

rebound during a game against Florida on Sunday. With all  
ing lineup, the Lady Vols routed the Gators on Senior Day,

# LGBT Center provides support, acceptance

Justin Joo

Staff Writer

On Wednesday, Feb. 22, the OUTreach LGBT & Ally Resource Center threw an open-house party to celebrate its two-year anniversary.

Donna Braquet, coordinator at the resource center and associate professor, was thrilled with the occasion.

"It's really exciting that we've been open for two years," Braquet said. "When we first opened in 2010 it felt kind of historic."

Last year, the celebration lasted for only two hours, which led to crowding troubles due to all of the LGBTQ supporters coming to the center to give support.

This year, the party was an open house that ran from noon to 5 p.m. That way, friends and supporters of the center could come and go throughout the day. Braquet said that faculty, students and the "regulars" attended the celebration throughout the day.

"People came in, they chatted with everyone here," Braquet said. "We had an anniversary cake. It was really just a nice time."

Now past its first two years, Braquet said the center is looking into the year ahead. One of its major goals is to find more funding, particularly so that the center can be open more hours.

"But we know that in this economy that can be tough," Braquet said. "It's hard on all

the university departments right now."

Today, the only money the center receives from the university comes from the Chancellor's Commission for LGBT People. Additional funding comes from private donations made by supporters of the center.

The existence of a place like the resource center is a pleasant surprise for Braquet and her colleagues. She recalled her own college experience when she came out. Things weren't nearly as supportive or positive as they are now.

"I've been here at UT for 8 years, and many of my colleagues have been here even longer ... and we just think that being here is a major accomplishment," she said.

That two-year existence of support is the core of the center, Braquet said.

"Just knowing that there is a place for (LGBTQ students), where they can be themselves and know that they're in a safe and supportive environment, goes a long way," Braquet said. "And having it here on campus shows to them that UT and the administration support them."

Students like Cole Garner, who identifies as bisexual, think parties like this are a sign of progress and acceptance.

"It puts the university in a very modern place, and just that the university is very in touch with a lot of social issues and social freedoms." Garner, senior in psychology, said.

2.27.2012

# LGBTQ

continued from Page 1

Garner has been coming to the center for a year and a half. He has also volunteered there for a semester.

"It's just a great place and a great resource," Garner said. "It's a great asset to the community."

Another student who appreciates the support of the OUTreach center is undecided freshman Robyn Dodd. She identifies as bisexual and is questioning the possibility of being transgender.

"I actually went to high school and middle school in Knoxville," Dodd said. "And UT, and especially with the OUTreach center,

is much, much better at acceptance. ... It's kind of like an oasis."

But it's not just the LGBTQ aspect of the center that Dodd appreciates, but also how they accept another part of her personality. Dodd is autistic.

"The people here are much more accepting of not just LGBT issues," Dodd said. "They're much more accepting of my social difficulties than other places. It's great."

When asked if Dodd will continue to visit the center as she continues her college career, she smiled and nodded, "Yes, definitely."

2.27.2012