cameras and reporters in tow, Carpenter literally chased McGee down the second floor corridor as the alderman fled into his city hall office. McGee barely acknowledged Carpenter during the exchange and could only be heard to mutter the words "Frank Jude" in response to Carpenter.

After the confrontation, Carpenter told Queer Life that he felt disrespected by McGee and that he still has not spoken to the alderman personally on the issue despite repeated attempts.

"I want to speak to him, man to man and elected official to elected official," Carpenter said.

The same day, Barrett told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, "He owes an apology to the gay community ... [McGee's remarks] go beyond what is acceptable for any mature adult or elected official."

Common Council President Willie Hines also held a press conference on Feb. 23 and said in reference to McGee, "None of us are granted a license to inflame others with inappropriate labeling."

Six Milwaukee aldermen, Mike D'Amato, Bob Donovan, Michael Murphy, Willie Wade, Terry Witkowski and Tony Zielinski, took the unusual step of rebuking McGee in a let-



'At the rally, McGee said, "At least with gays you don't know they are going to kill you until it happens."'

— Alderman Michael McGee Jr.

ter in which they asked McGee to apologize.

In the letter the aldermen say McGee's comments "dipped well below the common threshold of statesmanship and civil decorum that we hold dear."

Community Center Calls for Apology, Meeting

The Milwaukee LGBT Community Center called a press conference Feb. 21 after McGee failed to respond to the center's efforts to open a dialog with the alderman on the issue.

Ironically, McGee represents the 6th aldermanic district in Milwaukee in which the center is located.

At the press conference, James Pennington, executive director of the Milwaukee LGBT Community Center, requested a meeting between McGee and LGBT leaders. He also called for a public apology.

"It is my concern that inflammatory statements such as used by the alderman may lead to an atmosphere that is unsafe for LGBT people and may foster the horrific kinds of violence visited upon Frank Jude Jr. for simply being himself," Pennington said at the press event.

Charles Daniels, an African-American LGBT activist also spoke at the press conference. He said he was concerned that allowing McGee's words to stand would make it easier for other elected officials to engage in hate speech without consequence.

"I was shocked," said Daniels. "This is something we have to address and something we cannot tolerate. We are not out to condemn McGee but to show him that his words have power. However, McGee is trying to get justice for a hate crime by using hate words."

Daniels called for minority communities in Milwaukee to come together in the search for justice in the Jude case and against McGee's homophobic language, adding, "There is no room anymore for hate crimes or hate words in Milwaukee."

"It seems he has given us a clear message that he won't meet with us until after the Jude case is settled. [McGee] has just turned his back on us," Pennington later told Queer Life. "We are going to be sending

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PUBLISHER'S STATEMENT:

A Call to Action Against Ald. Michael McGee

Hate speech and homophobia have no place in City Hall. Milwaukee citizens cannot allow to stand Alderman Michael McGee's public, homophobic hate speech on Feb. 10.

As advocates for social justice for all, Queer Life News supports the call for justice in the Frank Jude Jr. beating. However, it is plain wrong for Ald. McGee to fight hate with more hate.

We urge you to support the Milwaukee LGBT Center, Milwaukee elected officials and other community leaders in their efforts to secure an explanation and full public apology from McGee. We ask you to join us by contacting McGee and other city elected officials to express your concerns and demand a public apology from the alderman.

We also ask you to take the time to read our special report: Gay Hate in City Hall. It gives a fair, full account of McGee's statements along with exclusive coverage of events that you will not find anywhere else.

New Milwaukee Gay Arts Center A Celebration of LGBT Artistic Culture and the LGBT Artist and Performer

By Holly Grey

The new Milwaukee Gay Arts Center is opening March 26. The emerging Arts Center will showcase, through its eclectic exhibitions and productions, the diversity and personality of the Milwaukee-area LGBT community.

The brain child of Paul Masterson, Mark Hooker of The Uncommon Theatre Company, Ray Bradford of RSVP Productions and Don Hoffman of Q Life, this new Arts Center will house rotating exhibitions of artwork in all media and an assortment of productions from local theatre companies utilizing local performers.

"The LGBT community has a one-of-a-kind perspective of the world that should be expressed and celebrated through the arts," explained Paul Masterson, co-founder and curator of the new Milwaukee Gay Arts Center. "This center will provide the forum for showcasing who we are."

By creating this unique space the founders plan to display subject matter that speaks directly to gay and lesbian sensibilities, including political, romantic, erotic and social imagery and performances.

The founders envision this space to be the cultural hub of the Milwaukee LGBT community. Over time, they anticipate the space to become home to art instruction classes, workshops, lectures and even yoga classes and more. This distinctive space will also be available

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