

Gala Opening for R.U.1.2? Queer Community Center

By EUAN BEAR

Beginning with a sumptuously all-volunteer-catered donor party on Friday night, the second weekend in June proved to be a gala public debut for the newly re-located and expanded R.U.1.2? Queer Community Center. From a one-room office on Burlington's waterfront, the center moved into a century-old brick building at 34 Elmwood Avenue, just a block from downtown. The building is owned by the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, which also owns the twin building next door that formerly housed Outright and Vermont CARES. *Out in the Mountains* has an office in the new center.

It was a busy weekend. On Friday, Executive Director Christopher Kaufman awaited the arrival of out-of-town-guests, then set off to IBM for a Pride-month presentation sponsored by EAGLE at IBM, the LGBT employees' organization.

The out-of-town guests included Sheila Healy, the executive director of the National Association of LGBT Community Centers, on whose board Kaufman sits. There are 139 such centers in the United States, and, Healy said, Burlington is the smallest city in the United States to have one.

The other essential out-of-towner was Michael Fleming, executive director of the David Bohnett Foundation, which funded the pseudonymous cyber center at R.U.1.2? to the tune of nearly \$30,000. The David Bohnett Cyber Center holds eight IBM computers, all with Internet and World Wide Web access. According to Kaufman, it is the second largest public-access computer center in Vermont.

Lawmakers David Zuckerman, a Progressive, and Bill Lippert, a Democrat, joked at the Friday night donor party that there are a mere dozen computers for all 180 legislators in



Is Sheila Healy (left) picking Howard Dean's shirt pocket? R.U.1.2?'s Board Chair Cathy Resmer (right) and Christopher Kaufman (right rear), along with Bohnett Foundation Director Michael Fleming look on.

Montpelier's State House.

R.U.1.2.'s is the 19th cyber center funded by the Bohnett Foundation, Fleming announced at the donor party, with the 20th (in Kansas City) following the next week. "I have the easiest job," he said. "I get to sign the checks and go to great places like Burlington to see such a vibrant community center. We've done our part in opening our checkbook to set up the center, now I hope all of you will do likewise."

Board Chairwoman Cathy Resmer thanked staff and volunteers for working so hard to make the center a warm and welcoming space, something the co-founders hardly dared to envision 5 years ago. Stalwart R.U.1.2? volunteer Moretti donated the catering, a feast that included salmon, ham, grilled chicken

skewers, two flavors of baked brie, stuffed cherry tomatoes, fruit, baked savories and much more. Ted Looby played guitar and Winnie Looby sang over the buzz of voices, while 135 Pearl, in the persons of Craig Mitchell and Robert Thompson, donated the buzz-giving beverages and presided over the bar.

The following day's picnic and open house drew a crowd laden with potluck offerings, local musicians bringing instruments, and politicians seeking signatures on nominating petitions. Jason Lorber (House), Jeb Spaulding (incumbent Treasurer) – and by report, Ed Flanagan (Senate) – showed up in person, while Wes Richie represented Jan Backus (Lt. Governor). The political highlight of the day was the appearance of former governor and former presiden-

tial candidate Howard Dean with a small entourage in his first appearance at a public gay event in Vermont. Someone shouted, "Welcome home!" To warm laughter, Dean replied, "I would've preferred to wait another eight years ..."

Dean thanked the crowd and acknowledged that much of the start-up money for his campaign came from the checking accounts of gay men and lesbians. He referred more than once during his visit to the fact that he had been considered a wild-eyed radical for signing the civil union bill, and now, because of events in San Francisco, New Paltz, and Massachusetts, his position is the conservative one.

The center, Dean said, was a wonderful thing for young people especially, who are making it easier for themselves and easier for each other. He made his usual LGBT pitch: that the strongest thing anyone can do to help themselves is to be themselves, to come out and to stand up for who you are. "No decent person can look you in the eye and say – well – crackpots like Fred Phelps can – but decent people can't look you in the face and say 'You don't deserve the same rights I have.' They can't do it.

"America," he concluded, "is stronger when everyone is included with equal rights for all."

OITM Editor Euan Bear presented the former governor and candidate with the November 2003 issue of the newspaper, featuring "Gays for Dean" on the cover, and an editorial calling for Dr. Dean to come home and acknowledge on whose shoulders he stood.

As he was leaving, Dean was asked by Resmer if he would consider an invitation to be the keynote speaker at the 2005 R.U.1.2? fundraising dinner. "It depends on who wins in November," Dean replied, clearly anticipating a spot in a Democratic administration and a need to be in Washington next April. ▼