



[CURRENT ISSUE:
VOL. III TABLE
OF CONTENTS](#)

features:

[k.c. faces of pride:
What a Difference
a Few can Make
dating in a gay
world: Another
Saturday Night and
I Ain't Got Nobody
snapshots of our
past: Reflections on
Kansas City's Gay
History](#)
arts &
entertainment
[Nicole, Kristie and
Marry](#)
style

[The Perfect Pair of
Glasses](#)

gardening

[Add a Beautiful
Water Garden](#)

spotlight
neighborhood

[Briarwood](#)

spotlight company
[AT&T's LGBT
Organization:](#)

[LEAGUE](#)

travel

[Cruising on Water](#)

wellness

[Traditional Chinese
Medicine](#)

[When Exercise
Hurts; How to Feel
Better](#)

voices

[What does Pride
mean to you?](#)

· [First Annual
Y'GAY Y'LIFE
Y'EXPO](#)

· [OUTBOX: letters](#)

feature ▼ : [Snapshots of our Past: Reflections on Kansas City's Gay History /](#)

Snapshots of our Past:
Reflections on Kansas City's Gay History

by Sarah Ivy

Kansas City's gay community has a rich Yhistory. At VERGE, we wanted to look back to the 1970s, 80s Yand 90s, and see what took place that led us to where we are today. We wanted to hear the history through the voices of those Ywho lived it. Along with the time line of key events, we're providing you the heart and soul of what has made our city's community so proud , through the words of those Ywho Ywere Ythere.



The 1970s marked the birth of a roaring movement for civil rights. In 1972 Congress overwhelmingly approved the Equal Rights Amendment and a local women's movement took shape. African Americans had caused a lot of commotion with riots in the 60's and their demands were now beginning to be taken seriously. The gay community too, spurred by the Stonewall Riots in New York City and the subsequent national outcry for justice, reorganized and began to establish a movement that would be the seed to carry Kansas City into today's relatively gay-friendly climate.

The Metropolitan Community Church of Kansas City (MCC) started meeting in 1973. That same year, a group of students at UMKC calling themselves the Gay People's Union, were denied the right to organize on campus. The chancellor refused to recognize the group because as he understood it "homosexuality was an abnormality and an illness." The outraged students sued the school.

In 1974 a handful of activists made the first



Anita Bryant

feature article

[to the editor](#)
[· urban living:](#)
[Rooftop terraces,](#)
[sky-lit openings](#)
[and floor-to-ceiling](#)
[windowsóitis all](#)
[part of what](#)
[Summit at](#)
[Sixteenth will be](#)
[offering its](#)
[residents in the](#)
[next year.](#)
[· Mr. Metrosexual](#)
[contest winner](#)
[· oh andee: Gay](#)
[questions with](#)
[Straight answers](#)
[· the coming out of](#)
[the gay american](#)
[family: Gay rights.](#)
[Equal Rights. Our](#)
[Rights.](#)
[· The Examined](#)
[Life: The Most](#)
[Frequently Asked](#)
[Question](#)
[· You've Got Male:](#)
[Take a look at our](#)
[favorite contestant](#)
[from this year's](#)
[International Male](#)
[Contest](#)
[· A More Perfect](#)
[Union: A Personal](#)
[Commentary](#)
[· Constitution](#)
[Defense League:](#)
[Missouri's](#)
[Campaign to](#)
[DEFEAT](#)
[Discrimination](#)
[Against the GBLT](#)
[Community](#)
[· Horoscopes by](#)
[James](#)

attempts to start a community center at 3825 Virginia, but lacked the support needed to sustain the few action items being implemented. The group did manage to pull together Kansas City's first demonstration for gay rights. A year later, the Gay Talk Crisis Line was established, an operation that managed well into the 90s. By 1976 the community had still not coalesced and only a handful of gay activists were present for the Republican National Convention at Crown Center that year.

The latter third of the decade marked the beginning of a strong, cohesive community. The Christopher Street Association was established in 1977 and rallied a gay community to oppose Anita Bryant's arrival. On June 15th of that year the Kansas City Times published, "The greater threat to this society, which struggles toward justice for all, is not the ordinary homosexual; it is the Anita Bryant's who catch up so many gullible and unsophisticated Americans in their messianic madness." The same year Christopher Street organized the very first Gay Pride Festival. In March of 1978, Gay Lib, et al, vs. The University of MO, the Supreme Court made a landmark ruling in favor of gay student rights.

