

Gay publications are seeing gains in numbers, acceptance

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Three newspapers circulated in KC area

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Step into a Midtown office building. Take the stairs up and veer left at the top. Enter a small second-floor room that's just big enough for a newspaper bureau. Welcome to the Lesbian and Gay News-Telegraph - and a different perspective on the news. After a long climb, gay publications are gaining solid footing in Kansas City and other cities nationwide.

Locally, editors at the News-Telegraph, the Kansas City Gazette and the Current News are optimistic about continuing growth.

"The first several years of the paper, nobody made anything on it," said News-Telegraph regional editor Jon Barnett. "But we've seen real growth since the first of this year. " About 160 weeklies, biweeklies, monthlies and quarterlies serve the nation's homosexual community, estimated at 25 million people.

In June, a national magazine called Out made its debut.

The News-Telegraph, which has a Midwestern focus, is published monthly, with a circulation of 4,800 in Kansas City and 6,500 in St. Louis. Total regional circulation is about 16,000, Barnett said.

Like most gay publications, the News-Telegraph is distributed without charge, mostly in gay bars and at gay-owned businesses.

Some of the paper's revenue is generated through sexually oriented advertisements.

In one ad, a young man poses provocatively under a 900 number promising intimate conversation. Some readers and advertisers have been offended by the 900 ads, Barnett acknowledges.

"We ask them to keep the ads as acceptable as possible," Barnett said. "On the other hand, they're paying to be in the paper. " The newest gay publication in the area, the Kansas City Gazette, doesn't carry the ads.

"If straight (heterosexually oriented) advertisers want to reach a fantastic market, we give them that opportunity," said Gazette Editor David Ray.

The weekly was launched this year. Ray, who is publisher as well as staff writer, is enthusiastic.

"We are the only publication actively reaching closeted people that don't go to bars," he said in an interview at the paper's storefront location on Troost Avenue. "We do not shy away from any issue. We believe that you should be who you are. " The market, Ray believes, is clearly out there. Kansas City is like "an emerging New York or San Francisco in the '60s," he said.

"It just seems a lot more people are out now," he said.

Ray thinks Kansas City has 150,000 to 200,000 gay men and lesbians - a formidable market for advertisers. And he also thinks he's got just the newspaper for them.

"If you want to reach a certain group of people, why wouldn't you focus on print, where it's going to be around for a while?" The Gazette has a circulation of 15,000, mostly in Kansas City, Ray said.

Like the Gazette, the Current News is a weekly. Publisher and Editor Angelo Restivo said the publication, available at more than 50 locations, is in its second year.

Unlike Ray, who said he thought the Gazette had much to offer heterosexual readers through its arts and entertainment coverage, Restivo said his focus was exclusively on the gay community. The Current News includes a roundup of news on gay themes from across America.

"If it's of interest, it's put in our paper," Restivo said. The Current News has a circulation of 3,500, he said, "and it keeps growing. " The three papers have "subtle differences," said Marc A. Hein, a gay activist who writes a column for the Current News. What they have in common, he said, is a commitment to addressing the gay community on its own terms.

"We are a social and cultural force," Hein said. "We don't just have a parade in June, and that's all we do. " The papers vary in their political stances. Barnett is concerned about uncovering news that the mainstream media might miss, such as incidents of discrimination and gay-bashing. Ray wants to show that gays are part of everyday life. Restivo professes no political agenda,

although he said he did not censor his columnists.

But the papers also have at least two other things in common: They depend on volunteer staff and are located in Midtown.

"We're pretty concentrated in the Midtown area," Barnett said.

"There are lots and lots of gay and lesbian people that don't want to go to an adult bookstore to get the paper." Of the three papers, the News-Telegraph is the oldest. It started in St. Louis 10 years ago, adopting a regional focus about three years later. The Kansas City office opened in September 1990.

Barnett became the paper's regional editor a year ago.

And as far as the former remodeling contractor is concerned, it was the right move.

"I've always thought Kansas City was a lot more progressive than people give it credit for," he said.