

P.R.I.D.E. Denies Disarray

BY EUAN BEAR

If you believed the rumors – that the entire P.R.I.D.E. in Vermont Committee had resigned, that there wouldn't be a Pride celebration after all – and put them together with an apparent lack of publicity through expected outlets, you might think that assimilation via civil union, or dissension, or plain old apathy was about to end LGBTQ Pride in Vermont.

And you'd be wrong. Or so says Michael Glidden of Middlebury, one of the co-chairs of the Vermont Pride Committee. "The committee has been consistent," he maintained. "We began with 10 people, and a few people either moved out of state or had job changes, so we are down to about seven." He noted that all of the Pride planning committee members except Mary Abar, the treasurer, were new as of last fall. It took this new committee a bit longer to get up and running, he said.

That planning delay was in large part responsible for the change in date for the Pride Parade and Festival from the traditional June weekend to July 10. "As a new committee, we just needed the additional time," said Glidden. Another reason he cited was that the traditional dates conflicted with Father's Day, not to mention the New York and Boston Pride celebrations. Boston was expected to be huge this year due to the celebration of equal marriage rights conferred by the Massachusetts Constitution and affirmed by the commonwealth's Supreme Judicial Court. New York celebrated the 35th anniversary of the Stonewall Rebellion. Finally, the organizers hope for less unsettled weather this month than is typical in June.

Glidden, involved in Pride organizing for the first time, said he had no complaints about his dealings with the Burlington Parks Department or the city police, in contrast to last year's committee. He got involved, he said, because "I want-

ed to have a Pride Day. It will happen. We'll have a wonderful Pride weekend." Glidden, a small business owner, has been active in the community most recently through the steering committee of Vermont Gay Social Alternatives (VGSA).

The biggest challenge for P.R.I.D.E. in Vermont hasn't changed much over the years: getting volunteers, both on Friday for the set-up phase, and on Saturday to provide security at intersections along the parade route. A new challenge is getting people and organizations to register and pay a fee (ranging from zero to \$100 per float or organization, depending on size and type) for spots in the parade. "We're just getting a record of who's there to help in next year's planning and creating a mailing list and a database," Glidden explained.

Another new and "large" challenge has been getting the LGBT communities to check the P.R.I.D.E. in Vermont website (www.PrideVermont.org) for information rather than relying on other sources. "It's been a large learning curve," said Glidden, "for us and for the community."

Other changes include the parade starting at 11:30, not noon, and the speak-out occurring at Waterfront Park after the march instead of being a rallying point

prior to the parade. The parade route has also changed – detouring around City Hall Park to avoid the construction zone in front of City Hall, according to Glidden.

At press time, negotiations with potential MCs and a "Grand Marshal" were still underway, and Glidden declined comment when names were mentioned. Among the possibilities included in Pride Committee minutes on the website are (NH Episcopal Bishop) Gene Robinson, (singer) Melissa Etheridge, (former talk-show host) Rosie O'Donnell, and (comedian and talk-show host) Ellen DeGeneres.

And in case you were wondering, that's P.R.I.D.E. in Vermont, and it stands for "People of the Rainbow Integrating Diversity Everywhere" in Vermont.

Asked whether LGBT Pride events were an endangered species – due to assimilation, civil union, or even apathy – Glidden was adamant: "No! No! Just as Irish-Americans celebrate their heritage, and some Christians celebrate their culture with Mardi Gras coming from Fat Tuesday in the Lenten tradition, we will celebrate. It might be a celebration rather than a political statement or a push for political change. [But] all it takes is one event to change things. Pride didn't exist before Stonewall, and that was one event." ▼

Unity Project Releases Needs Assessment Data

More than a year ago, the Unity Project asked members of the LGBT community in Vermont to answer a questionnaire on what the community needed most. The results have been compiled since last October, but had not been released before now, said Samara Foundation Executive Director Bill Lippert, because they were not yet in an easily presentable form.

Samara Foundation partnered with the Vermont Community Foundation to raise funds for the Unity Project to grant to the community. The needs assessment "informed" the priorities of the grant committee in deciding what kinds of projects would be welcomed for possible grants from the project.

The most interesting

assessment survey results came from the community issues respondents ranked as most important: civil rights (89%), protection against violence and HIV/AIDS education and prevention (77% each), access to LGBT-friendly physical and mental health care (76% each), support for LGBT youth in school (75%), and community education to decrease homophobia (75%).

At the same time, some of those items were ranked among issues that were not being adequately addressed, topmost among them community education to decrease homophobia. Responses from outside Chittenden County said that reducing isolation was not being adequately addressed, while Chittenden County respondents tended to identify greater communi-

ty cohesiveness as an inadequately addressed issue. Support for LGBT elderly (66%), teachers (67%), and youth (65%) was high on the list of issues needing more attention, followed by support for kids in LGBT families, affordable housing, and HIV/AIDS medical services (60% each).

"We intend to make these data available to community organizations and interested researchers as soon as possible," said Samara's Bill Lippert. "We just have to figure out a structure." The preliminary report was prepared by Jelica Todosejjevic, a doctoral student at the University of Vermont, and UVM faculty member Dr. Sondra Solomon.

Some people wrote additional comments: "I am a teenager in Orleans County, and from what I know of there is not much for GLBTC [sic] youth. It only makes it more difficult for myself and others."

"Gay day is not enough! We need more social gatherings open to all. One nice gay restaurant would be great. Gay day at Expos? Gay day at Shelburne Farms? Gay day at Mad River Glen? We need to bring our people together more than once a year."

"I can't emphasize enough how important it is to help GLBT adults get together for dating and

SEX. We also need equipment and access to sexual services."

"I have experienced discrimination and harassment because of age from both lesbian/gay communities and individuals."

"I think this survey is a great idea. Will the results be published anywhere?"

The results reflect the responses of 220 respondents, more than three-fourths of whom got their surveys as inserts in the September 2002 issue of *Out in the Mountains*. The demographic information reveals few surprises, with average age at 46 (ranging from 17 to 78 at the time of the survey) and almost two-thirds of the respondents identifying as women (36% were men, three percent "other"). Self-identified lesbians made up 47%, while 35% of the respondents identified as gay and 8.6% as queer.

The respondents were overwhelmingly "European-American" (87%), while 3 percent identified as African American (.5%), Asian American (.5%), Native American (.9%), or Hispanic (1.4%), and 6.8 percent as "Other."

More than half (55%) reported practicing a religion. Unitarians led the pack with 31 percent, followed by other Christians (24%), Jews (9%), Catholics (8%), other (7%), Quakers (5%), Wiccans

(4%), Protestants (3%).

Average household income was \$51,000 to \$62,000, and not surprisingly, older respondents and those in committed relationships showed higher household incomes. More than half of the respondents (56%) were in committed relationships. Those with more education and higher incomes were more likely to be "always out" to their families of origin, according to the report. Likewise, people with higher incomes were more likely to be "always out" at work.

Chittenden County residents sent in 34 percent of the responses, followed by Washington County (11%), Windsor (8%), and Addison and Windham counties (7% each).

The respondents to the survey were committed voters: about 90 percent said they were registered and had voted in the (civil union backlash) election of 2000.

More than half (54%) said they had experienced discrimination because of gender identity or sexual orientation; five percent had experienced racial or ethnic discrimination. ▼