KEITH SPARE



Keith Spare began his activism in the late 60s, driving to Kansas City from Manhattan where he was a student at K-State. He was by nature a conscientious objector and compassionate individual. In Kansas City he studied and graduated from the St. Paul School of Theology and practiced as a licensed counselor. Naturally, he incorporated the struggle for gay rights into his professional career.

"I moved to Kansas City in 1973, when MCC

was in its infancy and meeting in people's homes. I met with the pastor but didn't get involved. Somehow I ran into Gerry Young and we organized a group in 1974 for the first gay rights march. It was he and I and a few others that brought all of us together. There really wasn't much going on and people were still getting arrested in bars. We weren't nearly organized enough to get a marching permit or get enough people to walk down and cover the street so we marched from Liberty Memorial to downtown shouting 'gay rights now' or something like that. It wasn't more than 60 people."

LEA HOPKINS



Lea Hopkins was Kansas City's first African-American Playboy bunny and professional model. Although she knew she was gay at fourteen, she thought she was the "only one." She says, "I was a lipstick lesbian so many years ago there wasn't any phrase for it and I saw no examples of myself." When she decided to come out of the closet she left Kansas City for New York City and didn't return until 1974.

"When I came back to Kansas City I was just rabid and I realized, okay, you're back in the Midwest where things move a little slower so you're going to have to use a little more grace to get these people together. There had never been gay pride parades in Kansas City, the bars were an entity of their own, the church was an entity of its own; I mean, there was no cohesiveness at all in Kansas city. And that really, really surprised me because things happen in the Midwest that the east and west coast sometimes take a cue from but it was just a dry land for me and it absolutely made me nuts. You would go in to a gay bar and the guys are on one side of the room and the women are on the other side of the

room, or they're in the basement. And I thought, what is up with this, this is not going to get us anywhere. And from my own community, see I didn't know there was an Afro-American gay community in Kansas City until I came back. And the response was why are you, an African American woman, all involved in a white man's business. It was very, very closeted in those days being an Afro-American and being gay. But regardless as to race or sex, we are all homosexuals and that was my thing, we are all homosexuals and I don't care if you're white or black or orange or green or whatever."

Upon her return Lea immediately spoke up for gay rights and later was instrumental with the early parades and rallies organized by Christopher Street.

"Christopher Street started with a friend of mine Judy and a guy named Michael. I met them and we just started talking. They said they were going to start a group and they had heard me do a lecture at KU for the gay organization that they had there at that time and said 'we need a spokesperson, would you be our spokesperson?' I said 'sure, not a problem' and then next thing you know Anita Bryant came to KC. And I was like, oops now its time to speak I guess. There were tons of people who came. It was unbelievable! Police protection like you couldn't believe! I wanted to do an on-air interview with her but she denied it. So I thought, well we can't sit down together but I can definitely be outside and let her know that we are here."

GERRY YOUNG

Gerry Young moved to Kansas City in 1967 when he was 24 years old. Arrested at a gay bar in 1972, Gerry first isolated himself. He was fuming with anger and quickly became deeply involved in the movement.

"In 1976 we did a public demonstration at the Republican National Convention for Equal Opportunity employment, at the time I was working for the National Gay Taskforce. We were connected then with the Yippies and Coyote, the prostitutes union, and different groups like that. I was sending press releases to all the gay media nationally. We were hoping to get at least a blurb in the Advocate to get more people here. When we finally got a response it was Randy Shultz at the Advocate who said that the reason they weren't sending anyone at that time was because they considered Kansas City to be a very weak movement area.

At that time too, we lobbied the Human Relations Department at City Hall for probably a year and a half hoping to get a hearing in to the commission. We did finally and Jim Glyer, MCC

pastor, became the first gay commissioner elected here in the city, then Keith Spare followed. There were some great people on the commission who had come out for the gay issue. One young black man, Joseph Jones, a Republican, eventually got us a continuous seat on that commission."

