

# Outright Changes Leadership

## Co-Exec. Directors Succeed Rogers

**B**.J. Rogers, the executive director of Outright Vermont for the past three years, is moving on – although he says he doesn't know what's next. The two women who will succeed him are the youngest directors the organization has ever had – both are under 25.

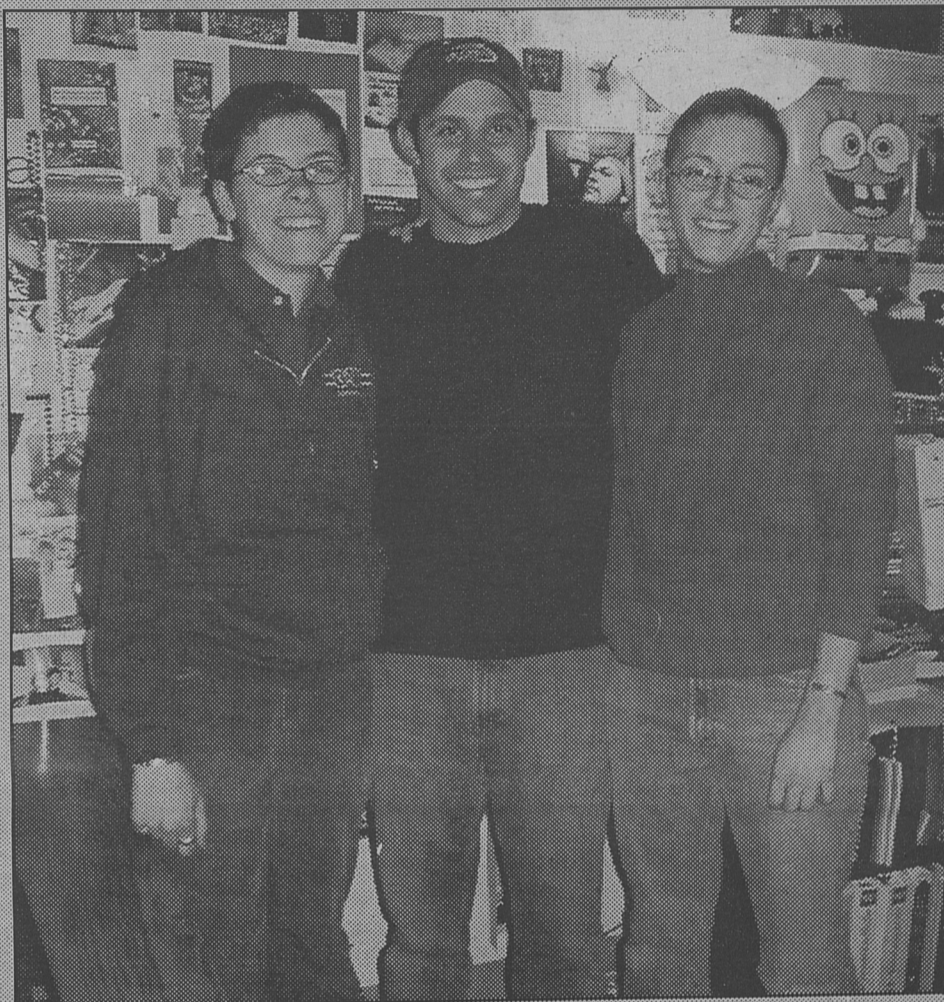
Llivia Mulvaney-Stanak and Kate Jerman have been paid staff members at Outright only since August. "The best thing I've done is hiring the current staff," Rogers said in praise of the new directors.

"I have no idea what's next," he said, "except that I'm running to France for a couple of weeks. After that..." Rogers explained that the time was just "right for me and for the organization. At the start I let the board know I viewed this as a project and not a career, and that I would be here for three to five years. Six months later, I amended that to two to three years."

Mulvaney-Stanak said that the vision for the organization wouldn't change much. "It's a process, an evolving discussion always based on collaborating with youth and with the board. We plan to keep it simple at the beginning."

