

Lesbian Keeps Eagle Soaring

Winooski Newspaper Rescued By Local Freelance Writer

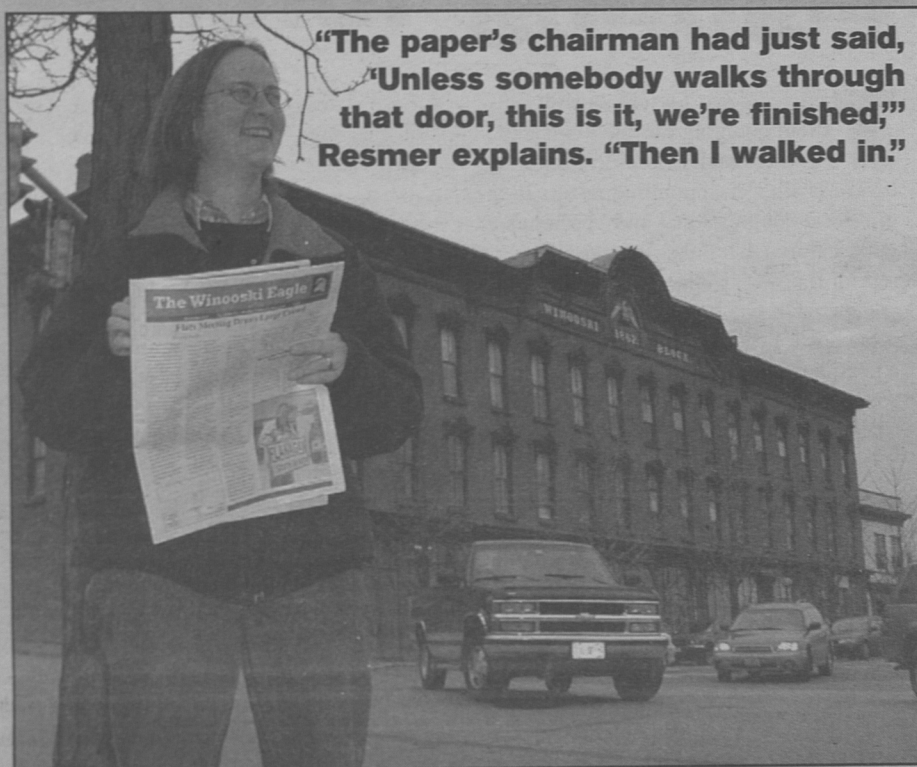
Cathy Resmer, a freelance writer and an occasional contributor to *OITM*, has become the editor and publisher of the *Winooski Eagle*. The *Eagle* is a 16-page community paper, published monthly and delivered free to every household in the city.

Resmer follows Rebecca Padula as editor, whom she credited with keeping the paper alive. The writer and former 'zine publisher said she hopes to enlist *Seven Days* publisher and editor Pamela Polston as an investor.

The *Winooski Eagle* was originated in 1981 by Guy Page, published for a couple of years, then was revived in 1993 by Jodi Harrington (also a lesbian) after a "decade-long hiatus." Former Progressive Representative Steve Hingtgen led a group of volunteers who bought the paper in 2002 and made it a nonprofit "community paper." Resmer plans to run the paper as a for-profit business.

Two considerations motivated her to take on the project: her mission "to bridge the partisan divide in this country and promote a culture of civility based on mutual respect and affection"; and a statistic that "90 percent of all media content in the world is controlled by six corporations."

She has read the paper since she and her partner Ann-Elise Johnson moved to Winooski in January of 2003. But she didn't become involved until September, when she found herself free on the night of the *Eagle's*



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monthly community meeting. "Dick Galperin [the paper's chairman] had just said, 'Unless somebody walks through that door, this is it, we're finished,'" Resmer explained in an interview. "Then I walked in."

Resmer left the meeting thinking that she could write an article for the final

issue. "But then I thought, 'I don't want this paper to die.' Ninety percent of life is showing up. So I showed up, and now [I want to say] 'Okay Winooski, let's start showing up—not just at meetings, but as a voice.'"

