The Long Struggle for LGBTQ Equality in Santa Clara County

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About the Author

Ken Yeager has been a Santa Clara County Supervisor since 2006. In 1992, he became the County's first openly gay elected official when he won the first of two terms on the San Jose Evergreen Community College Board. He followed that with two terms on the San Jose City Council and then three on the Board of Supervisors.

He is the co-founder of BAYMEC, Silicon Valley's leading LGBTQ political advocacy group, and was the first chair of the Santa Clara County AIDS Task Force. Before running for office, Yeager taught at San Jose State University.

He received his doctorate and master's degrees from Stanford University and his undergraduate degree from San Jose State.

THE LONG STRUGGLE FOR LGBTQ EQUALITY IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY

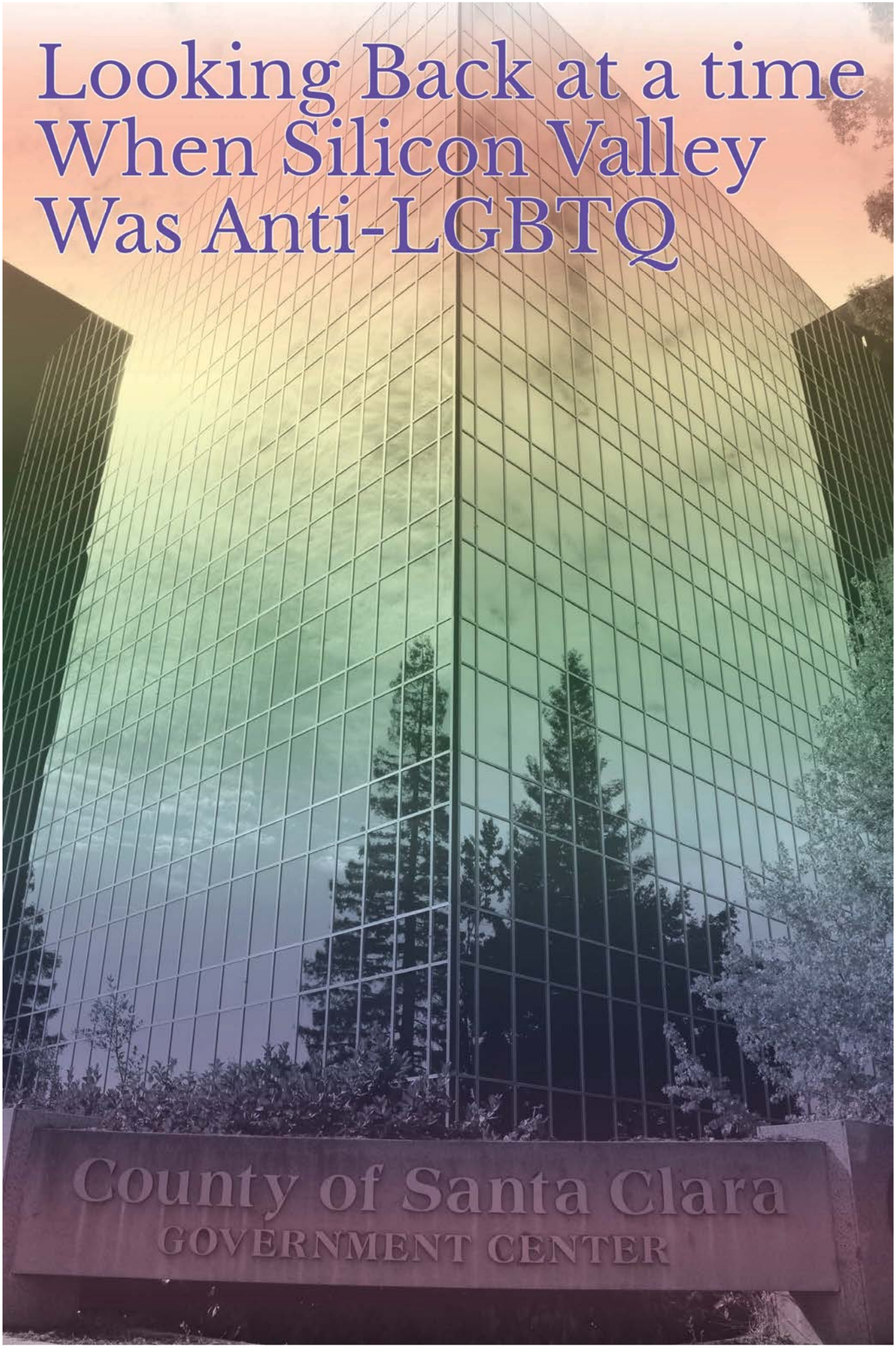
For quite some time, I have been interested in San Jose and Santa Clara County's gay history. LGBTQ people have won the right to be proud of our history through hard fought battles, hard earned victories, and tenacity after punishing defeats. Progress has emerged from the conflicts, and as we go forward, it is important to remember that we are a battle-hardened group.

Long before struggles such as same-sex marriage and serving openly in the military, there was the fight for policies protecting LGBTQ people from discrimination. This, unlike the others, is still being waged. Nineteen states still do not have any protections for sexual orientation or gender identity. In those states, LGBTQ Americans can be fired or discriminated against without cause.

Ken Yeager

December 2018

Looking Back at a time When Silicon Valley Was Anti-LGBTQ



Below: Marchers in San Jose's Pride Parade

Emerging Pro-LGBTQ Protections

The first major push for LGBTQ anti-discrimination laws began in the mid-1970s and came on the heels of the Civil Rights and women's movements. Securing approval of these policies was difficult. In California, for example, the state legislature had enough votes to pass LGBTQ anti-discrimination legislation in 1984, but it wasn't until 1992 that such a bill was signed into law by Governor Wilson.

Because states would not adopt these laws, attention turned to local governments. East Lansing, Michigan, was the first to pass an ordinance in 1972 forbidding discrimination based on "affectional or sexual preference." Another liberal university city, Ann Arbor, Michigan, followed a few months later.

Larger jurisdictions passing similar laws included: Boulder, Colorado; Miami-Dade, Florida; St. Paul, Minnesota; Wichita, Kansas; Eugene, Oregon; and Seattle, Washington.

Below: Anita Bryant speaking

Just when the gay rights movement was gaining steam, with people coming out of the closet and gay pride parades being held across the country, Anita Bryant—a Miss America runner-up and Florida orange juice pitchwoman—entered the scene. In 1977, building on her friend Phyllis Schlafly's anti-ERA campaign, Bryant founded an anti-gay group, Save Our Children, Inc., which led a highly publicized campaign to repeal Miami-Dade's ordinance.

The campaign was based on conservative Christian beliefs about the sinfulness of homosexuality and the perceived threat of homosexual recruitment of children and child molestation. Bryant stated, "What these people really want, hidden behind obscure legal phrases, is the legal right to propose to our children that theirs is an acceptable alternate way of life. I will lead such a crusade to stop it as this country has not seen before." Indeed, the campaign she initiated resulted in nationwide focus on the issue, a conservative backlash, and establishment of the tone of gay rights battles for years to come.

Her religiously charged "Save Our Children" campaign not only seriously set back the gay rights movement, but also launched the careers of Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Jim and Tammy Bakker, among others. It has been viewed as the beginning of the rise of the Religious Right.

As the number of jurisdictions in the U.S. that began outlawing discrimination based on sexual orientation grew, Bryant began traveling across the country spreading her anti-gay message. Bryant stated, "As a mother, I know that homosexuals cannot biologically reproduce children; therefore, they must recruit our children."

That same year—1977—here in California State Senator John Briggs introduced a ballot measure, Proposition 6, to deny gays and lesbians the right to be employed as teachers in California.

Playing the card of gay recruitment, Briggs was quoted as saying the proposition was needed since "one third of San Francisco's teachers are homosexual. I assume most of them are seducing young boys."

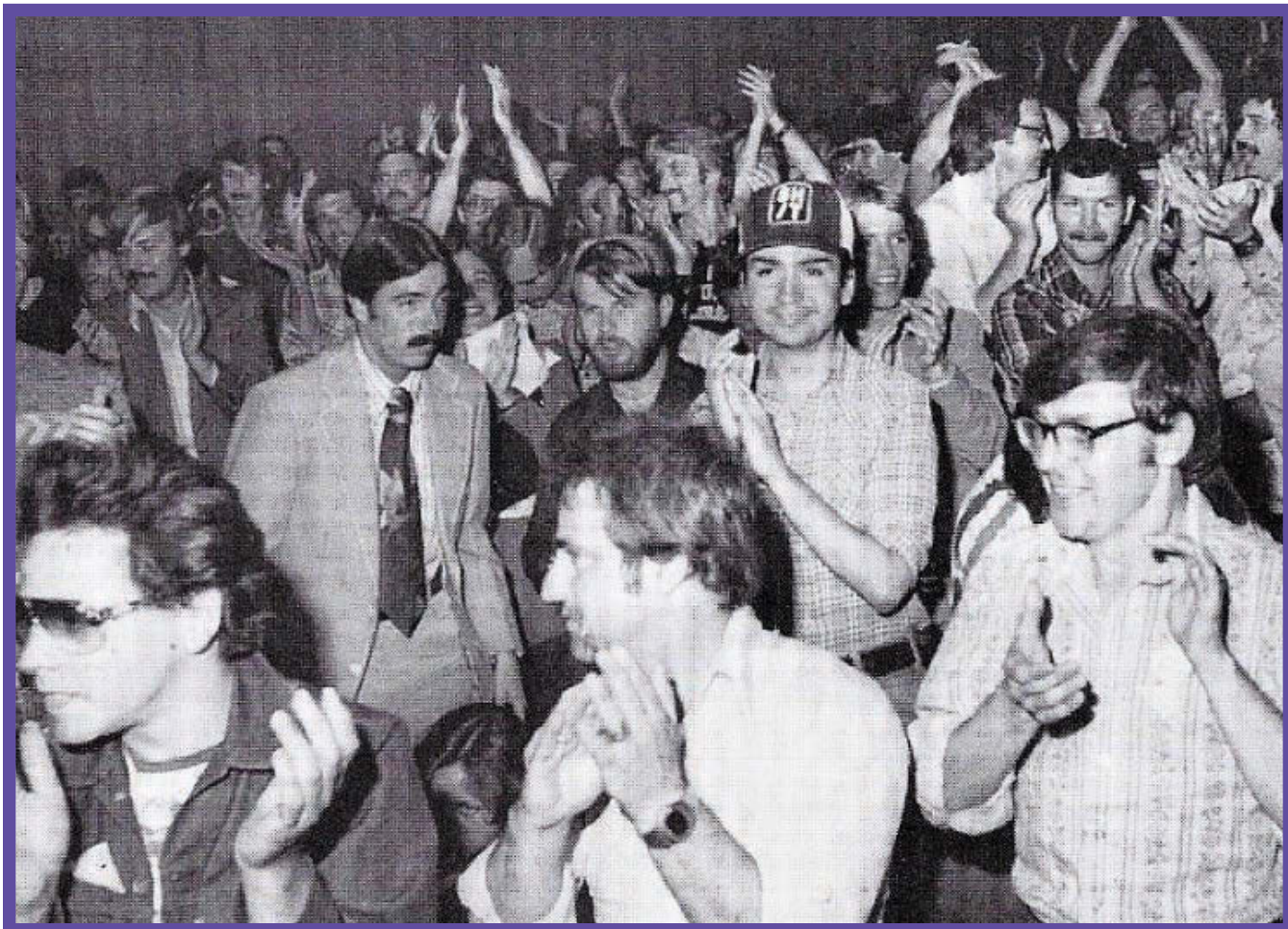
The initiative galvanized the gay community into action statewide. Recently elected San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk worked hard to defeat it, traveling the state, out- debating Briggs at every turn. (The film "The Times of Harvey Milk" has extensive footage of some of these debates.)