Kate Jerman said the organization had already done "a lot" and that the numbers of youth involved are up. They plan to get more youth members on the board of directors and hope to work a similar change in the boards of other lgbt organizations, as one way to encourage lgbtq youth to take on leadership roles.

Both women are college graduates, Mulvaney-Stanak from Castleton State, and Jerman from NYU, after two years at UVM. Neither woman imagined even as recently as last July that she would become co-director of the lgbtq youth agency. Jerman was one of the youth finding support at Outright when she



**New leadership and old: (l to r) Llivia Mulvaney-Stanak, B.J. Rogers, and Kate Jerman**

was in high school.

One of the difficult things about staffing a youth agency, Jerman and Mulvaney-Stanak agreed, is the high rate of

turn over – also, they said, a measure of their success. Youth are often in trisis when they first discover Outright, and supporting them while they work through that creates a bond.

When the youth are no longer in crisis, when they've come to a sense of security about their sexual and/or gender identity, they no longer need Outright's services.

The best experiences Jerman has had involve "seeing somebody that you have to meet outside in the parking lot – they're calling from their cell phone because they can't make themselves come in the door. And then later on, you see their name in the [visitor] book and you know they've been here. Mulvaney-Stanak's best experiences have been watching "youth go from crisis mode – where they may even be considering self-harm – to speaking on youth panels and not even needing our services."

Rogers said he felt his mission was to restore financial stability and to build and rebuild relationships that had been affected by past leadership. In addition, he wanted to move the organization "in a truly youth-centric direction."

"We've made noticeable progress – our external collaborations have increased, we have better funding, and youth are involved at every level from the board to volunteers and programming," Rogers said. There are now two youth members on the eight-member board.

"I'm proudest of Outright's absolute commitment to our mission: to provide a safe space for queer youth and educate the public about why discrimination is a problem. I have tremendous pride in the youth here for standing up to the world when it has been downright hostile to them," Rogers continued.

"I've watched other community leaders compromise, but not youth. Outright is strong, healthy, and an integral part of our community. I hope the community embraces the new leadership." ▼

# After Mass: Will VT Go For Gay Marriage?

**O**ne question has recurred in public and private discussions of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruling overturning the commonwealth's ban on same-gender marriage: Will activists in Vermont now seek legislative action to secure full equality in marriage?

"There's no question that the ultimate goal remains genuine equality, that is, marriage," said Beth Robinson, one of the attorneys in the historic *Baker v. State* lawsuit, which culminated in Vermont's civil unions law. "The passage of the civil union

law doesn't change that, and we've never stopped pushing for marriage."

Sherry Corbin, of the Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force, is somewhat less affirmative. "I can't really say we're going to push for legislative action this year," Corbin said in a phone interview. "I don't think we're ready."

"The question is really one of timing and tactics," added Robinson in an email. "We spent years doing political and educational work in chapter one of this saga (culminating in the civil union law), and in my judgment our focus at this time

needs to be on the political and educational work to lay the groundwork in the next chapter."

The Task Force acknowledges there remain some things to be fixed, Corbin said. "The Vermont law doesn't do anything for us on a federal level, and some of us hoped it would. Marriages are taken for granted, and civil unions are not treated the same, still, in many places." Corbin cited bringing non-citizen partners into the country as one example of a federal law unaffected by civil union.

"Dammit, we went through

all this hell, and we won't get to be the first state with a [gay] marriage law. I feel both elation [for Massachusetts] and frustration, especially as a born Vermonter – I wanted us to be first," Corbin added. There will likely be no move in the 2004 legislature to change Vermont's marriage law, she said.

At the same time, Corbin cautioned that conservative groups may use reaction to the Massachusetts ruling to push for more restrictive language in the marriage statutes.

Vermont is one of only 14

states plus the District of Columbia that has not passed a so-called mini-DOMA, or state law mirroring the federal Defense of Marriage Act. That law allows (but does not require) states to refuse to comply with the full faith and credit clause of the U. S. Constitution with respect to recognizing same-sex marriages performed in other states. It also denies recognition of gay marriages or similar arrangements by the federal government by defining "marriage" and "spouse" as applying solely to partners of the opposite sex. ▼