

From the
President's Desk

As many of you know, Chuck Tyson, MOHR vice president, died on Aug 27 as a result of a massive coronary. Chuck lived life to the max. His ability to motivate people with his visionary leadership was unparalleled.

Chuck was skilled in areas of organizational concerns. He conceived the idea for a staff pledge program which in a year and a half made it possible for us to hire three full-time staff persons. He was responsible for direct mailing programs and phone banks. Most of all, he worked to develop the Board into a working Board that had vital and effective committees. He led us into a planning model for the organization through a yearly board retreat. He saw that we as a group chose goals each year. He worked long hours for MOHR, travelling to various parts of the state to meet potential donors, to consult and work with local activists, and to strategize about how to make MOHR vital and present. And he did all this work with incredible energy, grace and outrageous good humor.

Chuck was unique: brilliantly skilled, visionary. He was also, from my perspective, very lovable. For me, Chuck made the work among members of our leadership team fun. I enjoyed the candor and trust of our relationship, and I loved him not only for his gifts of energy, but for his compassion. Underneath the bubbling exterior, he had an empathy for people that would emerge at unpredictable moments. In sensitive situations or painful moments, I experienced him as a person who had the gift for the right touch, the right comment, the right joke, the right note at a moment when it had the capacity to heal, re-energize, or simply support. His humor was always on target, but so was his humanity.

Chuck worked thousands of hours in the last years of his life for our freedom and dignity. He did so from a perspective of privilege in our society. He wasn't a victim of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. He was a successful man politically, professionally and in the civic arena. And he was gay. He had a vision of a day when that statement would be as neutral as saying one was a Presbyterian. He put himself on the line for that vision. Whether meeting with the press in Kalamazoo after the acquittal of Wayne Watson's murderer, or in dealing with other professionals, Chuck was clear. He knew that as a group we need to attract and recruit different types of people: larger numbers of women and minority groups, and people with professional skills in education, fund-raising, and media work;



Charles Tyson

he knew we need to recruit more activist members as well as to encourage some of our more closeted members to get involved with MOHR's work on some level.

We have lost a major driving force for MOHR. We've created an endowment fund in the MOHR Foundation to honor him. More than ever, we need men and women like Chuck, persons who are skilled, dedicated and willing to make gay and lesbian rights a personal priority. As you read this, you know there is something you could give to our movement in Michigan ... some skill, some commitment, some time, some money.

Commitment in the face of AIDS hysteria and the religious right is no longer optional. After Hardwick, after the legislature, after the U.S. Department of Justice, in face of calls for our quarantine and incarceration, this is not business as usual. Chuck knew that. Please, for the sake of the movement that he loved and worked for, look into your own hearts, find your own courage and beliefs, and come work with us for the freedom and dignity of gay men and lesbian women.

Life goes on for MOHR. Life goes on for his life partner, Steve Taylor. Life goes on for his family. All of us who knew and loved him are so much more alive and so much more gifted because of his time with us. Kathie Dannemiller, his business partner, said at his memorial service that Chuck chose each of us and made us feel special because he had chosen us.

W.H. Auden wrote, in his "Christmas Oratorio, For the Time Being":

"Space is the Whom our loves are needed by,
Time is our choice of How to love and Why."

The gay and lesbian rights movement, nationally and in Michigan, is blessed that Chuck chose us as his space and time for these last two years. We were blessed with a brilliant political strategist as a leader and mover in MOHR.

by Helen Gallagher