Above from top to bottom: Advertisement by Religions Right to ban homosexual educators from being able to teach, Button against Proposition 6: Briggs Initiative. Harvey Milk

After widespread opposition by newspapers and politicians, the measure was defeated by a 60% vote.

The Prop. 6 defeat led to an overconfidence among some LGBTQ activists in the South Bay about the level of acceptance they had achieved. They began a push for anti-discrimination ordinances in San Jose and Santa Clara County, unaware of the backlash to come.

Below: Residents in support of LGBTQ rights campaign against Briggs Initiative.



Above: LGBTQ Anti-Discrimination ordinance supporters applauding after San Jose City Council approves it

Below from left to right: Group after San Jose City Council passes Measure B.
Left to right: Rosalie "Nikki" Nichols, Pat McAtee, Johnie Staggs, Jana Cunningham, and James P. McEntee, Director of the Human Relations Commission

Landmark LGBTQ Anti-Discrimination Ordinances Enacted

In an April 2017 interview with Johnie Staggs—a pioneering lesbian activist in San Jose who was chair of the local campaign supporting Measures A and B—she recalled that the idea for the anti-discrimination ordinance started when the community wanted a gay pride proclamation. San Jose Mayor Janet Gray Hayes believed that a anti-discrimination bill would be easier to pass than a proclamation. Staggs Said, "She reasoned that a gay pride proclamation was too in your face for the public but who could be against basic rights,"

As it turned out, just about everyone was.

On the heels of the Briggs defeat, Staggs said "We were in a kind of euphoria. We knew we were right and we wanted to live our lives openly. Unfortunately, many of us were kind of pie in the sky."

From the outset, the idea was to have the city pass the ordinance, but according to Staggs, it became bogged down in the race for mayor and the continuing debate over a gay pride proclamation. Thus, the attention turned to the Board of Supervisors, who took up the issue and passed an ordinance before the city did.

Below: David Steward, Santa Clara County Human Relations Commissioner

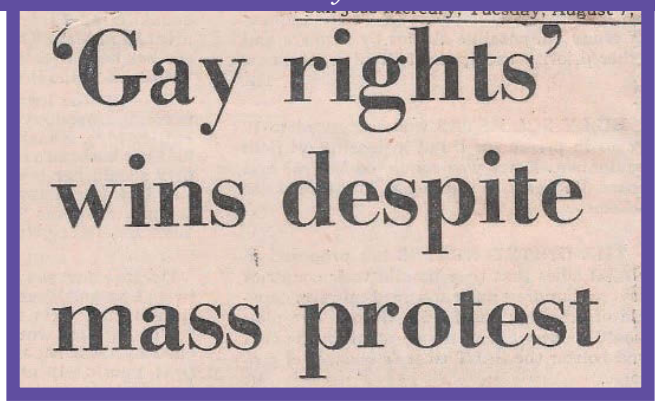
Staggs gives credit to Jim McEntee, Director of Santa Clara County Office of Human Relations, for bringing the ordinance forward. Others credit David P. Steward, who was appointed by County Supervisor Dan McCorquodale to the Human Rights Commission, as spearheading the effort. Steward was the first openly gay person to serve on the commission. A Lambda News article from 1980 stated, "The gay rights ordinances were his conception and his work more than anyone else's. Through a massive effort by Dave Steward and a relatively small core of community activists, both the city ordinance and county ordinance passed."
It is probably safe to say that Steward and McEntee worked side-by-side to get the ordinance in front of the County Board of Supervisors.

Regrettably, even from the beginning it seemed that many in the gay community were somewhat ambivalent. In a Lambda News article, Steward stated that there had been only one letter and one phone call received from the commission in support of an ordinance. "I am not going to carry the fight for protective legislation by myself," Steward said. He went on to lament that gays and lesbians must let their elected officials know of the support in the community. "Our mandate is clear," he said. "But time is not on our side if apathy toward protective legislation prevails.

Nevertheless, on April 24, 1979, the Human Relations Commission voted to adopt the ordinance and asked the Board of Supervisors to enact it. Early comments by board members interviewed by a San Jose Mercury News reporter seemed to indicate there were at least three votes in favor.

The Board of Supervisors first heard the proposed anti-discrimination ordinance on June 12, 1979. There would be a total of six hearings before final adoption, with more than 25 hours of public testimony.

Below: *San Jose Mercury News* Article from 1979


San Jose Mercury, Tuesday, August 7,

'Gay rights' wins despite mass protest

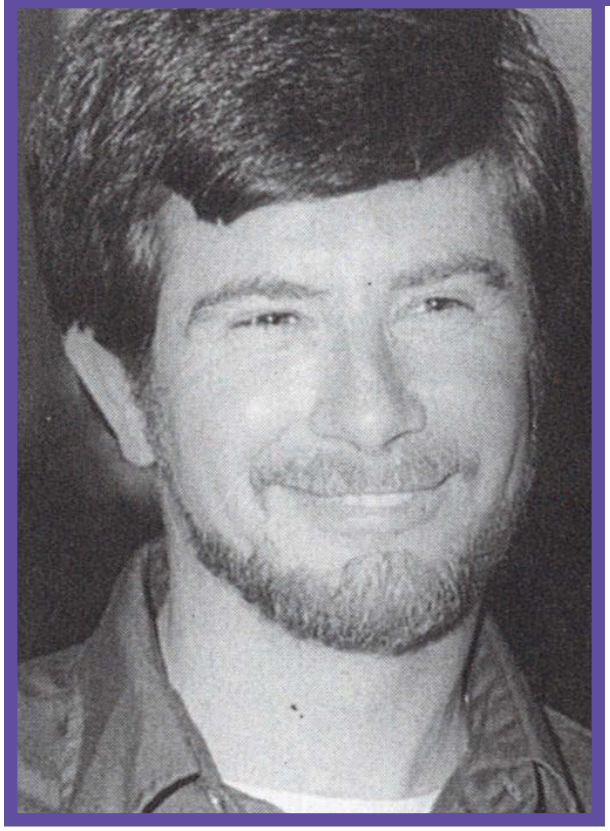
The first meeting provided a good indication of what was to follow. According to official transcripts of the meeting, speakers who opposed the measure included Rick Harrington, a 28-year-old Mormon who led the group Concerned Citizens Against the Sexual Orientation Ordinance, and Rev. Marvin Rickard of the Los Gatos Christian Church. Rickard is quoted at the hearing as saying he was "against the ordinance because it protects homosexuality, which is an immoral practice." Another speaker said, "the ordinance denies his right because, if it passes, he must hire gays which may offend his customers."

Forty years later, these remain the dual arguments used against granting LGBTQ people the same rights as others.

After the first public hearing, Supervisors Dan McCorquodale, Rod Diridon, Gerry Steinberg and Susanne Wilson all expressed support. According to the transcripts, Supervisor Dominic Cortese stated he felt the ordinance was inappropriate because it involved lifestyles and personal preferences. He went on to comment that it was a moral issue which should be resolved in the religious community and not by legislation.

Above: Rev. Marvin Rickard of Los Gatos Christian Church speaking before San Jose City Council

Below: Dan Relic



Perhaps as a premonition of things to come, activist, Dan Relic, writing in Lambda News, said he was "filled with dread and anxiety" over the lack of support being given to the four supervisors who favored the ordinance. Opponents were clearly getting their people to the board chambers in far greater numbers than supporters. Relic was pleading for the gay community to attend the hearings to counter the claim by fundamentalists that they and not gays represented the public's view on the issue. Relic went on, "Is it any wonder that a politician will believe them when they look out at an audience of 800 badge-wearing, bible-thumping fanatics who surround 150 vocal activists?"

The final hearing is particularly well remembered for the hundreds of religious protestors in attendance, the disruption of a 6.0 Richter scale earthquake, the scores of opponents who broke out in song when the jolt occurred—singing Onward Christian Soldiers and Amazing Grace--and the speakers who claimed it was a sign from God.

As reported in the *San Jose Mercury News*, one ordinance opponent, addressing the Board said, "That earthquake we had is just an example of what will happen in Santa Clara County if this ordinance is passed."

On August 6, nearly two months after it was first considered, the ordinance was adopted by the County Board of Supervisors. Following the 4-1 vote for passage, Rev. Rickard held an impromptu press conference and said an attempt would be made to place the issue on the ballot.

With far less fanfare, the San Jose City Council approved the ordinance on a 6-1 vote on August 28, after only two hearings.

Below: Teenage attendees of San Jose City Council meeting protesting the anti-discrimination ordinance

Retaliation from the Religious Right

Opponents of the LGBTQ anti-discrimination ordinances passed by Santa Clara County (8/6/79) and the City of San Jose (8/28/79) wasted no time collecting signatures calling for their overturn. An East San Jose Sun article discussed how the Concerned Citizens Against the Gay Rights Ordinance planned to send 2,500 persons to collect the needed 37,000 signatures to stop the ordinance from taking effect. (They got 57,000.) For San Jose, they needed 18,000 and got 27,000. Under California law, once the required signatures are validated, the Board of Supervisors and City Council have the right to rescind the ordinance or place it on the ballot.

The four supervisors who supported the ordinance stated they were in favor of placing the measure on the ballot. Perhaps reflecting the

Below: East San Jose Sun Article

Serving East San Jose since 1958

East San Jose Sun

25¢

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 15, 1979

Petition day Aug. 18

Group plans drive to repeal gay ordinance

By BRUCE ALDERMAN

MEMBERS OF A group protesting the county's recently passed gay rights ordinance say they'll be taking to the streets en masse in an effort to force the Board of Supervisors either to repeal the ordinance or to place it before the voters.

