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Safety a priority for rights group

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Mesa Legend

MCC's Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Association held its monthly meeting at Rio Salado College Feb. 20.

The board began discussing the second interval in its Safe Space Program. The event will be the conclusion of a two-part series that began last year. The tentative name for the event is "Inclusive Beginnings: Changing Lives through Ally Support and Grassroots Efforts."

The date has been set for April 23. The Safe Space Program was designed to help create a safer, more receptive workplace and environment for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender citizens.

This second installment will include many seminars by district figures and other important people throughout the community. Issues to be addressed will include lobbying for rights in Arizona and starting a family. Former president of the GLHRA, Joe Pearson, will speak on homosexuality and religion. At the closing of the daylong event, attendees who have attended both sessions will receive a certificate of completion in a graduation ceremony.

During a time when many cities are defying current laws on marriage and issuing licenses to same-sex couples, this program is essential.

"I believe that people should not be punished or discriminated in any way because of who they love. There should be some type of unification offered to same-sex couples that provides them with the legal and personal recognition that heterosexuals receive," Events Coordinator Genesis Toole said.

Currently, San Francisco, Massachusetts and New Mexico have been issuing same-sex couples marriage licenses. Whether the licenses will be recognized is a topic of heated debate. The attorney general in New Mexico has nullified over 66 of the licenses handed out after a two-hour wait.

Attorney General Patricia Madrid cited, "In my judgment, no county clerk should issue a marriage license to same-sex couples because those licenses would be invalid under current law."

President Bush has come forward and placed his backing in civil unions but against same-sex marriages.

"If they are banned, it will definitely be a setback for the gay community. Hopefully, if that occurred because we saw the light at the end of the tunnel, people would be willing to lobby and protest for their rights," added Toole.

In the wake of controversy throughout the nation, Arizona State University has just recognized its first lesbian sorority, Gamma Rho Lambda, with 12 sisters currently on the board. Rushing for the spring semester ended Feb. 20.

"A lot of these girls have never been in a queer group where they can have support," said Janette Elias, vice president of the sorority.

The sorority does not discriminate against any sexual orientation, and invites straight students to join as well. By offering a wide range of support, the sisters believe it is an open and friendly atmosphere.

"Some of them have been disowned by their families, and so it's like a surrogate family," added Elias.

The sorority began last semester but was only recognized this year. Gamma Rho Lambda joins Sigma Phi Beta, the homosexual fraternity at ASU. Sigma Phi Beta was chartered in the fall of 2003, although the fraternity has been operating under a different name since spring of 2000. Many brothers joined because of a common bond.

"I wanted to find a group of friends that had the same ideas and goals that I did," stated Aaron Blumenthal, fraternity president.

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