After Congress approved the ERA it was sent to the states for ratification. In 1982 the ERA quietly died after 10 years on the table, just 3 states shy of ratification; it never passed in Missouri or Kansas. The same year the first case of AIDS had been identified in Kansas City, then known as the Gay Related Immunity Disorder. At the close of the decade AIDS had claimed nearly 500 Kansas Citian's lives and between 10,000 and 15,000 were infected with HIV, 90% of them were gay men.

Groups for the gay rights struggle that were so very adamant about speaking up and increasing the visibility of the community began to relax after causing such a great furor and in the early 80s were relatively dormant. The mid 80's marked resurgence in the movement and a shift in focus toward dealing with the AIDS crisis. In 1985, the first of its kind, The Good Samaritan Project (GSP) started at MCC to provide support for people dealing with the disease. Soon to follow were SAVE, Inc. and SAVE Home and Heartland AIDS Resource Council and HARCmart. Groups like Gay Organized Alliance for Liberation (GOAL), Pink Triangle, ACT UP and Human Rights Project (HRP) were working towards education, awareness, and equal rights under protection of the law; for the gay community and AIDS community alike. Additionally Kansas City was forming chapters of National organizations such as PFLAG and GLADD. The first exclusively gay and lesbian bookstore in Kansas City, Phoenix Bookstore, opened in 1987. By the close of the 80s Kansas City would again be known to have a very strong community demanding attention with an uncompromising sense of urgency.



GARY ROOT

Gary Root became involved with GSP early on. He has since become a licensed counselor and continues to provide services for persons living with AIDS and HIV in Kansas City.

"Everybody was involved with everybody to take care of the people with AIDS. There were hundreds of volunteers. It was all very awful then. Drugs had to be shipped around incognito for people dying that didn't have insurance. They couldn't stay in the hospitals and the nursing homes wouldn't accept them. People would sometimes come in the morning and die later in the evening. It was like when you're old and all of your friends are dying except everybody was really young. Social events were fundraisers and funerals."

JON BARNETT

Jon Barnett has been a long time activist for gay rights. He was one person who came to the valuable realization that the gay community needed to get involved in the political sphere and how to be effective therein. Early on he was involved with ACT UP and HRP among other organizations.

"ACT-UP practiced acts of civil disobedience, you know, to get media attention. We had probably 1,000 people that would participate in all sorts of demonstrations. We would do die-ins a lot. We did them at the FDA. We did them at City Hall. We would lie on the sidewalk and outline each other's bodies with chalk, you know, so it looked like a mass murder crime scene. We printed posters for the idea of targeting city hall that were pretty controversial. The posters had a picture of city hall with a big bull's-eye over top it. One of the biggest stunts we pulled and what got a lot of attention was, well, city hall used to have an open observation deck on a floor between the courtrooms where the council met and the floor of the Mayor's office. During a council meeting we took over the deck. We blocked the door and hung a 20 x 60 ft. banner off the side of the building that said STOP AIDS. That was thrilling, exciting and scary at the same time, the feeling came from knowing you were doing something that was going to lead to good but you got the sense you were going to get in a lot of trouble for it. We did a lot of things and they had to pay attention because they couldn't avoid us. We shut down city hall once by jamming the phone lines for 2 or 3 days; they couldn't operate on account of us.

The thing about ACT-UP was that we operated on group consensus, but some people would come up with some outrageous ideas and create affinity groups for those people that were pushing for more radical demonstrations. So things were done like putting crazy glue on all the locks at city hall and there was one where they burned a church flag. Some of it was really over the top. There was a group that threw blood

all over city hall. The implication was that it was HIV+ and nobody knew whether it was or not. The idea was sort of a cliché, that the city had blood on their hands. HRP was sort of a shoot-off from ACT-UP or to do something with all of the visibility that ACT-UP was generating for the community. There was at the time the Pink Triangle but it had more focus on Jefferson City. Before Pink Triangle there was GOAL, which worked more in the educational sphere getting literature and resources in the schools. HRP became its own thing separate from Pink Triangle, in truth, because we didn't think that we could be taken seriously as a gay liberation group with pink in our name."



