Students, alumni celebrate LBGT center's expansion

By Ian Johnson (Last updated: 10/18/09 8:36pm)

As the Homecoming parade floats finished making their rounds and parade-goers made their ways home, there were people at Student Services who still were celebrating.

But what they were celebrating — and, more importantly, what it meant — stretched far beyond the night’s festivities.

The MSU GLBT Alumni Association, a collection of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender alumni, threw a party Friday night at the LBGT Resource Center in Student Services commemorating the office’s recent expansion.

The expansion will provide space for a conference center, a bigger reception desk, student offices and a new student lounge, which used to consist of two chairs in the corner of the room.

The LBGT Resource Center provides a safe place for people who identify as LBGT to learn about the community and get support from the center’s professionally trained staff, the center’s director Brent Bilodeau said.

Space in the center has almost doubled since the completion of a $40,000 renovation project that began in May, Bilodeau said.

“I was really thinking the center is more than just a destination,” he said. “It’s a gateway to the university, community and the world.”

Several of MSU’s LBGT student groups donated a total of $4,000 to help fund the center’s upgrade. Kate Miller, a public administration and public policy senior and president of People Respecting Individuality, Diversity and Equality, said her group donated because of how the center welcomed her when she came to MSU.

“To know that I can come here at any time and they will let me in, they will accept me and they will be my friends even if they don’t know me is a great feeling,” Miller said.

GLBT Alumni Association board member Bill Beachler was one of many former Spartans at the open house Friday night celebrating the center’s improvements. Beachler founded the Pride Scholarship in 2000, which assists an MSU student who is active in the LBGT community, because he went through MSU without resources such as the center.

“It was the issue of not feeling comfortable with who I was and always being ashamed of who I was,” he said. “I thought it would be nice (for) society if they could treat people better and that people could be rewarded or have pride in who they are, rather than the way I felt.”

Before the center’s expansion, the office’s cramped conditions made it hard to get work done, said Danielle Masuda, a graduate assistant at the center and student affairs administration graduate student.

“It gets crowded very quickly,” Masuda said. “We’re crawling over each other to answer phones.”

The extra space will help the center provide services for students which were hampered by the claustrophobic office, Bilodeau said.

“We will continue to promote an integrated student experience,” Bilodeau said. “Where we need to continue to go is for the students to see ways the LBGT experiences are present in the curriculum, are present in the community and are present in student leadership opportunities. We play a vital role in helping students to make connections between all those things.”

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