The Concerned Citizens Against the Gay Rights Ordinance plans to send 2,500 persons to collect the needed signatures. According to a spokesman at Los Gatos Christian Church, one of the supporters of the anti-gay ordinance troup, the group will hold a kick-off meeting Aug. 16 to discuss strategy and assign areas for the volunteer signature - gatherers to canvass.

"Each person will have specific areas to get 25 signatures apiece. The church is providing the location for the meeting," Carol Chapel said. Petition day is the following Saturday.

Chapel claims the group plans to get 50,000 signatures in one day.

Only 37,092 valid signatures are needed. If the group comes up with at least that number, then the ordinance is suspended until the signatures are validated, which could take 30 days.

The Board of Supervisors would then have the choice of rescinding the ordinance or sending it to the voters.

So far, only board Chairman Dominic Cortese has said he'll vote to kill the ordinance. "An election would be too costly. I think this county is not ready for this ordinance."

Susanne Wilson and Rod Diridon have said they'll vote for an election.

But supervisors Gerry Steinberg and Dan McCorquodale say they want to wait to see how many signatures the group will collect and from what areas of the county they come from.

McCorquodale says he's leaning towards allowing the voters to make up their own mind. "I think on a county-wide vote, the ordinance would be sustained. Proposition 6 (the Briggs anti-gay initiative) was defeated in my district by over 60 percent."

The Registrar of Voters office says if the ordinance goes on the ballot it would be probably be in June 1980.

hope of most of the gay community, Supervisor McCorquodale said, "I think on a county-wide vote, the ordinance would be sustained. Proposition 6 (the Briggs anti-gay initiative) was defeated in my district by over 60 percent."

The measures (Measure A for the county and Measure B for the city) were placed on the June 1980 ballot by the Registrar of Voters. A "yes" vote meant you favored the ordinances; a "no" vote signified you were against them and wanted them repealed.

From all indications, the local gay and lesbian community had a hard time organizing. Gay leaders worried that community members were not contacting their elected officials. Trailblazing lesbian activist Johnie Staggs said although proponents raised $100,000, much of the support came from out of the area. Likewise, she said that, "Busloads of people came up from Los Angeles on the weekends to walk precincts, but we had enormous difficulty getting local people to do it."

She commented that San Jose was still a closeted community back then. "In general, there was a feeling that many local gay people cringed when we held rallies or other public events. They were afraid some of the spotlight would splash on them."

I experienced this personally. At the time, I was a 26-year-old staffer working for Supervisor Susie Wilson. I was out to my gay friends but not colleagues. Locally there were no out gay or lesbian staffers and very few even in D.C. where I worked on Capitol Hill in the early 1980s. Having a gay staffer was still risky political business.

In his book, "From Closet to Community," Ted Sahl wrote, "From the beginning, the campaign was riddled with organizational problems. The public relations firm, Solem and Associates, hired to run the Yes on A and B Campaign was dismissed in January 1980 after it finished the preliminary work. Under its direction the campaign was not moving as quickly as the coalition wanted."

Also included in Sahl's book was an interview with Michael Morris, one of the few high-tech executives who was out and involved. He brought a level of management skill to the campaign which had been lacking.

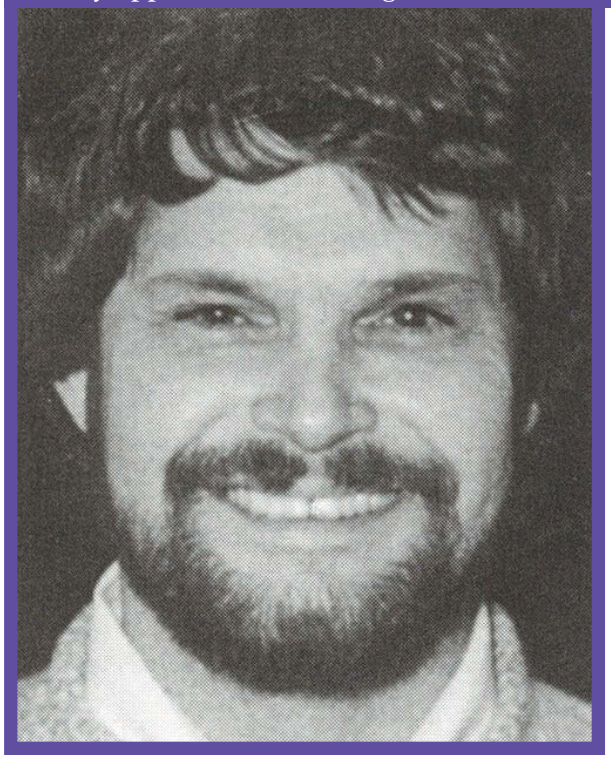
Morris spoke candidly about the disorganization of the initial campaign committee, with meetings lasting long into the night with no resolution, infighting, and members storming out or threatening to resign unless demands were met.

According to Morris, "The problems were further exacerbated when the ballot argument was delivered to the registrar's office five minutes past the legal deadline. The county clerk refused to open the door, and the campaign had to file a suit of mandate. Had a judge not agreed to hear the complaint, only the 'no' argument would have appeared on the ballot. Finally Johnie Staggs was appointed campaign manager which provided more focused leadership."

Although high-tech companies have a well-deserved reputation for being progressive on LGBTQ issues, that was not always the case, especially in 1979. A high-tech trade association named the Santa Clara County Manufacturing Group—the precursor to the extremely influential Silicon Valley Leadership Group—initially opposed both measures. In a letter to Supervisor Dominic Cortese, President Peter Giles wrote of the group's concerns over the legal and economic implications of the ordinance, stressing the cost to companies to defend themselves. He noted, "Please understand that our opposition to this ordinance is based on the sincere interest we share with you— that of promoting the continued prosperity and well-being of Santa Clara County."

Above: Campaign Graphic for Yes on Measure A & B campaign

Below: Michael Morris, General Counsel for ROLM Corporation and one of few high tech executives vocally opposed to rescinding the anti-discrimination ordinances



Morris, who was general counsel to ROLM Corporation—one of the two most progressive companies at the time (Apple was the other)—wrote a memo arguing for the need for the ordinance to ROLM co-founder Ken Oshman. Oshman subsequently sent it to the board of the Manufacturing Group. Morris argued, among other points, that concerns over affirmative action were groundless and that human costs of prejudice could affect employee productivity. The Manufacturing Group took a "no position."

Anita Bryant's aide and campaign manager in the Dade County campaign arrived to run the Santa Clara County campaigns, according to the Bay Area Reporter. They used the same playbook used in Miami: "Vote no for the sake of our children." Literature headlines read: "Enough is Enough"; "Don't let it Spread"; "Keep it Private." Their ballot argument also played on these themes. While not condemning gays directly, it questioned the need for special rights for one group of people that would lead to litigation and loss of religious freedom. "Local laws should not be passed that would take away the right of all people to choose with whom they wish to associate with," the literature read.

The "Yes on A & B" campaign tagline was "Live and Let Live." Their ballot statement stayed away from gay rights and focused on the principles of religious freedom, privacy, and equal protection of the law. "If you believe as we do, in privacy, fair play, and live and let live, please join with us to vote YES."

The San Jose Mercury News came out in favor of the measures. Their strong editorial began: "A homosexual who is denied a job or housing because he or she is homosexual presently has no legal recourse in this community," and ended with: "If the voters vote 'no,' they will be saying, explicitly, that homosexuals in this community do not have legal recourse when they suffer discrimination. In our opinion, that would be illogical and unfair. We recommend a 'yes' vote on Measures A and B.

To me, this is what the campaign arguments should have been, but with the opponents focusing so heavily on children, illicit behavior, and religious freedom, the supporters felt forced to counter those claims instead of discussing the lack of protections for LGBTQ people.

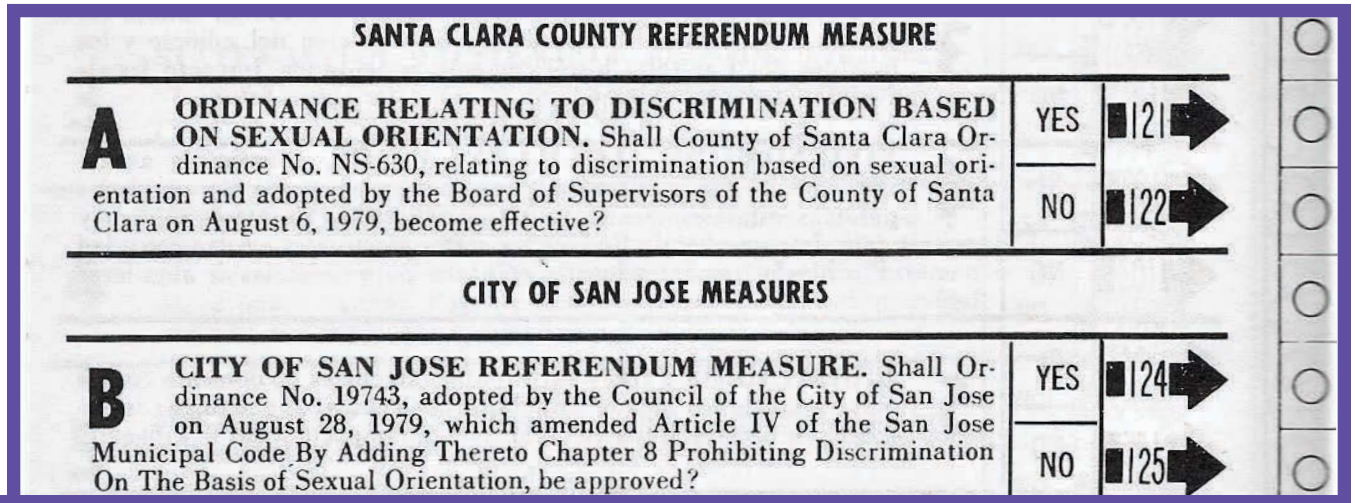
Both sides raised approximately $100,000. In the LGBTQ community, a portion of this was raised by a controversial "10 for 10" program, whereby bars and businesses catering to the gay community were asked to raise their prices by 10% and then contribute that amount to the campaign. While most bars went along, not all did. Those who did not were publicly scolded in the gay press, and resentment toward these businesses lasted long after the election was over.

The conservative ministers were very effective in organizing their congregations. Supervisor Rod Diridon would later reflect on how he always knew when opposition to the measures was stressed in a Sunday sermon because his office would be flooded with calls on Monday.

I recall how my boss, Supervisor Wilson, asked another staff member—Sarah Janigian—and me to attend one of the services as a couple to see firsthand what was being preached.

I remember walking into the massive church filled to the brim with worshippers and thinking "Wow, what an army." At the end, campaign forms were handed out for people to volunteer. As I left, I worried someone would point at me and shout "He's gay!" and I'd have to run for my life.

