

Queerness & Disability

I want to thank Euan & Samuel Lurie for writing the article ["Body of Pride"] in the August edition of *OITM*. I am a physically disabled gay man living in Bennington and am very glad to see an awareness taking place around the needs of disabled homosexuals.

For me, my disability was an important part of my coming to terms with my sexual orientation. People with disabilities, whether physical, emotional, or mental involve individualized life needs that are unique to non-disabled homosexuals. My hope is that this article will help to educate others about these needs and be more sensitive to them. I will be watching for the next QD Conference with anticipation.

Eric Webster
Bennington, VT

Surveying the Survey

The Vermont Unity Project so far has received nearly 150 completed LGBT Community Needs Assessment surveys that were included in the August issue of *OITM*. Thank you for filling out the questionnaires!

If you have not yet filled out the survey, we encourage you to do so. Before filling it out, please correct the unfortunate typo on the Adequacy scale on page one: #4 on the Adequacy scale should read "completely adequate." Amazingly, almost every one who already filled out the questionnaire figured out what should have been printed, and made the correction on their own. Thank you!

Additional corrected copies of the Vermont Unity Project LGBT Community Needs Assessment questionnaire are available by calling 802-860-6236. Please fill out a questionnaire and help shape our community's future.

Ted Looby
Vermont Unity Project

"Press"ing Complaint

I am writing in response to a portion of an article ["Kaufman Tapped as New R.U.12? Director"] in last month's issue titled, "Second Queer Summit Slated for Aug. 24: Will Press Have Access?" I disagree with your assertions that press access was denied, that only one participant objected to direct quoting, and that facilitator Stan Baker "allowed the objection to block media coverage."

First, it is important to note that more than one participant spoke in support of limiting direct media coverage of the meeting. While the issue was raised by one participant, several others, myself included, concurred. The concerns about the possibility of seeing one's words in print in the following month's issue of *OITM* would have been an obstacle to an honest and forthright conversation.

To my knowledge, the summit was intended as a forum to provide organization / agency updates as well as frank conversation about both organizational and community challenges. In the course of such conversations it is crucial that participants feel they are able to speak openly and freely. It was the belief of several, not one, of the participants that direct media coverage would inhibit that conversation.

We have all seen media coverage that isolates direct quotes, removes them from context and makes them susceptible to manipulation and misrepresentation. People's concerns were valid and Stan Baker, as any skilled facilitator would, heard and respected the views of the participants. The truth is, Stan Baker should not have had to facilitate this particular conversation to begin with. To my recollection, neither the previous nor the current invitations to the meetings, issued by the R.U.12? Community Center, included any indication or notice of potential press coverage. This issue should have been addressed in advance and notice to attendees communicated. It was certainly not my understanding that this was a "public" meeting.

In fact, invitations were sent to relatively few agencies/organizations and requested that each send a maximum of two representatives; Mountain Pride Media had three representatives present and one additional board member representing another group.

The press was allowed complete access to the last summit. No one was asked to leave the room or cover their ears. All three Mountain Pride Media representatives, were present for the entirety of the meeting. *OITM*'s reporting about the "denial of press access" is exactly the type of misrepresentation several of us worried about at May's summit.

While I am unable to attend the upcoming

summit, I am certainly hopeful that *OITM* and RU12? will have had the necessary conversations, prior to the meeting date, in order to inform participants in advance of the meeting as to whether they should anticipate press coverage or not.

B.J. Rogers
Burlington, VT

Let me first address your confusion regarding Mountain Pride Media and Out in the Mountains and our participation in the Queer Summit. Each organization was separately invited. By my calculation, that would have entitled each organization to two representatives. Two board members, the president and vice president, attended to represent Mountain Pride Media. I was the sole representative of Out in the Mountains. The other person to whom you refer was not representing either OITM or Mountain Pride Media; to suggest otherwise misrepresents her role.

And as to whether the meeting was open to our community's press or not, you are correct in saying that no one was notified that press would be there. However, neither was there any notice or suggestion that OITM's representative should not be attending in a professional capacity. It is only because I was forthright in announcing my intention to report on the meeting that it even became an issue – which puts OITM in a different light than is cast by your generalization regarding press misdeeds.

In so far as I was not asked to leave the room, yes, I had "access." However, although every other person in the room was free to take notes, I was not. Every other person in the room was free to speak or write about the proceedings and I was not – because I chose to abide by the concern initiated by one person to prevent any direct quoting from the proceedings. In essence I was handcuffed, pressured to be satisfied on behalf of the wider community with an official statement. Such a situation is far from being allowed "complete access." If LGBTQ community nonprofit organizations have nothing to hide, they shouldn't be worried about how they will be reported on in the LGBTQ press.

