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## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of *Out in the Mountains* is to serve as a voice for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgendered people, and our supporters in Vermont. We wish the newspaper to be a source of information, insight, and affirmation. We also see OITM as a vehicle for the celebration of the culture and diversity of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered communities here in Vermont and elsewhere.

## EDITORIAL POLICY

We will consider for publication any material which broadens our understanding of our lifestyles and of each other. Views and opinions appearing in the paper do not necessarily represent those of *Out in the Mountains*. This paper cannot and will not endorse any candidates or actions of public officials on issues of importance to lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgendered persons. We reserve the right not to publish any material deemed to be overtly racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, ageist, classist, xenophobic, or homophobic. Writers' guidelines are available on request. All materials submitted must include a name and a contact number. However, within the pages of the newspaper, articles may appear anonymously upon request, and strict confidentiality will be observed.

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# editorial

## Believing in the Light

The light is dying away in the December evenings, the darkness growing toward its longest reign. That's a simple fact of astronomy, of living in the northern hemisphere.

And yes, it might be a metaphor for the national election results to those of us who distrust the Bush administration's demonization of Iraq's oil-rich dictator, an admittedly easy target for demagoguery. Not to mention the ongoing erosion of privacy and civil rights for all citizens being orchestrated by Attorney General John Ashcroft.

But if I believe in anything, it's that the light will return, beginning in the physical world on December 22 (perhaps not measurably, yet, but within a week or so, we'll have gained a few minutes).

In the meantime, we light candles and shield those fragile flames from guttering gales.

We hold onto the historic election of the first woman — unabashed liberal Nancy Pelosi — to national party leadership in the US House of Representatives as one potential candle.

We got a lot of candles in the form of Vermont legislators committed to upholding the civil unions law as currently written, including Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force Executive Director Mitzi Johnson, from Grand Isle. As one political activist told me, "In terms of the effects on our daily lives, I'd rather have the Republicans at the top of the ticket where they can't do too

much harm, than in a majority in the legislature."

We in Vermont are a candle for the rest of the country, lighting the way toward equality in rights for gay and lesbian couples. Cities in other states have lit their own candles against the continuing hate-crime murders of transwomen and transmen by passing legal protections for transgender individuals.

And yet, we are not all safe or warm, we do not live in a glbt-friendly paradise in Vermont.

Repressive neighbors too often provide the gusts that blow out our candles of hope and joy. Steven George Smith's Franklin County neighbors hurl anti-gay epithets at him on the street, and some of them allegedly assaulted him at his not-so-friendly neighborhood bar. Rachel Erickson's school board can't decide whether she can show that her classroom is a harassment-free zone — a safe space — for her students.

Even now, after all our struggles, and in spite of legal protections, some of us cannot get justice. You can only protect your civil rights if you can afford a lawyer and there's someone to sue. Steven George Smith doesn't have that luxury. He's a classic outsider, disabled, poor, gay and alone, with no network of close friends and allies to support him. His story is an object lesson in how far we still have to go.

If you are not poor and disabled and living in a hostile community this December, count your blessings. If you have not had to try to

find justice in a system where the gears grind slowly and all too often grind up the hapless victims it should help, feel glad that you live in the light in a dark season in a dark world.

Light some candles this month: for how far we've come and how far we still have to go. For trans teen Gwen Araujo and the other 24 known transgender dead through hate violence; for Rachel Erickson and her questioning students; for Steven George Smith and all our brothers and sisters who live with the darkness of other people's souls.

If you are safe and warm this December — as many of us are — light a candle, whether it's for Chanukah, Solstice, Christmas, or Kwanzaa, or just because we need more light in a dark world. If we light enough candles, the darkness will retreat.

Euan Bear

## CORRECTIONS

▼ In case it wasn't obvious, the candidate endorsements by Vermonters for Civil Unions on the back page of last month's issue were paid advertising. We should have labeled that page as such.

▼ And, obviously I'm still haunted by the hobgoblin of inconsistency regarding Leah Wittenberg's last name. I'll keep trying to get it right, Leah.

## squibs

### Different Strokes

It was more of a shock than it should have been, given the WPTZ Channel 5 news team's propensity for sensationalizing news stories. But I did sit bolt upright when Thom Hallock announced that a gay group had been granted a permit for a "nudist camp."

The short (45 seconds maybe?) story indicated that the camp was Faerie Camp Destiny in Grafton and Chester. It was pretty outrageous — the release could have been written by the die-hard opposition whose primary issue with the permit was the possible devaluation of neighboring property because of nudity on the site.

Next day the story in — of all places — the Burlington *Free Press* had it right: Gay Retreat Gains Permit.

### Cyber-Advocacy

Just thought you might want to know that the San Francisco Bay-area based Online Policy Group ([www.onlinepolicy.org](http://www.onlinepolicy.org)) caters to underserved populations: Who, for example? Queer parents, a leather fetish group, and a women's peace group thrown off their

ISP for some recent examples. It's a nonprofit organization dedicated to online policy research, outreach, and action on issues such as access, privacy, and what they call "digital defamation." Its motto is "One Internet With Equal Access for All." OPG "focuses on Internet participants' civil liberties and human rights, like access, privacy, safety, and serving schools, libraries, disabled, elderly, youth, women, and sexual, gender, and ethnic minorities."

Its featured website this time around: Prospective Queer Parents, a forum for the exchange of information and a social gathering space for queer (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, etc.) people who are interested in childraising and parenting ([www.queerparents.org](http://www.queerparents.org)).

Its featured domain name: Leather Leadership Conference, an organization "dedicated to strengthening the SM/Leather/Fetish community through the development of the leadership skills of community members and fostering a greater sense of connection between and within community groups ([www.leatherleadership.org](http://www.leatherleadership.org)).

### Godless Americans March

Well, it's about time! An estimated 2500 atheists and humanists marched on Washington last month, representing over 200 organizations in what was billed as the first national civil rights march "by and for freethinkers."

Among the signs: "Al-Quaida Is a Faith-Based Initiative."

Counter demonstrators lined the march route and chanted, shouted and prayed that the "godless" would go to the hell they refuse to believe in.

Among the marching throng: Gay and Lesbian Atheists and Humanists (GALAH), which has apparently been around for 18 years. Its goals include supporting glbt equality, educating people about atheism and humanism, supporting the separation of church and state, and providing social opportunities for its members to meet. The Washington-based organization, which identifies religion as the source for most anti-gay hatred and bigotry, offers a monthly newsletter and has a website: [www.galah.org](http://www.galah.org).

### Advocate's 35th

It's the damndest thing. I wanted to put a little piece in *The Rest of Our World* about the 35th anniversary of *The Advocate*, but apparently a person has to buy the print version in order to get a look at the actual anniversary issue. On the website, there's a brief article by Boy George celebrating Scotland's beating England to the punch in eliminating infamous antigay provisions and a virtual gallery of photos and artwork — and that was it! Ah, well, Happy Birthday any way. ▼