The election result was devastating. In a mean-spirited and homophobic campaign, fundamentalists defeated us by a three-to-one vote margin. In a blazing defeat—with 70% opposing in San Jose and 65% in the county, this wasn't just a loss—it was a slaughter.



SANTA CLARA COUNTY REFERENDUM MEASURE

A ORDINANCE RELATING TO DISCRIMINATION BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION. Shall County of Santa Clara Ordinance No. NS-630, relating to discrimination based on sexual orientation and adopted by the Board of Supervisors of the County of Santa Clara on August 6, 1979, become effective?

YES 121

NO 122

CITY OF SAN JOSE MEASURES

B CITY OF SAN JOSE REFERENDUM MEASURE. Shall Ordinance No. 19743, adopted by the Council of the City of San Jose on August 28, 1979, which amended Article IV of the San Jose Municipal Code By Adding Thereto Chapter 8 Prohibiting Discrimination On The Basis of Sexual Orientation, be approved?

YES 124

NO 125

Above: Excerpt from ballot of anti-discrimination ordinance referenda for Santa Clara County and the City of San Jose

Below: San Jose Mercury News editorial by State Assemblymember Alister McAlister calling on then California Governor Deukmejian to not sign a LGBT workplace protection bill into law

San Jose Mercury News ■ Friday, March 9, 1984 7B

Deukmejian should veto the gay employment bill

By Alister McAlister

I am writing to strongly and earnestly urge Gov. George Deukmejian to veto Assemblyman Art Agnos' AB 1, which would forbid employers from discriminating against homosexuals.

My recommendation is based on four main issues that I would categorize as the moral issue, the quotas issue, the freedom issue, and the political issue.

For thousands of years homosexuality has been regarded by most of mankind and by nearly all traditional religious and cultural groups as a profoundly wrongful practice. The Judeo-Christian scriptures contain many warnings and exhortations concerning homosexuality.

It is a lifestyle that should not be given legal and social and political credence by a law solemnly adopted by the state of California. It is the clear objective of advocates of this group to establish themselves as morally and culturally legitimate through legislation recognizing them as a legal minority. Neither the Legislature nor the governor should assist them.

Some advocates and apologists for this group argue that homosexuals cannot help themselves, that are born homosexuals and cannot change. Any such theory is a flagrant denial of human freedom and moral accountability.

Whatever tendencies individual men and women may possess, no one should claim that their moral behavior has been predestined or predetermined. Predestination or determinism, whether articulated in theological or psychological terms, is simply wrong. People may have tendencies; within a given social, economic or cultural context they may well be subject to probabilities; nevertheless they are still free moral agents.

Advocates of AB 1 argue that those of us who are concerned about the abuses of the quota system need not worry because AB 1 adds Section 12940.5 to the Government Code to read as follows:

"Nothing in this part relating to discrimination on account of sexual orientation is intended, nor shall be construed, to require the imposition of quotas, goals, or other affirmative actions as relief for discrimination based on, or because of, sexual orientation."

The problem with this argument is that most present quota systems under existing civil rights laws did not come about because of any legislative mandate. We all know that existing civil rights laws, including especially the 1964 U.S. Civil Rights Act, have been interpreted and applied by courts and agencies to sanction racial quotas. Yet, some of the strongest supporters of the Civil Rights Act assured their colleagues over and over that racial quotas were not contemplated and were unacceptable.

Hubert Humphrey, U.S. Senate floor manager for the bill, ardently insisted that nothing in the legislation would permit any policy except color blindness. In defending Title VII, he reassured the Congress:

"Contrary to the allegations of some opponents of this title, there is nothing in it that will give any power to the Commission or to any court to require hiring, firing, or promotion of employees in order to meet a racial 'quota' or to achieve a certain racial balance."

In the light of the foregoing assurances given by eminent and sincere supporters of the Civil Rights Act, assurances that have been proven by events to be hollow indeed, is it possible to take seriously the present assurances by AB 1 supporters that the specter of homosexual employment quotas is nothing but a shadowy bogeyman?

It must be stressed that the inevitable result of the legal creation of a new civil right for homosexuals is the denial of the civil rights of others. The freedom of association and religious freedom of others will be trampled by the state if AB 1 is signed into law. Sometimes the asserted rights of some individuals clash with the fundamental, traditional, constitutional and moral rights and values of others that have stood the test of time and that have been accepted by most civilized communities throughout the history of humankind. In such a clash of values the choice is clear. A veto of AB 1 is the only appropriate response.

The political issue is exceptionally straightforward for the world of politics. I have heard speculation to the effect that some of the governor's political advisers are urging that he either sign AB 1 into law or permit it to become law without his signature on the premise that the Republican Party is a minority party and needs to broaden its base and that it could strike a blow on behalf of this objective by currying favor with the homosexual community and its friends by signing AB 1 into law.

I must strongly suggest that this is extremely short-term and unsophisticated reasoning. The homosexual community and their ardent friends are not the natural allies of a conservative governor or a conservative political movement. Deukmejian was elected because, in addition to Republicans, he received the vote of hundreds of thousands of moderate and relatively conservative Democrats. Extremely few of those Democrats are homosexual rights advocates.

The overwhelming majority of those voters are persons whose views on moral, cultural and social issues definitely tend toward the conservative side. It is voters of that persuasion who are the natural allies of the governor or any other public figure who will faithfully champion the tried and true moral and cultural values of our Judeo-Christian tradition. For the governor or anyone like him, a long-term political coalition with the homosexual community and their allies is out of the question.

Yes, they will be pleased if he allows AB 1 to become law. But it would be an unnatural coalition that could not endure. If he is to be true to his basic values, he will offend them on so many other issues that within a year or two after AB 1's enactment, homosexual advocates will have forgotten that he ever did anything for them.

On the other hand, the bitter memory would linger in the minds of millions of people who believe that the traditional moral principles of the Scriptures and the Ten Commandments are as valid as we approach the 21st century as they were in the days of the ancient biblical patriarchs.

Politics, of course, is not the foremost consideration in this issue. I mentioned these political considerations only to offset the appallingly dubious political counsel the governor is reportedly receiving from some of his advisers.

The issues on the merits are assuredly the most important and overriding, and I am confident in deciding this question, the governor will be true to our finest traditions and highest values and that he will make the right choice.

Alister McAlister represents parts of Santa Clara and Alameda counties in the state Assembly. He is a Democrat. This article is adapted from a letter he sent Gov. George Deukmejian.

The repercussions were immediate. The nascent LGBTQ rights movement vanished. Gay activism came to a dead stop. Supervisor Diridon, who ran for state senate in a special election in April 1980, lost to a Republican. He and most others credit his defeat to the opposition launched by the Christian Right. The Religious Right also supported two successful San Jose City Council candidates in 1980. Moreover, not including the supervisors and council members who voted for the ordinances, many other local political leaders backed away from gay rights issues.

When I returned to San Jose from Washington, D.C. in 1984, the local LGBTQ community was still reeling from the events of 1980.

It was at this low point that a local assemblyman, Alister McAllister, declared in a Mercury News editorial that a state bill forbidding discrimination against gays and lesbians should not be signed by the governor because it would give the "wrongful" practice of homosexuality legal, social, and political legitimacy. So prevalent was the anti-gay rhetoric that it probably never occurred to him there would be any outcry against his views.

I was angry that an elected official thought I had forfeited my civil rights simply because I was gay. I realized that if I was to have any rights, I would have to fight for them. I decided to challenge McAllister using his weapon of choice: the op-ed page of the Mercury News.

Below: San Jose Mercury News op-ed by Ken Yeager in response to editorial by McAlister that also publicly outed Yeager as a gay man

San Jose Mercury News ■ Sunday, March 18, 1984 7P

Tolerance will allow gays to help 'build our land'

By Ken Yeager

ALISTER McAlister and I have never met, but he scorns any and every aspect of who I am. I know this from reading his article, "Deukmejian should veto the gay rights bill," in the San Jose Mercury News March 9.

He wrote that due to my homosexuality, I have no legal, moral, social, or political standing in my community. His vehement opposition to the gay lifestyle as well as the gay rights bill came through loud and clear.

My reason for writing is not to argue the merits of AB 1, even though I remain a strong advocate of it. Rather, I write to see if there exists any chance that he and I might appreciate each other a little more. People such as he and people such as I are going to be around for a long time to come; and regardless of how distressing a concept that is, it is a premise neither of us can refute.

Let me begin by recounting how some of my gay friends spent the Sunday (and most Sundays) after his article appeared. One visited a board-and-care home and took an elderly woman shopping. One washed dishes for eight hours so he could pay for his college education. Another went to Dignity, the gay Catholic organization, to hear Mass. The list goes on — people contributing to their community, irrespective of how anyone judges them morally.

Not all my friends, however, are as actively involved. Many woke up late, read the paper, worked around the house, or visited friends. Ask them why they shouldn't receive the same respect given their neighbors who did the same thing on that particularly sunny afternoon the article appeared.

Many gay men can tell stories of the angry shouts of "kill faggots" they've heard while walking down the street. Some even have had bottles or rocks thrown at them from passing cars. One person I know was severely beaten by "fag-bashers." Ironically, now it is unlawful for employers to discriminate against him because of his physical handicap.

Being gay is more than who you sleep with — it's what you relate to, where you find happiness.

This is a summary of the gay lifestyle as I know it. Most gays can adapt to straight society and co-exist in both worlds. Likewise, I know people who restrict themselves solely to a gay environment after being hurt and rejected by society. They have no social or economic mobility. For them, there is no exchange of ideas, experience, or talents with society as a whole. There is no shared community dream.

Undoubtedly, Assemblyman McAlister comes in contact with homosexuals in his work in Sacramento. They write some of the reports he reads on legislative issues, answer his phone calls, give tours of the Capitol building for his constituents, and serve food in restaurants. Tell them that homosexuality is merely a choice of lifestyles and that a better, moral life awaits them as heterosexuals.

McAlister's solution to the gay question remains for gays either to marry or remarry or become celibate. He demands they forsake their lovers and friends and live alone or with straights.

What he doesn't understand is that being gay is more than who you sleep with — it's what experiences you relate to, where you find happiness, and how prejudices and oppression affects you.

These are tendencies (as he calls them) that will never go away. Mixed with these factors is something magical called love, and love is as blind for homosexuals as it is for heterosexuals. No power on this earth is strong enough to deflect, ignore, or legislate it.

I know our viewpoints on homosexuality are incompatible. On certain political and moral issues there will never be agreement. But, in the past, there has been too much condemnation on both sides. We must begin to change this for the consequences are worse than the moral disease each of us accuses the other of spreading.

Langston Hughes wrote that in America, people do not always understand each other, but there is always the trying, and the trying to say, "You're a man. Together we are building our land." This article is my way of trying. I hope a rethinking on his part will be his way.