The *Eagle* "is independently owned and operated. It's the only paper reporting on

Winooski issues," Resmer declared, including "the biggest downtown redevelopment project in the state; the fact that we're one of the most diverse towns in the state per capita. We have students speaking 22 different languages in our schools" among a total student population of about 900. "We have one of the highest ratios per capita of residents under the supervision of the Department of Corrections. Our crime rates are very high," she concluded.

Asked whether an influx of gays, lesbians, artists, and others who can't afford to live in Burlington might be a step toward gentrification, Resmer said maybe. "We bought our home through the Community Land Trust," she said, including herself in the tide rolling down Colchester Avenue and across the bridge. "Winooski used to be old French-Canadian families, millworkers. They don't live here any more. There used to be 20 kids on my block. Now there are three. More than 60 percent of the housing stock is rental. If you want to call it gentrification, you can. But longtime residents agree there are serious problems."

Resmer said in response to a question that she might consider including a gay column—as long as it was directed to the wider community. She plans to continue publishing the "Faith Matters" column, penned by a rotating roster of spiritual advisors. She will, she said, be "very careful" about homophobic content in the column. ▼

Safe Harbors Leads to Safe Schools?

By LYNN McNICOL

Kate Jerman, co-director of Outright Vermont, is happy that the state Department of Education is addressing the harassment and bullying that plague public school students, especially those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer. Jerman said a meeting with state Education Department officials in October to address these issues went "very, very well."

"They're working with us again—I'm excited about that," Jerman said, referring to the state's apparent abandonment of the Safe Harbors Project until recently. "I'm glad queer issues are being included," she added.

Following a meeting with the group in late October, Education Commissioner Richard Cate named Kate Cassi-O'Neill, DOE coordinator for HIV prevention programs, to work with Safe Harbors. Before the withdrawal of state interest, Safe Harbors was working on a "toolkit" on how to deal with harassment and bullying issues in the schools. But that work had come to a stop last year, Jerman said. Now, there are plans to have the project finished within months. Jerman was pleased with the commissioner's choice of Cassi-O'Neill. "I think she will be a great asset for Safe Harbors," Jerman said.

It remains unclear, however, exactly what role Cassi-O'Neill will play. Jerman was of the opinion that Cassi-O'Neill was appointed as a

member of Safe Harbors, but Cassi-O'Neill said she will be the liaison between Safe Schools and Safe Harbors.

The Department of Education's Safe Schools Team was set up to oversee projects concerning harassment and bullying and other safety issues such as presence of weapons on school property. It also includes the "BEST" or Building Effective Strategies for Teaching Students with Behavioral Challenges Project, HIV prevention education projects, and sexual abuse prevention. Safe Harbors works specifically on issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity in schools, Jerman said.

At any rate, Cassi-O'Neill said she plans to work hard to "build a bridge" between the two groups and to

establish a strong link to the GLBTQ community. She previously worked as a school health coordinator with the American Cancer Society.

Cate, who has been education commissioner for just a year, and following several commissioners who served about as long, said Safe Harbors' completed document will be distributed to all of Vermont's school districts once completed. Regarding the issue of having the HIV coordinator also working on harassment issues when there isn't necessarily a connection between the two, Cate said, "In this outfit, everybody's got about six different jobs," adding "I think that's just fine" that Cassi-O'Neill will play both roles.

Gay rights advocates have been concerned that the anti-harass-

ment and anti-bullying laws, both passed earlier this year, don't have the "teeth" needed to stop students from abusing other students. And they're concerned that there is no mandate to require training of staff or strong enough consequences for school districts that fail to implement the laws.

"We try to stay away from mandates," Cate said. "They don't work." He said it's "dangerous" to say there's one way to handle these problems, and that school districts need to be able to draw up their own plans. "Burlington is going to do this much differently than they are in [the Northeast Kingdom town of] Norton," he said. ▼

Lynn McNicol is a freelance writer who lives in Burlington.