With the clarification that the concern regarding a potential inhibition of discussion was initiated by one person and supported by a majority of the delegates (referenced in the story in a quote from Mountain Pride Media's then-Board President Carrie Rampp), OITM stands by its story. – EB

Samara's Thank You Party

Samara Foundation of Vermont will celebrate the 2002 grant and scholarship recipients, and the fifth anniversary of Samara grantmaking, at the second annual Thank You! Celebration in the Cedar Creek Room at the Vermont Statehouse on Friday, September 13, 6 to 8 pm. The Samara Foundation Board of Directors invites members and allies of Vermont's LGBT community to join us at the statehouse as Samara recognizes its 2002 grant and scholarship recipients and the many donors who make Samara's grants and scholarships possible. In 2002, 12 Vermont organizations and four Samara Scholars shared \$40,000 in Samara awards.

RSVP's are appreciated by September 10. Contact us at 860-6236 or ted@samarafoundation.org. (If you forget to RSVP, just come join us at the statehouse!)

Samara's annual Thank You! Celebration creates a special opportunity for Samara donors and grant and scholarship recipients to meet and celebrate each other, as well as to publicly celebrate Samara Foundation's contributions to the well-being of Vermont's LGBT communities. Last year over 75 people shared light hors d'oeuvres and punch in the statehouse, while hearing moving personal stories from grant and scholarship recipients.

Samara Foundation of Vermont incorporated in 1992 as Vermont's lesbian and gay community foundation. In 1998, inaugural grants totaling \$10,500 were awarded to five organizations. During the past five years, Samara Foundation has awarded over \$130,000 to 35 different Vermont organizations and individuals, through 51 grants and 11 scholarships.

Samara Scholarships were established in 2000, as "an investment in the future of Vermont high school students who oppose discrimination and prejudice, and who stand for the elimination of homophobia in our society." Four Vermont high school students were named as Samara Scholars in 2002, each receiving \$1,100 to support their higher education.

Please join us September 13, and allow us to thank you for helping us to help our community.

Bill Lippert, Executive Director
Samara Foundation of Vermont

editor's notebook

Hearing From The Opposition

For each of the last two issues, I have received a letter to the editor from a man in southwestern Vermont. I have declined to publish them – a choice always at the discretion of the editor. The reason is that I considered the first – a screed larded with religious dogma on "saving lives" from a gruesome death by AIDS by persuading gay men to stop having sex with each other – anti-gay. The man who wrote called twice to find out whether his letter would be published, and when I emailed him to say it wouldn't, he requested an explanation for my decision. He

insisted that his letter wasn't anti-gay, that he had worked with AIDS patients, that all he really wanted was to save gay men's lives.

Of course, suggesting that "abstinence only" for gay men – the Bush administration's sole favored approach to AIDS prevention – would end the AIDS epidemic is fatuous, simplistic in the extreme, and ignores all other transmission vectors.

The second letter announced the same man's candidacy for a seat in the Vermont House with the primary legislative goal of repealing "the wicked civil union law." Once again, the letter was full of selective quotes from the Christian Bible and made some

leap of (il)logic to suggest that by recognizing civil unions between gay men the State was then condoning the spread of AIDS.

He strongly urged that we print his letter because it would be of interest to *OITM* readers to know where he stood on these issues. I don't know what his real agenda is, other than to get in our faces, or perhaps to use whatever reaction he would get to fuel his right-wing conservative campaign, but other than this summary, I'm not going to play.

The bottom line for me is that people from outside our LGBTQ communities opposed to gay and lesbian rights have many more receptive print outlets for their opinions than we in our community have. And those outlets collectively – and in most cases, individually – have many more resources – in pages, advertising, funding – than *OITM* does.

Farewell, Elizabeth!

With this issue, we say goodbye to one of our most stalwart and involved volunteers: Elizabeth Hane. She is moving – has moved by the time you read this – to New York state's apple country to follow her beloved, Stina Bridgeman. Both women earned doctorates in their respective fields and are in the academic life; Stina has been and continues to be gainfully employed, while Elizabeth's grant-funded work at the University of Vermont's Proctor Maple Research Center has come to an end.

Elizabeth has been a regular at stuffing night, made major contributions as a community member of the Technology Committee of the MPM Board of Directors, and took on the leadership of the online archive project – the effort to make all 16 years of *OITM* accessible electronically. Under her direction,

and with the help of many volunteers, the online archive project has made a huge step toward completion.

And she writes well, too. Elizabeth has contributed several articles – on working in the sugarbush, updates on the archive project, travel in Scandinavia, to name a few – to these pages. I hope that she will continue to send us the occasional article – especially before she gets caught up in the travails of teaching and/or research.

Elizabeth, while we're sure this move to join Stina – after over a year of conducting a long distance relationship – is ultimately a happy one for you, we will miss you, and we wish you well. ▼