Ken Yeager is active in politics in San Jose. This article is adapted from a letter to Assemblyman McAlister.

There was one glitch. I wasn't completely out.

My byline in the Mercury news meant l would come out to the newspaper's entire Bay Area readership. I knew the publicity might cause me problems.

The day my editorial appeared in 1984 was a momentous one for me. I wondered if my friends would distance themselves or if l would ever be hired to manage another campaign. Clearly running for office would be out of the question.

However, politically I was now free to resurrect the gay movement in San Jose. Inspired by the success of David Mixner with a group called MECLA—Municipal Election Committee of Los Angeles—I co-founded the Bay Area Municipal Elections Committee (BAYMEC) with Wiggsy Siversten, a professor and counselor at San Jose State University. Local gay activism slowly returned.

In the back of my mind there always remained questions as to why the council and supervisors voted for the ordinances when they knew such laws were being defeated across the nation. That is why I thought it would be interesting to bring the five supervisors together to share their memories of this important part of Silicon Valley history. Four of the supervisors agreed: Cortese, Diridon, McCorquodale, and Wilson.

Above: Ken Yeager, San Jose Councilmember Iola Williams, Wiggsy Sivertsen

Below: Dan McCorquodale, Ken Yeager, Susie Wilson, Terry Christensen, Rod Diridon, Dominic Cortese reunited for a panel discussion about Measures A and B on CreaTV's Valley Politics show

Four Former County Supervisors Recall the Turbulent Times of Measures A and B

Supervisor Susanne Wilson began with a recollection of her earlier experience with the religious right. In her previous position as a San Jose City Councilmember, conservative church members turned out in force to insist that the Council rescind a vote they had taken in March 1978, which provided recognition for a planned Gay Pride Week later that year.

She recalled the Council Chambers being packed with opponents of the Council's action and that the crowds also filled to overflowing the downstairs cafeteria where the meeting was being broadcast. In the end, she and Councilmember Jim Self were the only ones who remained in support and refused to rescind their previous votes for the proclamation.

Supervisor Wilson also talked about the fallout from this vote she encountered when she walked door to door in her campaign that year for a seat on the Board of Supervisors. In the end, she was victorious in winning the Board seat, but she remembered experiencing lots of doors slammed in her face, something she noted had never happened to her when campaigning before her vote on gay pride.

Supervisor Dan McCorquodale commented that discrimination against gays was not a new issue for him. He recounted the anger and helplessness he felt when, as a young Marine, one of his friends

was discharged from the Corps for having been seen leaving what was thought to be a gay bar.

There was no due process and no avenue for recourse. He said that he considered his 1979 vote on the anti-discrimination ordinance as one of his opportunities to speak out for equality and justice.

Supervisor Rod Diridon recalled, at the time of the gay anti-discrimination ordinance vote, he already was planning a campaign for a State Senate seat that would be decided in an April 1980 special election. He said that the Senate district electorate had become more conservative under Governor Ronald Reagan and with the growth of the Moral servative under Governor Ronald Reagan and with the growth of the Moral Majority, and he was aware a "yes" vote on this issue would impact his chance for success. However, despite the trepidation this caused, he felt he had to vote his conscience.

Supervisor Dominic Cortese said he considered the vote on the ordinance premature and that it concerned a moral issue to be discussed by the church and not legislated by government. "In many ways, I still feel that way." He added his thought that "My church has not done enough to open that door." He reminisced, "I was in a learning process. The whole country was in a learning process." He concluded by saying, "I commend my colleagues for moving forward in a very bold manner. We had a very proactive Board."

In response to a question concerning what the hearings were like, Wilson said she remembers, despite her previous experiences, still being amazed by the extent of the anger and hatred demonstrated by the ordinance opponents. Diridon said that the calls and letters received by the Board offices numbered at least 10 to 1 in opposition to the ordinance, but he didn't believe the opponents reflected the entirecommunity. He commented

Above: San Jose County Supervisors from left to right, Dan McCorquodale, Susanne "Susie" Wilson, Rod Diridon, Gerry Steinberg and Dominic Cortese

Below: *San Jose Mercury News* article by Scott Herhold, "Petition drive begun to recall Diridon"

Petition drive begun to recall Diridon

By Scott Herhold
Staff Writer

A recall petition is being circulated by five constituents who want to unseat Santa Clara County Supervisor Rod Diridon because, they said Tuesday, his vote for the county's gay rights ordinance was "contrary to the expressed views of the citizen majority."

In a press conference several hours later, Diridon said the action was intended to sidetrack his potential campaign for the state Senate seat to be vacated by the appointment of Jerry Smith, D-Saratoga, to the bench of the state Court of Appeal.

To force an election, the supporters of the recall petition must accumulate 10,400 signatures within 160 days. County Registrar of Voters George Mann confirmed Tuesday morning that the petition had been filed with his office.

A copy of the document was given to Diridon before a board meeting. It said that the supervisor's voting record is "inconsistent with the majority of the residents in the district he represents."

Specifically, it asserted that Diridon has "large responsibility for the county's financial mess" and that he had "generated the largest staff of assistants in the county history."

The petition also charged that Diridon's "attitude of absolute government is vividly displayed by his voting record on private property. His actions clearly establish that he cares little about private property owners."

The recall document was signed by Camille Fargher, the secretary for the Pro-Family Political Action Committee; by Patrick A. Hazel, a landowner who has attempted to build a house without county permission; and by residents John H. Reese, John W. Brown, and Caylor D. Allen.

"I don't think there's any question that we'll have the necessary signatures," Hazel told reporters after the document was given to Diridon. "We have 160 days. We won't need that long."

Diridon later said that the "issues presented in the peti-

Continued on Page 3B

that anti-gay sentiment was being preached from the pulpits of the conservation churches, as reflected, in part, by the number of calls against the ordinance the Board offices received on Monday mornings.

When asked if they saw the referendum coming, Wilson said "no"; Diridon said "yes"; Cortese said he felt the whole controversy was likely to set back the movement. McCorquodale said he could tell the proponents were in trouble from the very beginning but that rescinding the vote wasn't an option as it would have been much "too disheartening for too many people."

All described the campaign as "brutal."

Diridon recalled leaving church with his wife and children on one occasion during that time and finding that every car in the church lot had a flyer on the windshield condemning his vote and stating "Diridon is a false person" and "actually he is gay." He subsequently found out this distribution of flyers that Sunday morning involved virtually every car in all the church parking lots in his district.

Diridon went on to say that his support for the ordinance was a dominant factor in his losing the Senate election in April 1980. He clearly remembered being told by a state Democratic Party leader that "If he voted for this issue, he was committing suicide." After his vote, he said some state Democratic leaders lost interest in his campaign. However, he concluded, "If you don't vote your conscience, you're not worth a damn.".

Wilson said that this issue didn't seem to hurt her in her 1982 re-election campaign. Diridon, too, was reelected to the Board in 1982. Cortese won election to a seat in the State Assembly in the 1980 election, the same year as the Measure A and B

vote. McCorquodale ran unopposed that year for another term on the Board of Supervisors.

However, in McCorquodale's 1982 State Senate campaign, his opponent, incumbent Senator Dan O'Keefe, tried to make an issue of the gay rights vote in Stanislaus County, the more conservative part of the district. McCorquodale commented that, while he received negative reactions from certain individuals, the issue never seemed to gain traction.

When interviewer Terry Christensen asked if the supervisors ever regretted their vote, all said "no." Cortese added that he had been consistent with his votes in support of LGBT issues over his 16 years in the Assembly. Diridon said that it was emancipating to vote his conscience despite the consequences. He expressed regret that the ordinance supporters hadn't been better organized, though, because he thought the Measures A and B votes could have been successful.

Christensen asked if the supervisors had any advice to advocates of unpopular causes. Diridon responded, "Get organized early." He went on to say that the Democratic Party, organized labor, the Council of Churches, and the Mercury News all supported the ordinances and, if the supporters had been organized, they could have won.

Above: David Steward and group before Santa Clara County ordinance measure vote in 1979

McCorquodale recommended that advocates research their issues carefully and also study and understand their oppositions' issues in order to formulate responses. In addition, he suggested they make sure they have enough volunteers to go door to door and take the issue to the public.

Wilson said when you feel something deeply, you must stand up and fight for it. Cortese added that he always recommends following the golden rule and treating people with respect. Further, he said it is important to analyze the issues, make considered decisions, and stick with them.

McCorquodale said he wanted to take the opportunity to recognize the contributions of then-Human Relations Commissioner David Steward, the first openly gay commissioner, who secured a unanimous vote from the Commission to send the ordinance to the Board. He called Steward "the spark plug."

Diridon and Cortese both added that the role of then-Human Relations Director Jim McEntee shouldn't be overlooked. Diridon noted that McEntee never hesitated in his support for the ordinance, and Cortese recalled that "Jim McEntee gave of himself unconditionally."

When asked how the supervisors thought the County was functioning now, Wilson said, "very well" and concluded with, "They are taking care of people." McCorquodale made special note of the County's fine hospital and park system. Cortese added to his positive comments about the current Board that he was extremely proud of his son, former Board President Dave Cortese, and that "Dave was his legacy." Diridon expressed that he perceived that the dynamics of the current Board were similar to the Board at the times of Measures A and B, and that they were "taking up progressive issues" and "doing a wonderful job."

Long Struggle for Pride Regonition

Below: Supervisor Ken Yeager, LGBTQ Affairs Director Maribel Martinez, and transgender rights activist Lance Moore raising Transgender flag for first time at Santa Clara County Government Center for Transgender Day of Visibility in 2016

The month of June holds special meaning for me and many people because it is known around the world as LGBTQ Pride Month. In San Jose and Santa Clara County, the governing boards issue pride proclamations and raise the rainbow flag, usually at their first meeting in June.

I remember when I was elected to the San Jose City Council as the first openly gay councilmember in the City's history in November 2000 and took office January 1, 2001. It was in June of that year that I asked the city manager and Mayor Ron Gonzales if I could raise the rainbow flag in front of what is now called Old City Hall on Mission Street. They both agreed.

Never before had the flag flown, so it was quite a media event around the flag pole. I had invited the Silicon Valley Gay Men's Chorus to sing, and they did a moving rendition of the Star Spangled Banner. Mayor Gonzales and several councilmembers joined me. It may sound cliché, but I truly was filled with pride for my city and my community.

Given the significance of the event, I had the flag framed in a large glass case. It hung in my office while I was on the Council; it now hangs outside my door at the County building.

Fast forward seven years to my election as the first openly gay member of the Board of Supervisors. I was not totally surprised to learn that the rainbow flag had never before flown at the government center. That changed in June 2007 when I hoisted the flag. Once again the Silicon Valley Gay Men's Chorus sang the national anthem.

