

### Appreciation

I've never written to the editor before but I feel compelled after reading this month's issue of *Out In The Mountains*. The [November] "Editor's Notebook" made reference to someone who is obviously not happy with the changes that have occurred since you have become editor.

I, for one, would like to add my two cents to the mix and comment that I have never enjoyed reading *OITM* more than I do now. The content is much improved, and I find it to be a "class act" now rather than an embarrassment. You and your staff obviously put a lot of time and effort into producing this newspaper and I am truly grateful for your efforts and commend you on the quality of this publication. In my opinion, it has greatly improved!!!

With appreciation,  
Bunny Lavoie  
Windsor, VT

### Child Abuse by Priests

I am writing to respond to recent stories in the press about the investigations of Vermont Catholic priests for "sexual misconduct", or more directly, child sexual abuse. I specifically want to comment on the situation with a priest in Vergennes who

resigned because of his "affair" with a young man. In a letter to his parish, the priest apologizes for violating his vow of celibacy, not for sexually abusing a youth. He also states that the young man "had been sexually active (not with me) from his early teen years and had several other ongoing liaisons during the period that we knew each other," implying that the youth's sexual activity and history justified his taking advantage of his position of power to abuse the youth.

It is irrelevant how much sex a person has or had before being abused. A priest in his 60s abusing the power and influence of his position by having a sexual relationship with a young teenager is wrong, and should be illegal. The youth was not at fault for what happened to him. Priests who sexually abuse youth should not only be removed from their parishes, but from the priesthood, and should not be rewarded with retirement packages. What is the youth rewarded with, but scars from an abusive relationship that will take a long time to heal from.

It is not uncommon for an abuser to try to shift the blame and responsibility for their actions to the victim. Victim blaming is all too common in our society that condones abuse and violence everyday. Institutions of power like the Catholic Church and the State of Vermont's Attorney General's Office should hold perpetrators accountable to prevent such abuses from continuing to occur. Now that the silence has been bro-

ken, we all must hold each other accountable to bring justice to young victims of sexual abuse of priests.

Kara DeLeonardis, MSW  
SafeSpace Executive Director

*SafeSpace is a social change and social service organization working to end physical, sexual, and emotional violence in the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQQ) Vermonters.*

### Respect: Insist on It

Marshall's in Williston was an exciting new discount store coming to the area, arriving just in time as Ames was closing all of their stores. However, Marshall's is no bargain when it comes to the handling of its employees or customers.

First of all, there have been more than 30 people who have quit - 6 the day before the store opened - because the manager is belittling and belligerent towards them, even in front of customers. She has also been rude to customers, including myself. All of this in less than a month of the store's opening.

Employees have contacted corporate offices because they were told that the company has an open door policy when it comes to com-

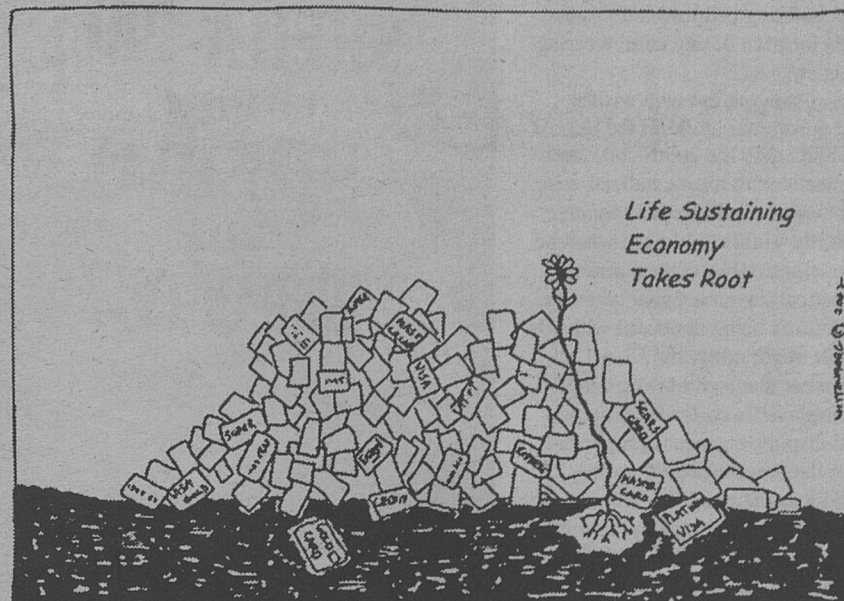
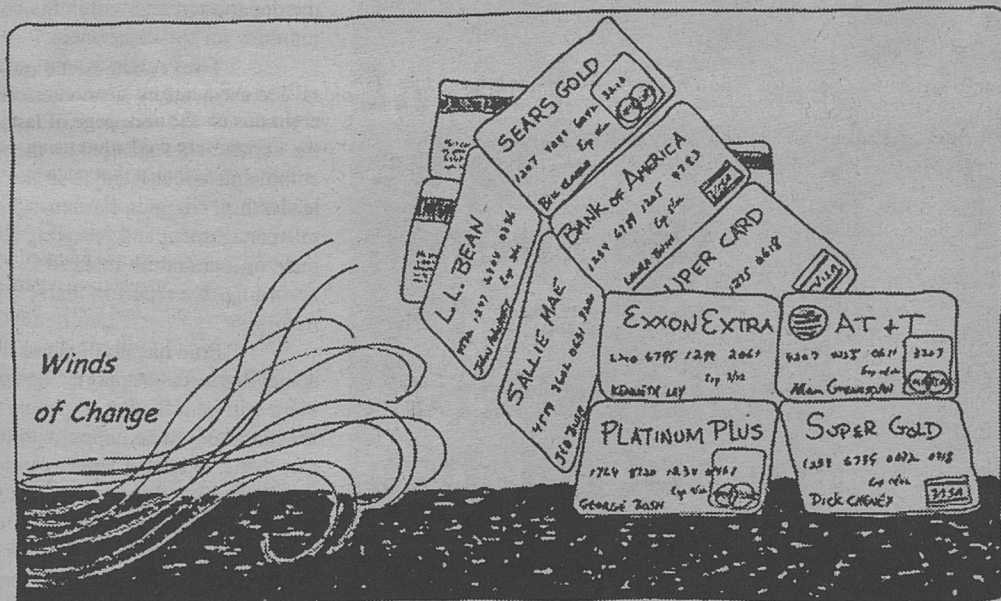
plaints. However, instead of correcting the problems, the manager was informed of the complaints, reprimanded the employees, and made their stay at the store miserable. So much so that they would eventually quit.

