



Photo courtesy ProjectQAtlanta.com

WES BERRY

When you feel truly at-home in Atlanta's LGBT community, you (hopefully) try to give something back. Luckily Wes Berry does. He's passionate about his work on the board of Joining Hearts and especially with AV200, which benefits the Emory Vaccine Center.

How would you define your role in Atlanta's LGBT community?

I have always considered Atlanta to be "My Town." I grew up here (Fayetteville/Vinings), I went to college here (Georgia Tech Undergrad and Graduate School), and I have lived in various parts of the city since then, so I feel especially connected to the community, especially the LGBT community. I've watched the city and the LGBT community grow over the past 10+ years, and I see people I've known for a decade or more when I go out, so I really feel like the community is a part of who I am. This is the main reason I try to give back to the community through nonprofit organizations and events, or just help when I can; these are the people I care about. Aside from offering my help, I hope that I can convince more people my age to take a more active role in helping the community and see that helping the community helps everyone.

What do you forecast for Atlanta's LGBT community in the next 5 to 10 years?

I think that the next five to ten years will be very exciting for Atlanta in general and especially the LGBT community. Atlanta is growing and so is our community. Our charities continue to make more

money each year and offer more support to our community. Our events are attracting larger crowds, allowing more people to become more active and understanding of the issues affecting the LGBT community. Similarly members of our community are taking more active roles in the government, allowing our issues more exposure, which will hopefully translate into more help, awareness, and rights for the community.

Currently in Atlanta, Emory University is working on several vaccines for HIV/AIDS, one of which is in Stage Two human trials. If something like that were to happen here in Atlanta it would put our community front and center around the world. I encourage anyone who can participate to ride, donate and/or volunteer with the AV200, which is a local charity that benefits the Emory Vaccine Center and has raised over \$750,000 that has been used for the center to get grants and bridge gaps created by conventional government funding of such projects.

We learn from all our experiences, both good and bad. Tell us about a negative life experience you've had that you learned a valuable lesson from.

My negative experience was more like years of misguided energy and focus on frivolous endeavors. After wasting a lot of energy on things that really didn't matter, I decided to make a conscious effort to focus my energy on things that did matter. I actively sought out ways that I could help my community and those that needed it or organizations that supported positive causes. This is my third year working with both the AV200 and Joining Hearts and over the years I have become more involved. This is my second year on the Steering Committee for the AV200 and, after being a "host" last year for Joining Hearts I was elected to the Board this year as Assistant Director of Events. I am proud of the service that I've done and continue to do for my community, and I am grateful for the positive change that it's made in my life.

How has being LGBT shaped your outlook on life?

I would like to say that being gay hasn't shaped my outlook on life and I don't really notice that I am gay or different from other Americans, but unfortunately over the years I realized that isn't the case. As I became more aware of the issues within our community, the misunderstandings that others have of our community, and the prejudices still facing our community, it made me more aware of what it means to be gay and, being the problem solver I am, look for ways to help. I realized that these issues aren't other people's issues; they are everyone's issues.

Tell us a little more about yourself. What are your hobbies? What are your goals?

I love anything to do with architecture, art, construction, or being outdoors. These days my life consists mainly of working, working out, and doing charity work, which keeps me calm and happy. As far as goals, I am always seeking something new and challenging, be it educational, professional, charitable, or physical. Immediate goals would probably be to ride in the AV200 this year, as I've only volunteered in the past; and perhaps go back to school (Law or PhD), because I love to learn.

If you were stranded on a desert island, what's the one book you would want with you?

The Lord of the Flies by William Golding.

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