The rainbow flag has flown over the County Government Center during LGBTQ Pride Month every year since then. In fact, the rainbow flag has become such an important symbol for our Santa Clara County values that it now flies every day, along with the transgender flag.

The politically charged story behind the issuance of the pride proclamation in San Jose reflects the local struggle for LGBTQ rights and our fight with the Religious Right.

Although the first U.S. pride marches and parades were held in June 1970, it was not until 1975 that leaders in San Jose's LGBTQ community first asked then-Mayor Janet Gray Hayes and the City Council for a pride proclamation. It would take three years, but in February of 1978, Hayes, along with Councilmembers Susie Wilson, Al Garza, and Jim Self, approved a resolution that declared the week of June 18, 1978, as "Gay Pride Week" in San Jose.

The resolution generated a tremendous backlash among the city's Christian conservative population, who were more numerous and significantly more politically influential 40 years ago.

Councilmember David Runyon, who had been absent for the initial vote, called for a reconsideration of the proclamation at the Council's March 14 meeting.

According Ted Sahl's 2002 book, "From Closet to Community," the LGBTQ community made a valiant effort to mobilize support for the proclamation with a telephone campaign and more than 200 supporters attending the council meeting. However, they were overwhelmed by the other side. Approximately 800 proclamation opponents, most from area churches, attended the meeting, and their presence was enough to convince Garza to switch his vote and rescind the proclamation.

The Council, including Garza, did agree to issue a proclamation for "Gay Human Rights Week," but to the LGBTQ community that was seen as a defeat.

Above: Ken Yeager standing in front of framed Rainbow Flag, which was the flag first flown at San Jose City Hall

Below: Ken Yeager at San Jose City Council Chambers delivering remarks for Pride Month Proclamation

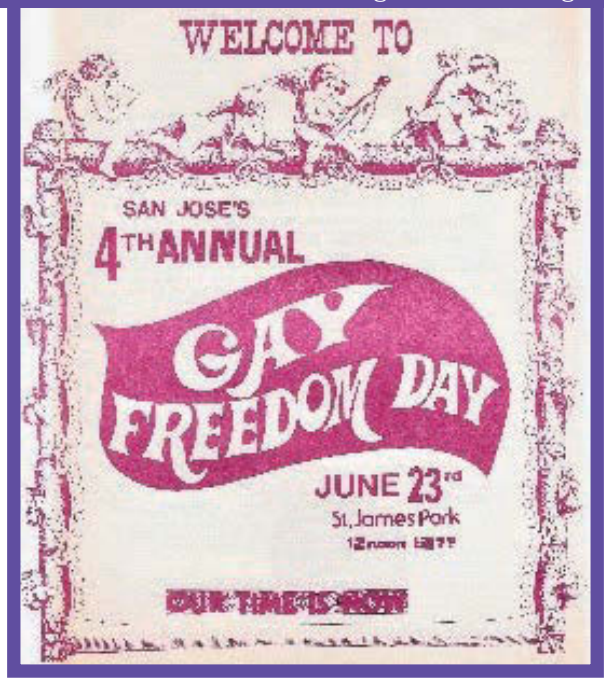
A year later, Councilmember Jim Self, a strong supporter of LGBTQ rights, took advantage of a loophole in the City Charter. When Mayor Hayes left the country on a trip to China, he issued a "Gay Rights Day" proclamation in his role as acting mayor. This did not have the force or resonance of a council-issued proclamation, but it was as close as the community would get for almost a quarter century.

The rescinding of San Jose's pride proclamation in 1978 turned out to be the canary in the coal mine for a resurgent Religious Right in San Jose and Santa Clara County. Gay pride proclamations became politically toxic. When Mayor Hayes ran for re election that November, she was confronted with a newspaper ad saying "the recent Gay Pride Week initiated by Mayor Janet Grey Hayes is a perfect example of moral insensitivity and weak leadership."

In 1980, the Religious Right managed to defeat two ballot measures, A and B, which would have prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment and housing in the City and County. Following those defeats, it became too politically dangerous for the Mayor and City Council to vote for a city proclamation supporting the pride celebration for years.

When Wiggsy Sivertsen and I co-founded BAYMEC in 1984, we started lobbying the Council for a proclamation, but to no avail. Finally, Mayor Tom McEnery waited until after being safely re-elected to a second term before he issued a "Lesbian and Gay Human Rights Day" proclamation in 1987. BAYMEC saw the issuance as a major hurdle that was overcome, and several of us posed in front of the proclamation at that year's pride celebration. Only Councilmember Blanca Alvarado joined us.

Below: 4th Annual Gay Freedom Day Program Cover Page



The full San Jose City Council would not issue a proclamation until I proposed it in 2001—23 years after the first attempt to secure this city council recognition. This taught me how important it is for our community, and the issues we care about, to have LGBTQ elected officials.

The situation was better at the County level. In 1993, then-Supervisor Ron Gonzales introduced a resolution declaring "Lesbian and Gay Pride Week." Similar proclamations have been routinely adopted by the Board of Supervisors since then, including those I have sponsored each year since my election in 2006.

Today, getting a city proclamation for an LGBTQ event generates no more controversy than any other cultural celebration in our diverse community. That was not always the case, and we should never take these things for granted. What is now routine was once unthinkable, but as long as we stay engaged, and stay committed, we will continue moving forever forward.

Above: Ken Yeager speaking at first rainbow flag raising at San Jose City Hall

Remembering the 1986 AIDS Quarantine Initiative

It has been 32more than 30 years since I served as the manager for the No on 64 campaign in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties.

Many people do not even realize that there was an initiative on the California ballot in 1986 that attacked the LGBTQ community. I think it is important to recap the events of that summer and fall because the fight to defeat Proposition 64 became a turning point for the community's political activism and engagement both here in the South Bay and statewide.

The 1980s began with the Religious Right successfully passing Measures A and B. Those measures overturned ordinances in both Santa Clara County and the City of San Jose that prohibited discrimination of gays and lesbians in housing and employment.

The Religious Right relied on a campaign of fear and intolerance, plastering the region with billboards that read "Don't Let It Spread."

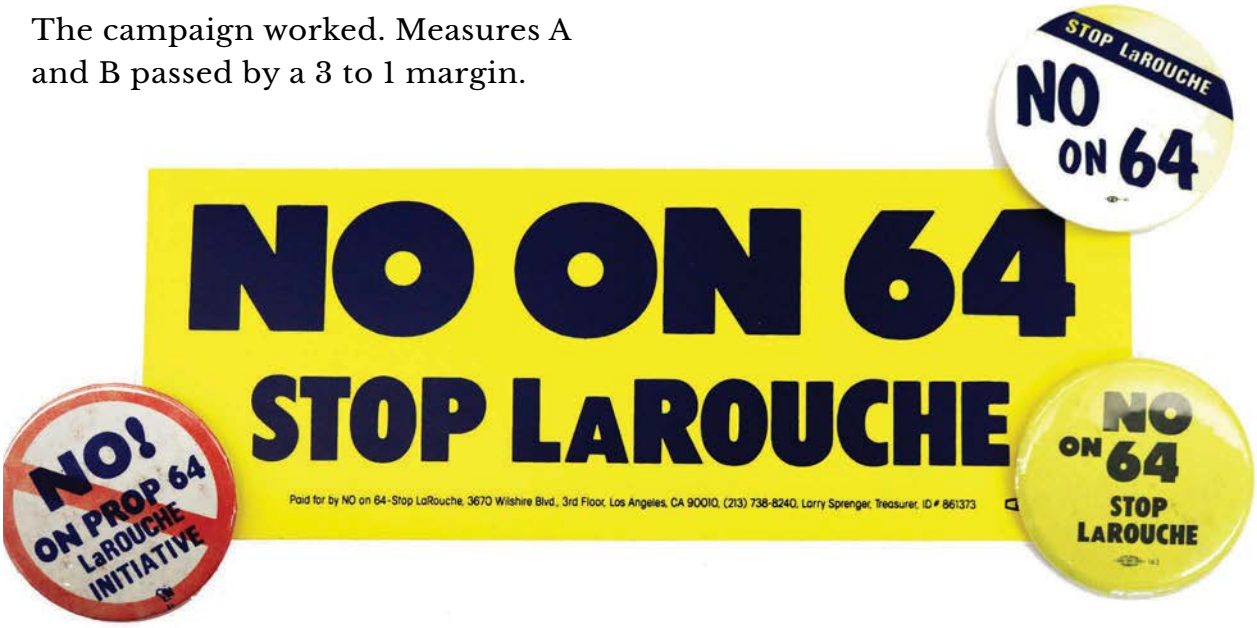
The campaign worked. Measures A and B passed by a 3 to 1 margin.

In response to the passing of those measures, Wiggsy Sivertsen and I founded BAYMEC, a political action committee designed to fight for the rights of LGBTQ people by electing candidates who supported us and confronting our opponents.

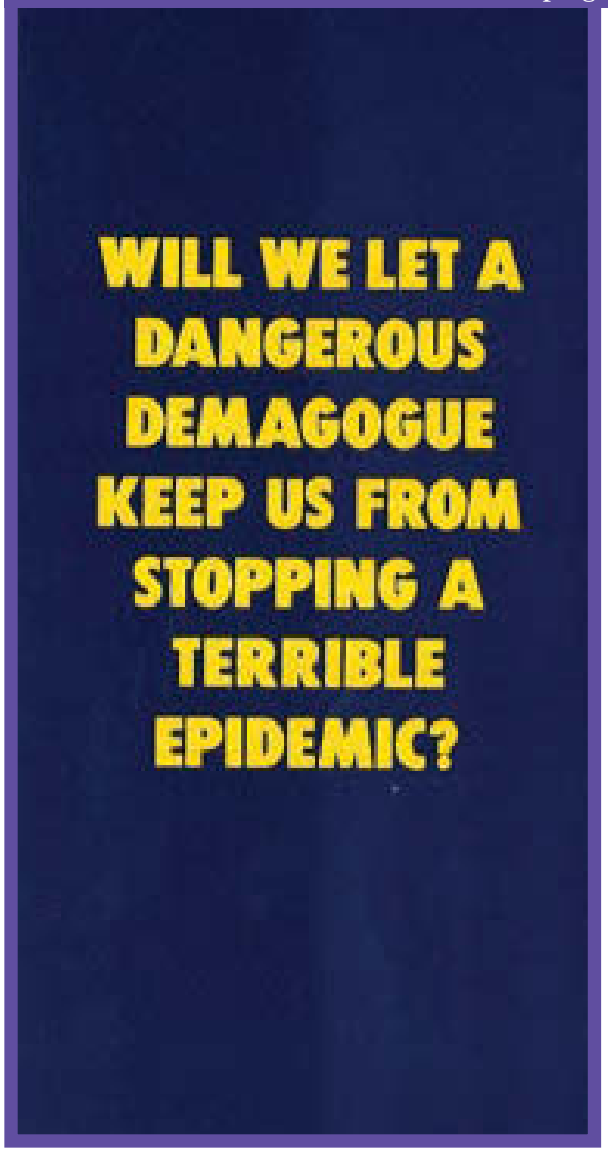
However, we were seen as so politically toxic at the time that few candidates even bothered to return our first questionnaires.

