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## Vermont Teddy Bear Launches Pride Bear

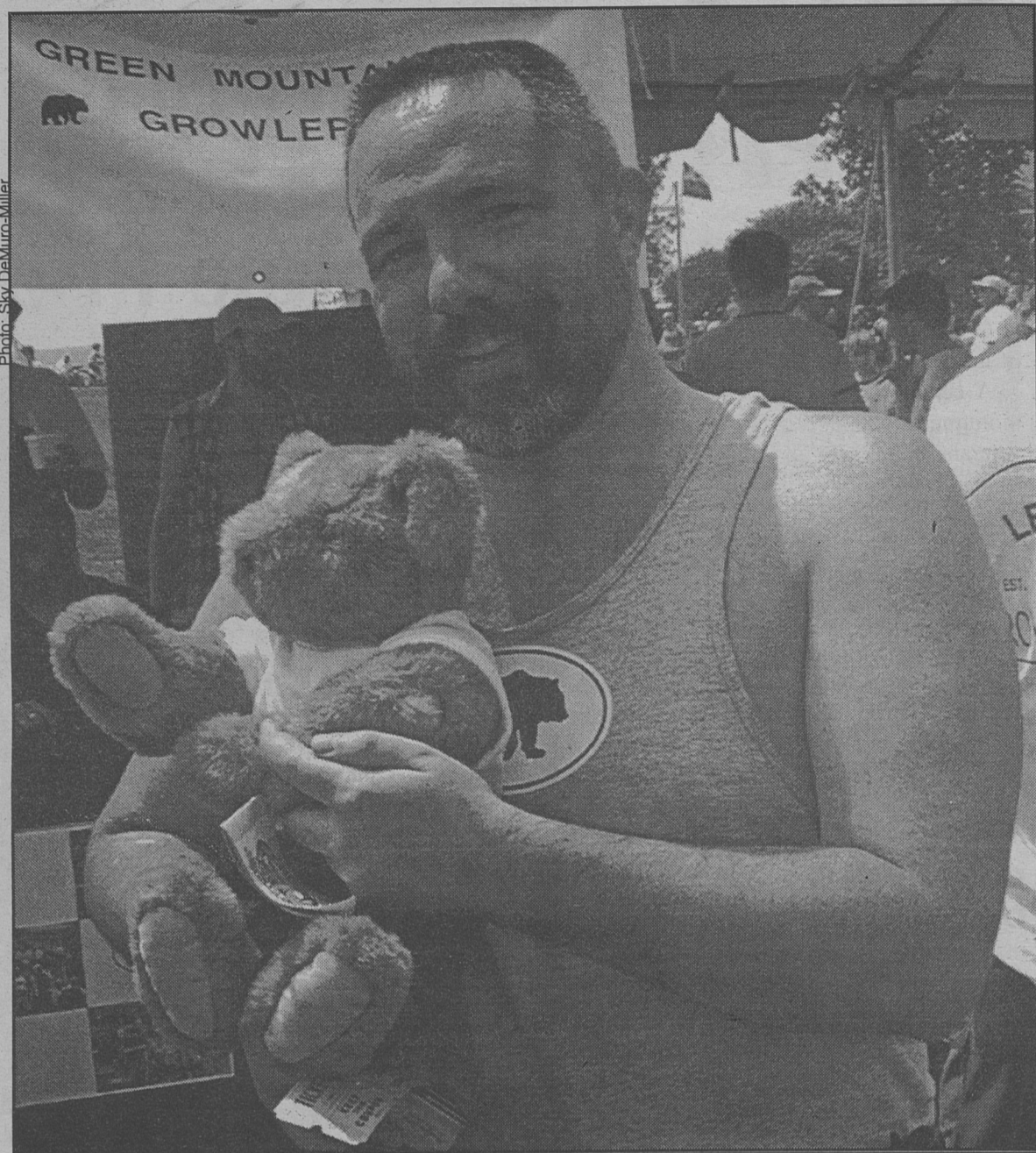
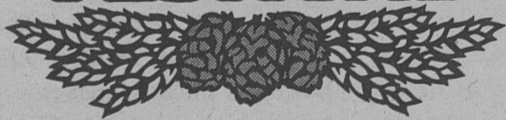


Photo: Sky DeMuro-Miller

Michael Maggard, Montreal resident and postmaster/webmaster for the Green Mountain Growlers, with the GLBT Pride Bear manufactured by The Vermont Teddy Bear Company.

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BY PAUL OLSEN

SHELBURNE — Looking for a unique gift for friends on Pride Day? Are you at a loss for a gift idea for the gay or lesbian couple being joined in civil union? The Vermont Teddy Bear Company in Shelburne may just have the answer. The company recently introduced a GLBT Pride Bear and has been selling bride-bridal and groom-groom teddy bear wedding sets for the past two years.

Dressed in blue jeans and a white t-shirt, the Pride Bear has honey colored fur and features a permanent embroidered rainbow tattoo on its arm. The bear is approximately 15 inches high and costs \$75.

According to the Vermont Teddy Bear Company's Public Relations Manager, Cal Workman, Pride Bear was a natural extension of the company's philosophy. "We're in the business of helping people communicate with each other and it just seemed like there was a hole in our product line," she told *Out in the Mountains*. "There was a need for this kind of bear to help this community communicate deeply held emotions and celebrate milestones just like all of our other bears do."

Workman indicated that Vermont's civil union debate

played no role in the company's decision to launch Pride Bear at this time. "It's not so much that we were coming out and making a political statement," she said. "I'm sure people are going to make that connection. Vermont has been in the spotlight for so long and the name of the company is the Vermont Teddy Bear Company, but it (civil unions) really didn't have an influence. We just do what we know we do well which is helping people make meaningful connections. I hope the (Pride) bear does well. Its time has arrived."

Irene Steiner, the Vermont Teddy Bear Company's Director of Marketing, says developing a bear for the gay and lesbian community created unique challenges. "We had several people tell us it should have pink paw pads or wear a rainbow scarf," she said. "We normally take pictures of prototypes and survey our customers. Since we don't have a database of people who we know are gay, lesbian or bisexual, we thought it would be weird to send out a survey to people about this product."

"So we decided to try things a different way. So our research manager and myself went out to a local gay bar in Burlington, brought the prototypes, and sat down and just

started talking to people. We had a lot of fun and got really good feedback. We thought we had something that people are going to relate to so we came back and said 'let's give it a whirl.' We're making 500 to start with and depending on the success we'll keep on going with it. A drag queen bear might be next!"

For gay and lesbian commitment ceremonies or civil unions, the Vermont Teddy Bear Company sells same-sex bride and groom sets. The Groom-Groom Wedding set features two dashing groom bears dressed in satin-lined tuxedos. The Bride-Bride bears are dressed in brocade and lace and come complete with wedding veils and flowers. Each set runs approximately \$150.

The Vermont Teddy Bear Company was founded in Burlington in 1981 and sold its first bears from a peddler's cart on Church Street. The company went public in 1993 and moved to its Shelburne location in 1995. The company's bears are handcrafted in Vermont and can be shipped through their Bear-Gram delivery service.

The Vermont Teddy Bear Company can be reached at 1-800-829-BEAR or [www.VermontTeddyBear.com](http://www.VermontTeddyBear.com).

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