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VERMONT'S VOICE FOR THE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY

# OUT IN THE MOUNTAINS

Volume XVI, Number 11

December 2001

www.mountainpridemedia.org

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## Northeast Regional NOW Conference Held in Fairlee



photo: Jade Wolfe

Judith Beckett (l), conference planner, and Judy Murphy, NE NOW coordinator, take a moment to compare notes.

BY JADE WOLFE  
OITM Staff Writer

The northeast regional 2001 NOW conference was held November 16th through the 18th at the Lake Morey Inn Resort in Fairlee, VT. Entitled "Moving Forward Together," there were over 200 in attendance for this strategy summit and celebration.

Jan Dunlap and I arrived before 9 am on Saturday morning. The morning air was crisp. The beautiful, natural surroundings of Lake Morey were deceptively peaceful outside the country club resort. Walking up to the entrance, we were greeted by Paij Wadley-Bailey. She is a member of the Conference Planning committee. A warm and vibrant woman, if her energy level was any indication, I was about to enter an area

of lively conference activities.

The mission and goals of this conference were "to bring together lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered people and our allies ... to break down barriers that splinter our movements ... to build coalitions that will strengthen and unite our causes ... to move forward together ... to strategize for our future and celebrate our victories and lives."

Copies of *Out In The Mountains* placed prominently across from the entrance, we moved on to the registration area. Several organizations had information tables or booths set up. There were displays of political information, a women's publishing organization, and artists' displays and media packets. Looking around this larger room, various age groups and orientations were represented. There were not many women of color.

Once gathered in a banquet hall, the morning began by Paij leading us in an African women's welcoming chant. We were accompanied on African drum. After a brief introductory speech there was just enough time to engage in a 'get to know a total stranger in a few minutes as it relates to the conference' exercise. I met Lois. She was recently back from Morocco. An adventuresome risk taker, Lois was one of the first women arrested in Washington, D.C. for protesting AIDS issues. As anecdotes go, hers was a true reflection

of someone who lives the belief of equality in America.

Had it been possible, my time would have been more wisely spent if I could have had those three-minute commentaries from each individual present. Instead, we dispersed into workshops.

As someone has said before, "Never underestimate the power of the individual [to affect change]." I don't underestimate us as individuals. I become concerned any time we give up some of our individuality and become members of a group, panel or committee. Hoping others were feeling similarly, I sat in on a morning workshop entitled "Women and the Middle East."

As with any ambitious topic, there wasn't enough time to address each presenter's words. There was no time to view the 24-minute video. We barely had gone around the room commenting on September 11 when each presenter hurriedly gave their particular comments introducing an important aspect of our discussion. At least two of these women had lived in the Middle East. An important guest of these speakers was a Middle Eastern woman recently arrived from her country.

Howard Zinn might have enjoyed conversing with these well-informed, passionate presenters. In the back of my mind as I listened to a great deal of fear and anger, I heard Holly Near singing: "Why do we kill people, for killing people when we know, that killing people is wrong..." It had faded out of my mind a few days after September 11 and now the volume had been turned back up.

Elizabeth Toledo, Robyn Ochs and Mandy Carter presented "Bringing Our Movement Together." During their individual speeches, some of the words brought nodding heads and scattered applause but a few phrases opened up touchier areas. Clearly there were opposing forces here addressing whether change was needed, what these changes could achieve and ways to move forward.

As Robyn Ochs noted, "What you are depends totally on who you're standing next to." Within the NOW organization there are diverse people standing next to one another. A radical lesbian feminist does not necessarily have a great deal in common with a transgendered person. A transgendered person may find little common ground with a bisexual feminist, and so on. Mandy Carter's eloquent words summed it up when she stated, "Definitions can clarify or divide us." We were left to ask ourselves the question, "Are we seeking justice or just for us?"

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