Things only got worse as the 80s moved forward and it slowly dawned on the LGBTQ community just how devastating the AIDS epidemic would be. The number of AIDS deaths in Santa Clara County grew every year that decade. They would not peak until 1994. Many of us saw friends and loved ones get sick and die and in frighteningly short amount of time.

Then came 1986. That spring, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a Georgia law that criminalized oral and anal sex between consenting adults.



Below: Brochure cover for No on 64 Campaign



In California, political gadfly and cult leader Lyndon LaRouche sensed an opportunity in California. He got an initiative placed on the state ballot that if passed would have effectively quarantined both AIDS patients and anyone diagnosed with HIV.

The initiative went on the November 1986 ballot as Prop. 64. It would have allowed public health officials to make AIDS testing mandatory. It would have required the public disclosure of anyone who tested positive for HIV. The initiative would have also prohibited anyone with HIV from attending or teaching school, as well as restricting their ability to travel.

LaRouche and his followers admitted in their own ballot argument that their goal was to keep people with AIDS or the HIV virus "out of our schools, out of commercial food establishments, and… give health officials the power to test and quarantine."

Proposition 64 would have been disastrous if it had passed. By taking away people's civil rights, LaRouche would have sent AIDS underground, which is exactly where an epidemic should not go.

It was a time of widespread misinformation and hysteria about AIDS. There were public fears that AIDS could be transmitted through the air like the common cold or by mosquitoes.

In this atmosphere stepped LaRouche, a onetime Marxist who by 1986 had become a far right reactionary, calling Henry Kissinger a communist and accusing Great Britain's Queen Elizabeth of conspiring to get the U.S. population hooked on drugs.

LaRouche saw Prop. 64 as a way to establish a political foothold in California. His followers exploited the misinformation and public fears about the AIDS epidemic to secure the 500,000 voter signatures necessary to get it on the ballot.

Prop. 64 qualified for the ballot on June 25, 1986. In the South Bay BAYMEC sprang into action. In just five days we were able to publicly announce that 26 elected officials in Santa Clara County opposed the LaRouche initiative.

On July 1, BAYMEC's board voted to put the organization's full resources into defeating Proposition 64. The South Bay's LGBTQ community, which had been demoralized by the defeat of Measures A and B and the subsequent arrival of the AIDS epidemic, got a renewed sense of activism. The next few months would see a dramatic transformation in the community's profile and relevance.

We were worried because that year many Californians continued to have a negative or hostile attitude towards both the AIDS epidemic and the LGBTQ community. A Los Angeles Times poll published in the summer found half of the public favored quarantining AIDS victims and a quarter believed "AIDS is a punishment God has given homosexuals for the way they lived."

We knew we had a lot of work to do in educating state voters about both the realities of the epidemic and just how dangerous and disruptive Prop. 64 would be if it were approved.

The statewide No on 64 campaign initially planned to open offices only in San Francisco and Los Angeles. BAYMEC board members thought this was short-sighted. We feared that the San Francisco and Los Angeles-based campaign leadership would ignore the South Bay and put little or no effort or outreach into the region.

BAYMEC was eager to run the local campaign for two reasons. First, even though we were a fledging organization, we felt we had the capabilities to run a professional campaign. Second and equally important, we believed that the South Bay needed a strong LGBTQ organization to lead all the subsequent fights we knew would surely come over the years.

It would be a lost opportunity to have no lasting legacy of progressive gay politics and coalition building afterwards. Though originally there was not universal agreement on BAYMEC's role by all activists, over time most everyone came on board.

Above: No on 64 campaign committee

Wiggsy Sivertsen agreed to serve as our local No on 64 campaign chair, Paul Wysocki as finance chair and I became the campaign manager for Santa Clara and San Mateo counties. Wiggsy, Paul, and Rich Gordon served on the statewide campaign committee.

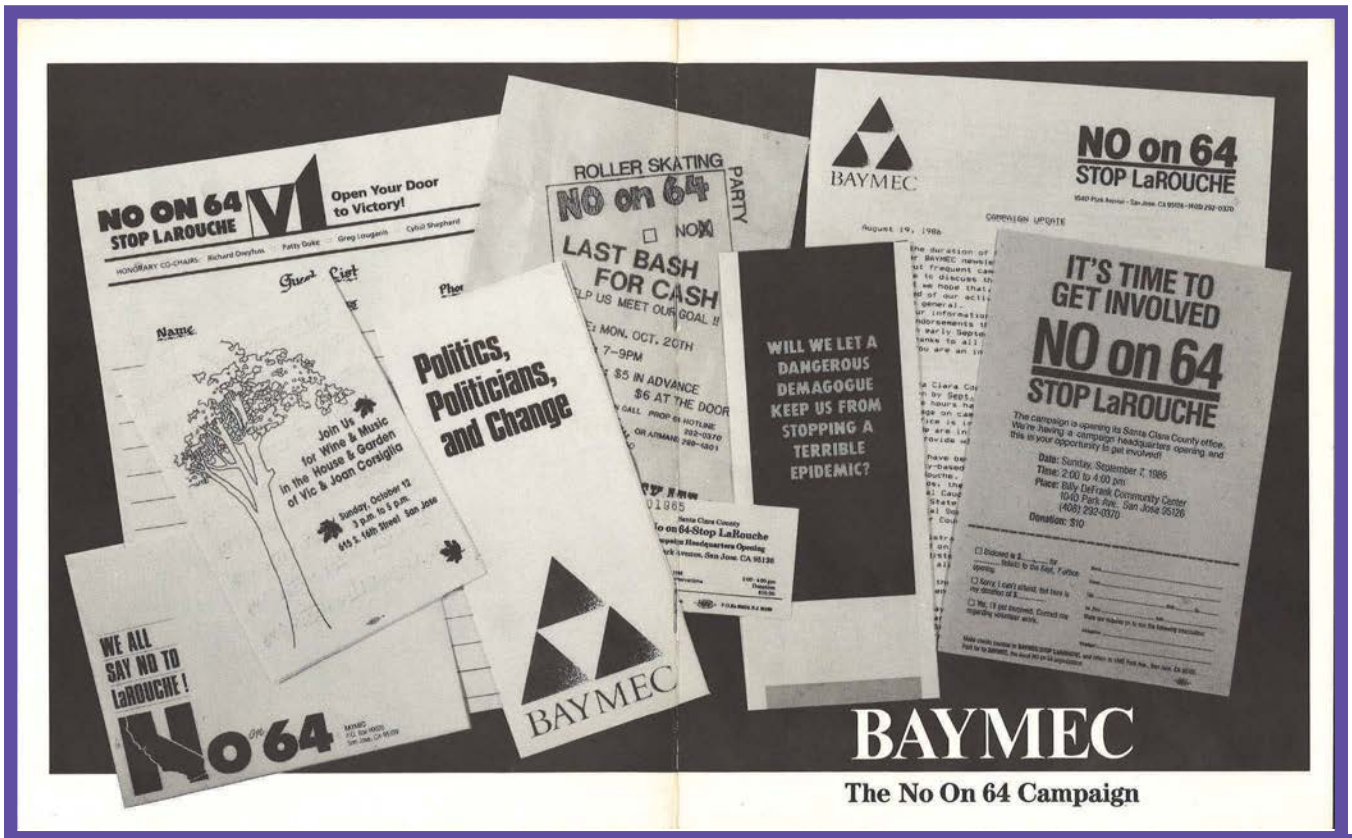
Wiggsy and Paul were already stalwarts in the community who commanded respect. I was less known. I had only come out publicly two years beforehand and shortly thereafter co-founded BAYMEC with Wiggsy.

Although I had run numerous local campaigns, managing the local Prop. 64 efforts would be a test of my leadership skills. I had much to prove to the gay community and to myself.

To demonstrate that there was opposition to the initiative beyond the gay community, I knew we needed to get support from local leaders.

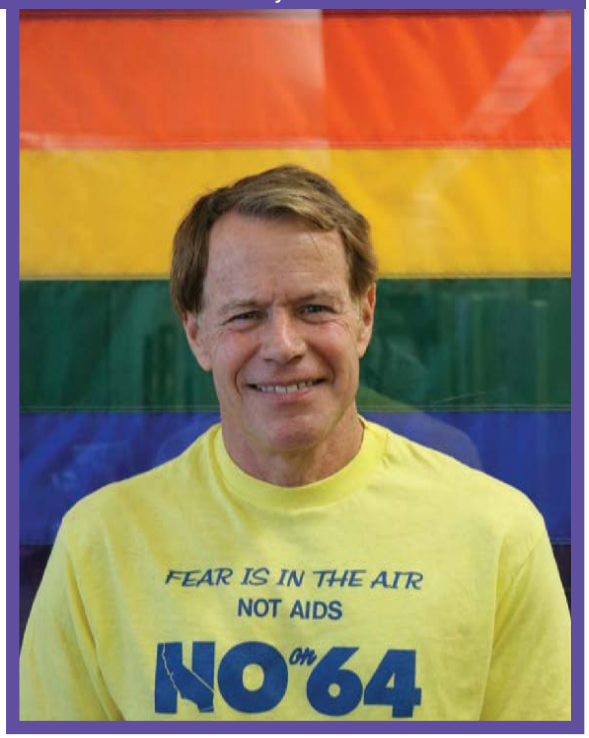
We asked six civic leaders to sign a letter asking elected officials to oppose Prop. 64. They included presidents of the Central Labor Council, Santa Clara County Medical Society, National Women's Political Caucus, and San Jose State University, as well as Assemblyman John Vasconcellos and Rabbi Jonathan Plaut.

Next, we got unanimous opposition from the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors and the city councils of San Jose and Palo Alto.



Above: Assorted No on 64 Campaign brochures and leaflets

Below: Ken Yeager wearing No on 64 campaign shirt on 30th anniversary of the ballot initiative



Congressmen Don Edwards, Norm Mineta and Ed Zschau, State Senator Dan McCorquodale, and Assemblyman Byron Sher also quickly came out against the initiative.

There was never any question that the headquarters would be at the Billy DeFrank Center, located at the time on Park Ave. It was not only the hub of South Bay LGBTQ political activity in 1986 but also a landlord who was willing to rent us space for the incredibly low rate of $200 a month.

