

LGBTQ rally encourages student opinions

Event uses artistic messages to promote expression of equal rights, sexual identity

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News Editor

As the title implies, "Speak Out for Equality" is an event aimed at raising awareness of the inequity that exists between different members of society.

"In order to help change our current laws we need to create awareness among people of all orientations," event organizer Shannon Foster said.

Everyone, regardless of sexual orientation, is encouraged to participate in the event and show support for the rights of the LGBTQ community. Organizers of "Speak Out for Equality" stress inclusive participation by all.

"LGBTQ people are not the only folks voting. We need a united voice of people from all walks of life, backgrounds, orientation etc.," Foster said. "Everyone supporting equal rights is welcome."

"The event itself is fairly simple. We are asking anyone who supports equal rights to come make a videotaped or voice-recorded statement about why they believe LGBTQ people should have equal rights."

The event is planned to take place Sunday, Oct. 16, from noon to 5 p.m. Lox Salon on West Jackson Avenue will serve as the host sight for the event.

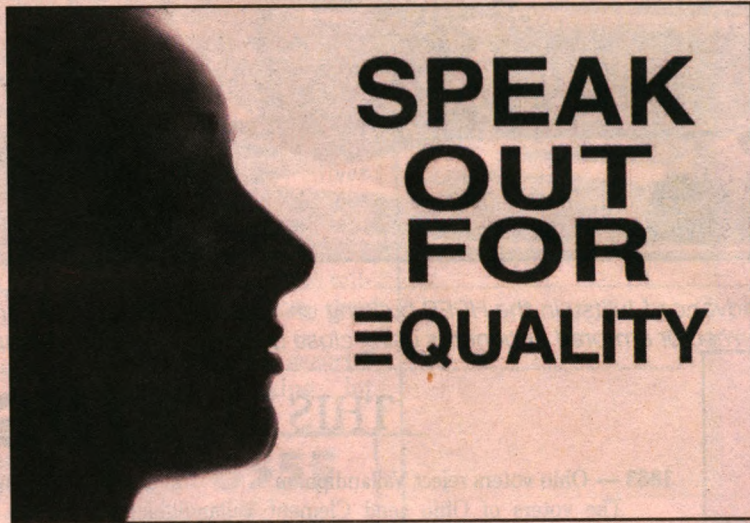
Candid photos will also be taken at the event with the main goal being to combine all three mediums to create one piece of work.

"This 'Speak Out for Equality' work will be published on YouTube, the 'Speak Out for Equality' (Knoxville) website and sent to various state politicians as a 'spoken petition' for equal rights," Foster said. "What I love about our event is that it will live on in the voices of the participants beyond one day."

Student groups on campus are lending their support in

preparation for the event.

"As a member of our diverse and interconnected university community and greater Knoxville community, I believe all students, faculty, staff and community members should have a safe, supportive and positive experience," said



• Image courtesy of Hillary McDaniels

Steven Stothard, graduate assistant in the college of social work and OUTstanding member. "Structural and policy factors that contribute to discrimination against LGBTQ people need to be changed. That's why OUTstanding supports 'Speak Out for Equality.'"

According to Foster, two things inspired her to create the event. Foster had a simple desire to marry her same-sex partner Beth, who was particularly concerned with the federally recognized civil aspect of marriage.

"If it was important to her then it was important to me,

but the tipping point came after I watched iO Tillet Wright's Self Evident Truth's video online," Foster said.

Foster was so inspired by the work of iO Tillet that she no longer felt simply voting for candidates that supported equal rights was enough.

"In order to help change our current laws we need to create awareness among people of all orientations," Foster said. "I think art is this amazing venue to bring awareness and solidarity on some of the biggest issues that face humanity, which is one of the reasons I wanted an arts based event."

The "Speak Out for Equality" event was originally planned to contribute to the Self Evident Truths videos. After speaking with iO Tillet, the artist was so excited by the momentum already achieved, she wanted to come in person in the spring, Foster said.

Instead of scrapping the event this Saturday, organizers decided to edit the concept and use it as a fundraising effort to bring iO Tillet to Knoxville.

Many students and members of the community have shown a great interest in advancing the cause of equal rights.

Sponsors include Fainting Goat Productions, Knox and You in 52, Old City Java and Planet Xchange. Artists who will be conducting the video and photo shoots include Hillary McDaniels, Tovah Greenwood and Jennifer Tipton.

"Events like 'Speak Out for Equality' and OUTstanding are important because they add to the amazing work that local, national and international organizations have been building to increase compassion and equality in our society," Stothard said. "Every time someone speaks out for equality and holds themselves, their families, friends, workplaces and policy-makers accountable, is another step towards our potential for meaningful compassion and equality."

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Renowned cartoonist