

DaRos reveals homosexuality after two years at UR

By Jessica Ronky
Staff Writer

"Many people believe that Richmond is a hopelessly closeted, homophobic, unsupportive kind of place — my experience so far has been anything but,"
—John DaRos, Richmond College area coordinator.

Last week, at a resident assistant staff meeting, John DaRos, Richmond College area coordinator, made one of the biggest personal and professional decisions of his life — DaRos publicly revealed that he is gay.

DaRos, who has been at the University for the past two years, is relieved that he no longer has to live a lie. "It's great to stop acting. People aren't asking me what woman I'm with this week because they know that I'm not," he said.

Before he came out, DaRos said he had to blatantly lie to his RAs, to pretend that he was heterosexual when he wasn't.

"I personally wanted to be honest and up front with them [RAs]," DaRos said about his decision to come out. He also wanted people to realize that it's possible to have a professional relationship with someone who is gay.

"Not one of them has come up and told me that they have worked closely with a gay, and I

want them to know that it can be done," DaRos said.

He believes that in the future, the RAs he first came out to, and everybody else for that matter, will have friends and family come out to them. DaRos hopes he can be the one to prepare people for this experience by having them deal with their feelings about homosexuality through him.

"Some people don't understand why I want to do this," DaRos said. He is bothered by the fact that people can talk to him all they want about their girlfriends, but those same people don't want to hear he is gay.

You must trust someone before you can come out to them, DaRos said. "People should view it as a wonderfully flattering thing that somebody would have the trust and faith in you to tell you something like that," he said.

DaRos was nervous about coming out at the University of Richmond because he didn't know what kind of reaction to expect. So far, he has been pleasantly surprised.

Last July, DaRos first came out to his boss, Richmond College Dean Richard Maier. "I didn't know if I would lose my job," he said. "But the Dean said something to me that I'll never forget. He said, 'John, I'm 51 years old, I was born and raised in East Kentucky where you

wouldn't be in the same room with someone who was gay — I'm somewhere between that and where I should be and you're going to help me get there.' We talked for two hours after hours and he was wonderful about it."

DaRos had a gut feeling that most of the RAs would be supportive of him because he has a good relationship with them. Reaction from RAs ranged from high-fives and hugs to blushing and squirming.

Jefferson Jones, Freeman Hall head resident, was shocked to learn that DaRos is gay. "I don't think anyone really suspected him," he said. "I think it's kind of strange that he works with all men. I think he compromised his position [by coming out]."

Jones is not shy about his feelings on homosexuals. "I'm pretty homophobic," he said. "I'm not afraid to admit it — I'm scared of these people [gays]."

Jones and Matt Straw, Thomas Hall's head resident, both said they have not told their residents that DaRos is gay but they have heard people talking about it.

"The word is out and I don't think he [DaRos] minds," Straw said.

In fact, DaRos doesn't mind at all. "I want people to take a good hard look at this," he said. "They have thought all along that I am straight, and the fact is that I'm not."

Jones said that when he learned DaRos was gay, it was like a whole new person that he was meeting. He felt betrayed by the fact that he has known DaRos for two years, but only now knows the truth about him.

DaRos understands this kind of reaction. "It took me years to get comfortable with who I am," he

said. "I don't expect people to do it in a week."

At the same time, DaRos is bothered by some of the misconceptions people have about homosexuals. "People have said, 'John, it's nothing against you, I just didn't know you did that,'" he said. "All people can think of is the act of having sex with men."

DaRos said that most of the people he has come out to have told him they never would have guessed he was gay. He looks like the All-American Guy. He was president of his senior class and captain of his ice-hockey team. He's Catholic — and he's gay.

"When people find out that I'm gay they seem to forget everything else about me," DaRos said.

But he doesn't regret his decision to come out. In fact, he regrets not doing it sooner. DaRos said, "The bottom line is that if you have built a good relationship with people up to that point, chances are the relationship will be even better after you come out."

Straw agrees and respects DaRos' decision to come out. "I was glad that he trusted us enough and felt close enough to us that he could tell the truth," he said. "I respect his courage to come out to so many people at once."

Straw said the room got "really stuffy" when DaRos told the RAs he was gay. "People started to make jokes to try to change the subject," he said. "A couple people couldn't wait to get out of their seats. The guy next to me said 'Oh my God.'"

DaRos will be leaving the University in June because he is moving to the Washington, D.C. area with his partner. He says



John DaRos

this made his decision to come out a lot easier than it would be if he were staying here. "If I were staying here, I don't know if I would do this," he said. "Well, knowing me, I probably would — just to make waves."

Straw said DaRos told the RAs that he thought it would be unfair and a cop-out to come out at the end of the year and then leave Richmond.

DaRos hopes his decision to come out will influence other gay and lesbian faculty members to do the same. But he knows that the fear of losing a job or a chance for advancement is still a big deterrent.

"This is something that needs to change and change quickly," he said. "That change is occurring other places, and Richmond has a choice of going with that or staying in the Dark Ages."

"I know there are people out there and I challenge them to come out. I challenge straight people to become active allies and support that to happen."

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