Financially, the South Bay stepped up in a big way. State organizers only expected us raise $20,000. We raised $73,000, which is the equivalent of $160,000 in 2016 dollars. Santa Clara County donors actually contributed more to the campaign than those in the much larger San Diego County.
All this occurred in less than 14 weeks. Our first fundraising letter was mailed out on July 30. The kickoff fundraiser took place September 7 with over 200 people attending and over $7,000 raised.

An active LGBTQ tech organization called High Tech Gays did a significant amount of fundraising. Led by the late Rick Rudy, HTG raised approximately $5,000 and was a vital part of the campaign team.

City Councilman John Laird coordinated the fundraising in Santa Cruz and also served on the BAYMEC board.

The campaign was the definition of grassroots. More than 1,200 small contributors wrote checks of $10, $50 or other like amounts. The average contribution was $60. There were no corporations or wealthy individuals writing us big checks.

Fundraisers were held at bars and nightclubs stretching from San Jose to the Peninsula. Renegades and Mac's are still around but most of them are just a memory: the Cruiser, Daybreak, Ryders, Savoy, the Silver Fox, the 641 Club, TD's, Visions, the Vortex and Whiskey Gulch. All of these bars participated in a program where they donated 10 cents from every dollar spent at their establishments to the campaign.

Anna Eshoo, then a San Mateo County supervisor and now a congresswoman, had always been a

supporter of the LGBTQ community. Working alongside Rich Gordon and Tom Nolan, she hosted a fundraiser at her house featuring Democratic Congressman Gerry Studds of Massachusetts, the first openly gay member of Congress. In San Jose the Corsiglias hosted a big fundraiser at their house. In all there were 23 house parties in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties that raised more than $12,000, including $5,000 just at the Eshoo party.

The house parties were important for reasons beyond just money. Because the hosts invited their friends, we were able to reach many people from outside of the LGBTQ community and inform them about the dangers of Prop. 64. They also helped show local elected officials just how large BAYMEC's network was, and that we were willing to provide significant financial support to causes and candidates we believed in.

The November 1986 ballot in California included a rematch between Governor George Deukmejian and Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley for the governor's office; a high profile challenge to U.S Senator Alan Cranston from Republican Zschau; and an initiative that would have made English the official state language. Those races dominated the news that summer and fall, making it harder to get any attention for the No on 64 campaign. A statewide poll conducted during the first week of September by the San Francisco Examiner and KRON-TV found that more than half of state voters had not heard about Prop. 64 or were undecided about how they would vote on it.

The good news was that the proposition was not winning. The bad news was no one could predict how the huge number of undecideds would end up. Would disapproval

Above: No on 64 campaign committee staff

Below: Paul Wysocki, Wiggsy Sivertsen, and Ken Yeager in 1986

of the LGBTQ "lifestyle" and fear of AIDS lead them to vote yes?

In the South Bay, we were trying to register as many new voters as possible. We registered more than 500 of them by the early October deadline, and between October and Election Day we had scores of volunteers staffing phone banks. The No on 64 campaign would contact more than 5,000 Santa Clara and San Mateo voters by Election Day, educating them about why 64 was a bad idea and encouraging them to make it to the polls on November 4.

Ultimately, the time, money, and effort paid off in a big way. Proposition 64 was resoundingly defeated, losing statewide by more than a two-to-one margin, 29 percent yes and 71 percent no.

In Santa Clara and San Mateo the No on 64 numbers were even more impressive. Seventy-five percent of San Mateo County voters rejected LaRouche's initiative; the percentage in Santa Clara County was 76%. Election Night at the DeFrank Center was glorious.

On election night November 4, 1986, a large crowd of supporters watched the returns at the Billy DeFrank Center. The mood of happiness and relief mounted as it became clear that the people of California listened to the message of reason and understanding that had been so much a part of the No on 64 campaign.

I had written two press releases that morning: One if we won; the other if we lost. Shortly after 8 p.m. I was all smiles when I released the victorious version. "Our victory was due to the enormous effort and commitment of the people who helped in this campaign," I stated.

Below: San Jose Councilmember Iola Williams speaking to BAYMEC at its first Spaghetti Dinner fundraiser in 1986

The next day BAYMEC immediately began to plan for a celebration party Someone had a connection to Archbishop Mitty High School in San Jose so we decided to have the event there. Rebecca Obryan organized volunteers who cooked spaghetti for approximately 200 people. We charged $5.

Because so many people deserved to be recognized for their work, during the program I asked people to stand up and be acknowledged for their contribution: voter registration, speakers' bureau, fundraising, house parties, voter outreach, or if a Billy DeFrank board member. Lastly, when I asked who had donated their hard-earned dollars, everyone in the cafeteria stood up. There was a roar of applause, creating a sense of community that was palpable.

The BAYMEC Board of Directors wanted to begin a tradition of handing out an annual award to a non-LGBTQ person who had actively worked to guarantee that our rights were protected: someone who had stood with us on the front lines and who was never afraid to speak out for LGBTQ causes.

This accurately described San Jose City Councilwoman Iola Williams. She was one of the first elected officials to come out against Prop. 64, doing so within hours of it qualifying for the ballot. She also convinced the California League of Cities to oppose it. After Iola gave the keynote speech at the dinner, Wiggsy and I presented her with the first Friend of BAYMEC award.

Just as the campaign created the template for the future political work by BAYMEC, the spaghetti dinner

served as the beginning of all the BAYMEC dinners that we were to follow for the next 30 years.

Even though Proposition 64 was soundly defeated in 1986, Lyndon LaRouche and his followers did not stop trying to score a big political victory in California. Less than two years later, LaRouche's followers put the exact same initiative on the June 1988 ballot, Proposition 69. The new number did not change the result. It also lost by more than 30 points.

In November 1988, ultra conservative Republican Congressman William Dannemeyer and anti-tax crusader Paul Gann put Proposition 102 on the state ballot. It would have required health authorities to put everyone who tested positive for both HIV and AIDS in a statewide registry. They even managed to get then-Governor George Deukmejian to support it.

However, by then it was becoming clear that a solid majority of California voters were not going to be swept up by AIDS and anti-gay hysteria no matter who supported the initiative. Prop. 102 lost by more than 30 points.

BAYMEC led the local campaign against both initiatives, showing the foresight of it running the first campaign in 1986 campaign.

Many of the organizers of the South Bay's No on 64 campaign have gone on to long public careers. Wiggsy Sivertsen had been a counselor at San Jose State University for almost 20 years at the time of the Prop. 64 campaign. In 1988 she would become a professor in the university's sociology department and would serve as director of counseling services from 1996 to 2007. She retired in 2014 after a 47-year career at the school. She continues to serve on numerous county commissions.

Rich Gordon, who was the president of BAYMEC in 1986, won a seat on the San Mateo County Board of Education in 1992. He followed that with 13 years on the San Mateo County Supervisors and six years in the state assembly.

John Laird was already on the Santa Cruz City Council when he served on the BAYMEC board in 1986. He served three terms in the State Assembly from 2002-2008 and spent 8 years as Governor Jerry Brown's Secretary of Natural Resources.

Paul Wysocki became one of the South Bay's first openly gay candidates for political office when he ran for the Downtown seat on the San Jose City Council in 1990. Paul then went on to senior positions at a pair of South Bay nonprofits: the Community Technology Alliance and the Housing Trust of Silicon Valley. He died in 2017

In 1992 I became the first openly gay elected official in Santa Clara County when I won a seat on the San Jose-Evergreen Community College Board.

Below: Paul Wysocki, Wiggsy Sivertsen, and Ken Yeager in 2016

I was elected to the San Jose City Council in 2000 and re-elected in 2004, and elected to the Board of Supervisors in 2006 and re-elected in 2010 and 2014.

It was just a decade ago when a majority of California voters cast ballots in favor of Proposition 8, which banned same sex marriage in the state until it was overturned by the courts.

In 2016, the legislature in North Carolina enacted HB2 which not only legalized discrimination against transgender people in public restrooms but also rolled back existing anti-discrimination provisions in state law covering the entire LGBTQ community.

Those types of regressive steps are the reason that Proposition 64's role in solidifying BAYMEC's place in the South Bay's LGBTQ community is so important. The organization is now in its 35th year and continues to be a voice in the fight for equality for all.

Despite our individual success in elected office, many challenges remain. The last four decades have brought many dramatic changes in our community. Medical advancements and improvements in social services have blunted the worst impacts of the AIDS epidemic. Same sex marriage is now the law of the land. LGBTQ service members are able to serve openly and proudly in every branch of the military.

However, we can never become complacent; we need to continue to reach out to community leaders and the public on emerging issues confronting us.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank Jean McCorquodale who greatly helped with research especially for the history of Measures A & B.

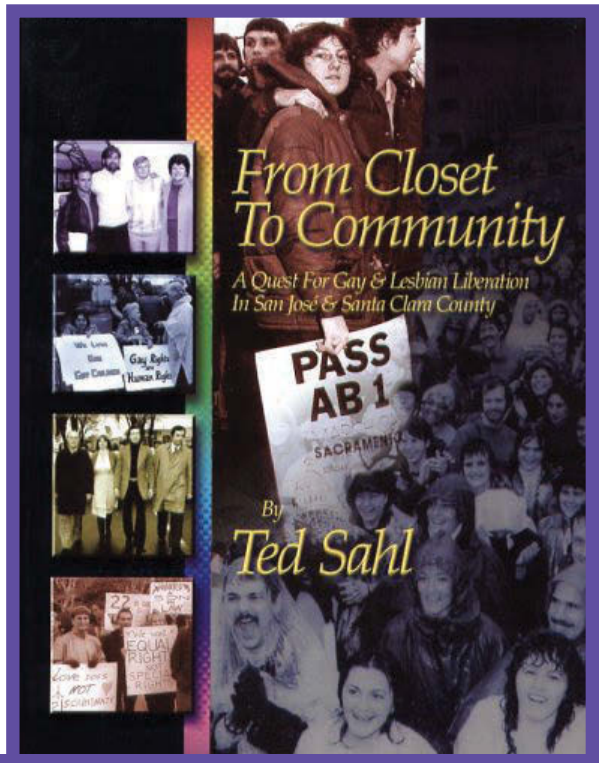
I would also like to thank Benny O'Hara, Jason Bennert, and Bryan Aubineau for their assistance in producing this history.

As he has done on numerous other projects, Michael Haberecht served as a good sounding board and editor of material, he is always of great help, especially when deadlines approach.

In addition, I would like to thank my staff at the Board of Supervisors and the many individuals that spent time reviewing and editing this booklet.

Photo Credits:

Sahl, T. (2002) From Closet to Community: A Quest for Gay & Lesbian Liberation in San Jose and Santa Clara County (pp. 9, 17, 25, 27-30, 34, 159). Campbell, CA: Ted Sahl Gallery.



Above: *From Closet to Community* by Ted Sahl book cover

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