

Summit V Sets Sights on Racism

By CHRISTOPHER KAUFMAN

On Saturday, September 6th, queer community organizers from across Vermont and as far away as Boston gathered in Burlington's Old North End for the fifth in a series of Queer Community Summits organized by R.U.1.2? Community Center.

The Summit focused attention on the intersections of homophobia and racism in Vermont. The Old North End was chosen as the location for this Summit due to its status as the most racially and ethnically diverse neighborhood in Vermont. Ted Looby of the Samara Foundation agreed to host the Summit in the Rose Street Artist's Cooperative, a public gallery space that also offers affordable living space for Burlington artists. Looby, a musician in addition to his work at the Samara Foundation, is one of the residents.

Twenty different organizations were represented at the Rose Street Summit, including two organizations that had never before attended. The Mental Health Education Initiative, a self-advocacy organization for people struggling with stigma and discrimination based on mental illness, sent representatives to work in alliance with other anti-discrimination groups. Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders also attended for the first time. They are a Boston-based organization that served as co-counsel in *Baker v. State*, the historic Vermont Supreme Court decision that resulted in the creation of civil unions. GLAD is working hard on the case of a Northeast Kingdom transgendered person hounded from his job after an anonymous phone call disclosed his transgender identity to supervisors.

The Queer Summits begin with report-backs from the attending groups on their activities in months since the last Summit. Some of the highlights since the May gathering in Vermont's State

House include the successful collaboration of the Vermont Anti-Racism Action Team and many queer groups to produce the first Juneteenth/Stonewall Celebration commemorating two pivotal moments in the struggle for civil rights.

Also, Kate Jerman of Outright Vermont recently returned from a month-long fellowship on HIV/AIDS prevention at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia. Equality Vermont

the person of Peter Jacobsen. Jacobsen is the new Director of Prevention at the AIDS service organization and also serves as the Chair of the Board of Directors for SafeSpace. Finally, UVM is welcoming Eli Clare as the second staff person in LGBTQA Services. Clare, a nationally known writer on issues of gender, class and disability, is working with Dot Brauer to create a safe and welcoming atmosphere on the Burlington campus.

The Queer Summit also

are without doubt positive for the community, but also point to the need for more voices at the table.

The afternoon session on anti-racist organizing demonstrated the on-going push for greater collaboration to increase our effectiveness in working for civil rights for all people. Khristian Kemp-DeLisser, now an R.U.1.2? board member, and I facilitated the anti-racism discussion.

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received a grant from the Verizon Foundation to update its website and include references to all statutes involving gender identity and sexual orientation.

Many groups at the Summit noted personnel changes. Mountain Pride Media is saying good-bye to Operations Manager Tania Kupczak and welcoming on board Michel Dubois. Brian Cina, an important organizer of Vermont's annual PRIDE Festival announced that 2003 was his last year on the committee. Brian is attending the graduate program in Social Work at UVM.

The Barony of All Vermont produced a very successful "Adornment" event in August honoring the work of out-going Baron Kristoff Rowley and welcoming incoming Baroness Linda "Ariel" Holden. The new Baroness is the first straight woman to hold a monarch's title in the international Imperial Court System.

The Summit also welcomed back Vermont CARES in

encourages organizations to report on their struggles or challenges.

Brian Cina of PRIDE Vermont noted that, although the organization closed the books on the 2003 festival in the black, there is a dire need for more active volunteers to ensure that the festival will continue in the future. The PRIDE committee will be holding a community meeting this fall to encourage greater community investment in Vermont's biggest queer event. Others also noted the need for more strong volunteers or participants, including the Green Mountain Freedom Band and Christ Church Presbyterian, a GLBT activist congregation based in Burlington.

With over 20 organizations in the room, the connections and collaborations between organizations were easy to spot, with virtually every activist in the room involved in more than one organization or engaged in active coalition-building. The strong relationships forged at the Queer Summit

is "prejudice plus power based on skin color," and saw that alliances between groups working on homophobia and racism strengthen both causes and that social change cannot happen in a vacuum. Some participants also commented on the importance of recognizing the cultural and strategic differences between the anti-racism movement and the queer movement, especially noting the privilege that many white queer people benefit from at the expense of queer people of color.

Kara DeLeonardis, Executive Director of SafeSpace, noted "as queer organizations working for social change, it's important that we acknowledge the connections between oppressions. Specifically, SafeSpace is very concerned about the recent string of murders of transgender people of color across the country."

The second half of the anti-racism discussion focused on ways to address "white supremacy culture" in our organizations.

Using as a catalyst an article from *Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change* by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun, participants strategized on ways to reduce or eliminate disparate power dynamics in their own organizations through examining our organizational tendencies towards perfectionism, isolationism, defensiveness and fear of open conflict.

The day closed with a final presentation by State Representative Bill Lippert on the need to "heal Vermont." Lippert was referring to the on-going struggle to create and maintain a gblt-affirming majority in the Legislature and state government. He encouraged queer organizers to take a step back and consider all the issues that might be important to the queer community and to recognize the sacrifice that members of the legislature made in order to get Civil Unions passed.

Lippert noted that until the political coalition that supported Civil Unions, including environmentalists, women's rights advocates, health care advocates and labor/livable wage activists are returned to power in the State House, gblt activists are not done with their work.

"We need to have our community get involved in the political process because we owe it to our allies," Lippert said. "They took a big hit," he continued, "we need to continue the struggle on behalf of the larger coalition. We are not done."

The next Queer Summit will take place at the start of the Legislative Session in January 2004. Anyone wanting more information or wishing to join in the organizing is encouraged to contact R.U.1.2? at 802.860.7812 or thecenter@ru12.org. ▼

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