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'Open Door' newspaper tries to bring understanding of the gay community

Kevin Richey admits that his idea to produce a widely distributed gay and lesbian newspaper was not greeted enthusiastically throughout the local gay and lesbian community.

"A lot of people were worried about being misrepresented," he said. "They didn't know what would be in it and they were apprehensive about the images it might create."

Richey and a small group of interested people nonetheless pursued the idea and saw it turn into *The Open Door*, a free, 16-page newspaper/magazine distributed this week to several Bloomington businesses and various locations at Indiana University.



Mike Leonard

H-T columnist

"Now that the paper is out," Richey said, "I can honestly say I've had nothing but good reaction, a lot of enthusiasm. And as far as the business community, I've been overwhelmed by their support. The first issue doesn't have many ads, but now that people have seen the paper, the support has been incredible."

The Open Door is an unusual publication. It is entirely locally produced, and Bloomington is, after all, a relatively small city in a conservative state which lies within a region sometimes referred to as "the Bible belt."

The paper also is unusual in its attitude and outlook. "There are a lot of gay publications all over the country, but they seem to me to address themselves to the gay community exclusively," Richey explained. "That's fine — there's a need for that. But my problem is I don't know where that all ends up. I think it's fine for a group to communicate and network and all that, but

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New 'Open Door' newspaper focuses on gay community

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what good is it? I think we need to be communicating with the rest of the community and the rest of the world.

"The idea is to let them know who we are and that we're basically like everyone else," Richey said.

The premiere issue of *The Open Door* includes a variety of articles, including "Straight Talk" (written by a heterosexual woman), a story on parenting written by a gay father, and several arts and entertainment stories.

One story, written by a woman named Karen Lane, is a poignant personal account about being the mother of a gay son. "I'm very proud of that article," said Richey, the newspaper's editor. "Several people I know have cut it out and sent it to their parents. I wish it were normal for all parents to act the way she did toward her gay child."

The tone of the stories in the newspaper is non-confrontational.

"We are firm in our desire to keep *The Open Door* completely non-pornographic," says an opening statement in the newspaper. "We will strive also to avoid sarcastic and vituperative language and will instead stress a positive view of our fellow humans. Above all, we will attempt to channel the love and energy of the Bloomington gay/lesbian community toward bringing about positive social change."

Later in statement, however, it says: "It would be unfaithful to those who write and read this newspaper to ignore the frustration, the

sadness, and the anger that we must work to avoid feeling every day. Every day our sisters are denied their rights purely because of their gender. Every day our brothers die of AIDS, while an ignorant few perpetuate myths about this dread condition at our expense. Every day our people lose jobs, are denied housing, are insulted and ridiculed and threatened, or are assaulted, raped, beaten or murdered — all because of whom we love..."

Richey expects at least some anti-gay backlash because of the publication, but said he expects more far more positive impact than negative. "Hopefully, it will cause some people to drop their reservations and prejudices about gay people and become more understanding and accepting," he said. "I imagine everyone is touched by someone who is gay, whether they know it or not. A lot of people are gay and choose to not be open about it."

Though he says, "I'm not the type of person to march in parades and carry a banner," Richie is quite open about his own situation. He believes he was born with the inclination to be homosexual, though grew up in a small central Indiana town and "never even knew what a homosexual was until I came to college." He now is an IU graduate and a divorced father of two children.

"We're no different than anyone else," Richie said. "We all have our quirks, I suppose — just like people who aren't gay. Hopefully, if people read *The Open Door*, they'll come to understand that."