



TAKING TO STREETS: Queer Nation members march in annual Gay Pride Parade last month.

NICOLE BENGIVENO DAILY NEWS

New era for gay rights

Queer Nation pushes movement out of closet

By ADAM NAGOURNEY

Daily News Staff Writer

On a warm night two weeks ago, 40 gays and lesbians took over half the tables at Dorrian's Red Hand, an upper East Side singles bar. As stunned regulars watched, they staged a "kiss-in."

After two Brooklyn men were arrested for assaulting gays during a Greenwich Village demonstration in June, hundreds of homosexual protesters defiantly marched to the suspects' homes.

And at the annual Gay Pride Parade last month, straights and even some older homosexuals did a double take at the new marching contingent, a group chanting: "We're here. We're queer. Get used to it!"

Meet Queer Nation, an organization whose very unorthodoxy is celebrated by its adoption of a name that has been a gay slur.

Spurred by AIDS, anti-gay violence and frustration with the slow pace of traditional activism, the gay rights movements has entered a new phase of militancy.

Many gay activists liken the development to the emergence of groups like the Black Panthers out of mainstream civil rights battles of the 1960s.

The new gay activism was pioneered in New York by ACT-UP, the AIDS advocacy group that staged such

street theater as "die-ins" to protest the government's response to AIDS.

Queer Nation emerged because ACT-UP was increasingly consumed only with the AIDS issue, frequently declining to take on gay issues.

In the five months since four young men met at an East Village apartment to form a militant gay rights organization, Queer Nation has emerged as one of the city's leading homosexual groups.

Using conventional and unconventional tactics, the group says it is battling the two-fold increase in reported incidents of gay-bashing this year and pushing homosexuals not just out of the closet but into high profile.

Its meetings attract hundreds. Chapters have sprouted in San Francisco, Providence and Boston.

Its tactics — from creation of an anti-violence patrol force to dispatching "Queer Shopping Network" delegations to distribute gay rights pamphlets in suburban malls — have won admiration even from gay activists who normally work through the courts and legislatures.

"The movement has finally come of age," said Tom Stoddard, executive director of Lambda Legal Defense Fund, a gay rights legal organization.

"Lambda is a legal organization — it can't go into the streets. But someone ought to be able to create visibility of a new kind for gay people and ex-

press the rage of gay people in an immediate and frankly confrontational way."

Queer Nation member Jay Blotcher, who is in the vanguard of the new gay militancy, said: "This definitely is the new order of gays and lesbians. People who believe in outing (publicly identifying closeted gays). People who were born after the stigmatization. People from the age of 18 to 30 who are gay and proud first."

Alan Klein, who formed the group with three friends — including Michelangelo Signorile, the columnist from the gay weekly Outweek, who has led the outing movement — said the group wanted gays not just to fit in, but to forthrightly display their sexuality.

"Gays and lesbians are no longer staying in their place, just like in the '60s, when blacks were not staying in their place," Klein said. He noted the increase in attacks on gays, and added: "We want to be feared as opposed to just dismissed as just dykes and fags."

When Queer Nation met two weeks ago, about 300 people crammed the first floor of the Gay and Lesbian Community Center in the West Village: men and women from age 18 to 60, some wearing shorts and tank tops and others dressed in business suits.

They cheered as they watched videotapes of TV news coverage of their march to Brooklyn.

They went through an ambitious agenda of actions: A mock funeral procession to meet President Bush in Manhattan; a march on Senate Majority Leader Ralph Marino's Long Island home to protest his blocking of a gay bias crime bills; a request that members don't buy Esquire magazine, which included an attack on the homosexual movement by columnist Pete Hamill; more invasions of straight bars like Dorrian's.

Klein said the group will continue to organize demonstrations and ac-