More and more employees are quitting because of the manager and more and more customers are exercising their rights and complaining, too. However, corporate has done absolutely nothing to correct these problems. I speak from personal experience. When contacting corporate headquarters to complain, I was thanked for the call and that was it.

I encourage all of those individuals who have been treated poorly by Marshall's to contact corporate offices and demand justice by calling 888-627-7425, the regional manager at 781-273-4694, or emailing them directly at [MarshallsCustomerService@tjx.com](mailto:MarshallsCustomerService@tjx.com). Tell them you refuse to shop in the store until major changes are made. It seems like this is the only way they are going to listen.

Vermonters, both employees and customers of retail establishments, should be treated with respect. Marshall's doesn't seem to believe in this.

Dean Pratt  
Burlington, VT



## U. S. Economy.....A House of Cards

# No Safe Zone in Barre Schools

The Barre City School Board says it needs "to just study" whether a school teacher may display a "SafeZone" card in the window of her classroom door. And until it is done "studying," the card may not be replaced.

Rachael Erickson, a middle school art teacher, is fighting for the right to put the card back on her door after it was removed by community member David Ayers, possibly following a public meeting he attended at the school. The card indicates to students having questions or problems dealing with their sexual identity that Erickson is a "safe" person to talk to and that Erickson's classroom is a place where harassment will not be tolerated.

Ayers objected to the card,

according to news reports and to Erickson, because it shows a pink triangle (new ones show a rainbow) and is associated with Outright Vermont, an organization that supports diversity and harassment-free schools. Ayers admitted stealing the card and suggested that he was entitled to do so as a taxpaying member of the community.

Accompanied by Steve Cable, founder of the now defunct anti-civil union organization "Who Would've Thought" and currently CEO of the Rutland-based "Center for American Cultural Renewal," Ayers appeared at the school board meeting to object to Erickson's request to replace the card.

Cable warned the board that displaying the card "legally con-

nects the school to Outright Vermont and what they teach," according to a report in the Barre-Montpelier *Times Argus*.

Erickson, in her second year of full time teaching, cited daily harassment she hears in the hallways. "The most frequent harassment is sexual," she said in an interview, "and most of the sexual harassment is anti-gay - calling someone a fag, saying of something negative 'that's so gay.'"

She originally looked for the card at the Youth Services Bureau, which redirected her to Outright Vermont's offices. "All it says is 'Safe Zone' with the Outright Vermont website and phone number in very small letters," Erickson said.

The card with which she

had planned to replace it is "a generic 'Safe Space' sign from UVM," Erickson explained. "I can't believe the school board is saying I can't put up a sign saying my classroom is safe space."

Erickson is considering filing a formal harassment charge against David Ayers for stealing the card. "When I called the big organizations - GLAAD, HRC, Lambda Legal - they all said, 'Call us back when you're fired.'" GLAAD is the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation. HRC is the Human Rights Campaign. She said GLESN (the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network) had been helpful.

The Human Rights Commission of Vermont, a govern-

ment agency, was not encouraging and not much help, she said, but would consider her complaint if a specific student was involved.

Erickson is a nationally juried artist who has worked on public murals in several inner cities. She said she teaches four age groups in the K-8 school, fifth graders through eighth graders. She was discouraged from explaining the situation to any of her students, she said, although she has answered questions from older students who ask.

Currently, Erickson has placed a large sign on her door quoting Vermont law on harassment in schools as a replacement for the "Safe Zone" card that was stolen by Ayers and "Safe Space" card she tried to post in its stead.

"This is about civil rights," Erickson declared, "not sex or morality. 'Kids need to be safe, regardless of who they are.'" ▼