Gay rabbit visits campus, talks about homosexuality

By Cassie Tomlin
Arizona Daily Wildcat

To be an Orthodox gay rabbit is to be a duck-billed platypus

That’s coming from someone who knows — Rabbi Steve Greenberg, the first openly gay orthodox rabbi, who spoke to about 70 students and other Tucsonans last Thursday night in the UA Hillel Center.

Greenberg traveled to Tucson from New York City to speak as part of Temple Emmanu-El’s Rabbi Albert T. Bilgray “Living Judaism” speaker series.

Greenberg shared his Jewish history, his experience being part of the film “Troubling Before-Gay,” and his views on gay marriage and homosexuality in Orthodox comm-

Orthodox Judaism does not condone homosexuality and does not allow homosexuals to become rabbis.

Greenberg was not publicly gay for more than 10 years after he finished rabbinical school.

Greenberg said that he interprets the biblical prohibition on homosexuality differently than Orthodox custom, and said the one place in the scriptures that bans “lying with another man” focuses on humiliation more than homosexuality.

“ Jewish Law is not a science detached from life,” he said.

Rabbi Sam Cohen, of Tucson’s Temple Emmanu-El, said homosexuality is broadly accepted in Reform Judaism and there are many openly gay reform rabbis, but he does not see Orthodox resistance to homosexuality fading any time soon.

Greenberg said the Orthodox community is attempting to address homosexuals as little as possible.

“Most Orthodox people have never met a gay person, they’ve only seen them on a screen in a tutu on a float,” he said. “It is total-

ly other in the Orthodox commun-

ity.”

Greenberg said common Orthodox sentiment holds that homosexuality is a curable disease or moral illness. He said that once the Orthodox community realizes

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A self-admitted neo-Nazi was convicted two weeks ago for beating and killing an openly homosexual man in 2002 but was not convicted of committing a hate crime, even though he admitted he killed the man because of his sexual orientation.

Philip Walsted was found dead outside of I.B.’s Bar, 616 N. Fourth Ave., with dozens of injuries inflicted by a baseball bat.

David Higdon was charged with first-degree murder Jan. 28, and his prosecutor said he killed Walsted because of Higdon’s affiliation with a neo-Nazi group. Higdon will be sentenced March 28 and he stands to serve anywhere from 25 years to life in prison or possible execution.

Lori Ginshick, coordinator for the WingSPAN anti-vio-

lence project, said the judge will take into consideration Higdon’s skinhead ties and testimonies from witnesses at the time of Walsted’s murder.

WingSPAN does various services around Tucson for les-
bian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals who need counseling and assistance. WingSPAN holds seminars and is working to “better the light” on North Fourth Avenue, Ginshick said.

Ginshick, who sat in Higdon’s trial to show support for Walsted’s family and the community, said the Arizona Legislature does not have a statute specifically related to hate crimes.

However, if hate is a factor in the crime, Ginshick said it is taken into consideration during trial.

Michelle Pickrom, Tucson Police Department spokesperson, said police cannot charge a person for a hate crime, but it can be introduced in a trial as a “sentence enhancer,” meaning it could tack extra time on the person’s sentence.

TPD classified 21 cases as hate crimes in 2004 and 28 cases as hate crimes in 2005, but that does not necessarily reflect a downward trend, Pickrom said.

According to WingSPAN statistics based on telephone reports, in 2004, 59 individuals in Arizona reported some kind of discrimination based on their sexual orientation, including vandalism, job discrimination, unjustified arrest-
ed, assaults and robberies.

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