The 90s marked a period of unprecedented political gain for the local gay community. In 1990 the Human Rights Commission introduced a civil right's ordinance to give homosexuals equal protection under law. In 1993 the ordinance passed. In 1991 Jon Barnett ran for city council as an openly gay candidate. June 22, 1991 marked the last time a gay pride festival would not be granted a proclamation when Mayor Emanuel Cleaver gave a 20 minute speech on stage and announced that a mayoral commission on gay and lesbian concerns would be formed in the coming months. Hundreds of testimonials were given by gay individuals in Kansas City and reported to Mayor Cleaver. That same year the Kansas City ordained an unprecedented allocation of funds to AIDS patient care and resources. In 1992 lesbians organized a movement to draw women nationally to Kansas City for the start of Womantown, a neighborhood for lesbians in which to live and feel comfortable and have a strong social network. In 1993 Jon Koop began performing as "Flo" at the Cabaret to raise money for charitable AIDS organizations. The Cabaret would become the number one fundraising bar in the world for The American Foundation for AIDS Research (amFAR).

Keith Spare: "I remember one of the most ornery things we did-but I am still very proud of-was to get Kansas City to put a funding level for HIV in place that was similar to St. Louis. They had over \$500,000 of city money going to

HIV for care and treatment. In Kansas City it was nothing, \$60,000. I actually remember the meeting when we got Emanuel Cleaver and Dan Cochran, Chair of the finance committee to agree that if we dropped pushing the vote on the human rights ordinance until after Cleaver was elected that he promised to increase city funding, which he did. It was one of his earliest statements of commitment, and it made a difference. Emanuel struggled with that religious issue, what were his other black ministers going to say or do if he supported gay rights. So we had to struggle with him on that and keep his feet in the fire. One of his friends advice to me was, 'He's a sweetheart, he'll do it, just keep him hot, don't let him off the hook.' He wanted to vote for the ordinance but he was afraid of what would happen to his career. He was supportive but he didn't want it to come to vote while he was on the city council because he was running for Mayor and because the conservative he was running against was using his support for gay rights against him. So the feeling was that if we brought it to vote and won we might lose the election. Of course my feeling was that if we brought it to vote we might lose from not enough support. So we came into the mayoral election with less city council votes and we came out of it with not only a mayor in our corner but the majority of city council votes because we got our candidates elected. That's how the ordinance first lost. I can remember the looks on the folks' faces that were against the gay rights ordinance, when the motion was made to table it."

Jon Barnett: "The whole intent behind my running for office was to find out where the gay vote was so we would have some leverage to fight for our issues. We knew there were a whole lot of us, but we couldn't necessarily prove that. To find out where we all were I ran citywide in the council race and we definitely brought attention to my being gay, but that wasn't the whole thing. I had a position on everything, I just happen to also be gay.

I lost in the primaries but I had 20,000 votes, 12% of the vote; quite a bit for six candidates having ran. We tracked the outcome and found the majority of our votes spread evenly over the second and fourth districts, and clusters in the Northeast, North of the river, and an area out south we couldn't make much sense of. We also found that the African American neighborhoods didn't have much of a gay vote at all."

Keith Spare: "After Mayor Cleaver was elected he was asked to do a proclamation for gay Pride. He didn't want to do it because again, he was afraid. There was a great amount of tension. I had been out of town meanwhile the shit had hit the fan. When I came back Linda May and I

started meeting with the mayor and he eventually made us his liaisons to the community. I remember when he came to Gay Pride we didn't know how people were going to respond. About the proclamation the feeling was, we voted for you and you should now come through and do this for us. Well, he wasn't sure what would happen on the other side if he did. Emanuel Cleaver came to Gay Pride and that was the last year we didn't get a proclamation. Walking with him through the crowd, oh my God, was the most moving experience of my entire life. People stood up and there was wave after wave of applause. He was still scared to death!"

The 90s saw a decrease in organization and motivation. Leaders had died or began to burn out after their long careers in activism. Most monetary support was being funneled in to the AIDS cause or out of Kansas City to the national movement. The Phoenix bookstore shut its doors for lack of monetary support. Many fledgling attempts to recreate a community center were made but lacking support it was slow to take shape. The Womantown eventually lost its spirit to divisive philosophies.

As always our Kansas City gay community has since repooled its energies and reorganized for what causes there are to pursue. With the new decade the community has made outlandish progress in visibility and gaining the support of our allies. The activism of our leaders years past has paved a bright future for Kansas City and younger generations have stepped up to carry the baton to new heights and are setting new precedents for tomorrow. Thank You!