Calling All Allies

By Nick Patras

On October 20 -24th, the A&M Commerce campus will celebrate Ally Week, specifically allies who provide the space and support for LGBTQQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning) students, faculty, and staff. This year marks the second year the campus will observe Ally Week and plans are under way for an exciting array of speakers and programming. The office of the Dean of Campus Life and Student Development, the Counseling Center, the Safe Spaces Ally Project and Pride Alliance are working collaboratively to make this Ally Week informative and inspiring.

The work of allies has been a historically effective way of changing the thinking of the dominant culture. Ally week focuses attention on the need for LGBTQQ students to have learning environments that support and embrace them in all of their diversity. The goal is to achieve a culture where any person can study or work in an environment free of discrimination and harassment.

The results from GLSEN’s 2011 National School Climate Survey reveal how much work remains to be done to make campuses feel safe for all students. Some examples of the survey results include the fact that 84.9% of LGBT students heard “gay” used in a negative way (e.g., “that’s so gay”) and 71.3% heard homophobic remarks (e.g., “dyke or “faggot”) frequently or often at school. 81.9% of LGBT students reported being verbally harassed, 38.3% reported being physically harassed and 18.3% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation. There is also significant harassment of students who have a different gender expression from their birth sex.

This year’s speakers capture the essence of understanding how the world is enriched by everyone-including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people. Rebecca Kling is a transgendered artist and educator who explores gender and identity through solo pieces and educational workshops. Her multidisciplinary performances incorporate conversational storytelling, personal narrative, humor, movement, video projection, and more. Rev. Elder Ken Martin (retired) is a Christian minister from the Metropolitan Community Churches who has spent over 35 years of his ministry serving the LGBT community in Chicago, West Hollywood, and Austin. He became an Elder in MCC in 2006 and has traveled the world assisting churches and training allies as they provide safe space for LGBT youth in Australia, Cambodia, China, Malaysia, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, and Singapore. An important campus community event this year will include a panel discussion with Dr. Dan Jones, Dr. Mary Hendrix and officers from Pride Alliance discussing issues with regard to LGBTQQ students and allies. The discussion will be held in the Special Events room near the Café in the Sam Rayburn Student Center.

Watch for more detailed information for specific times and days for the speakers’ presentations during Ally Week 2014 at A&M Commerce. Ally week is about elevating the discussion while creating safe spaces to honor the inherent dignity and worth of every person on our campus, including LGBTQQ students, staff, and faculty.