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BY SUSAN McMILLAN

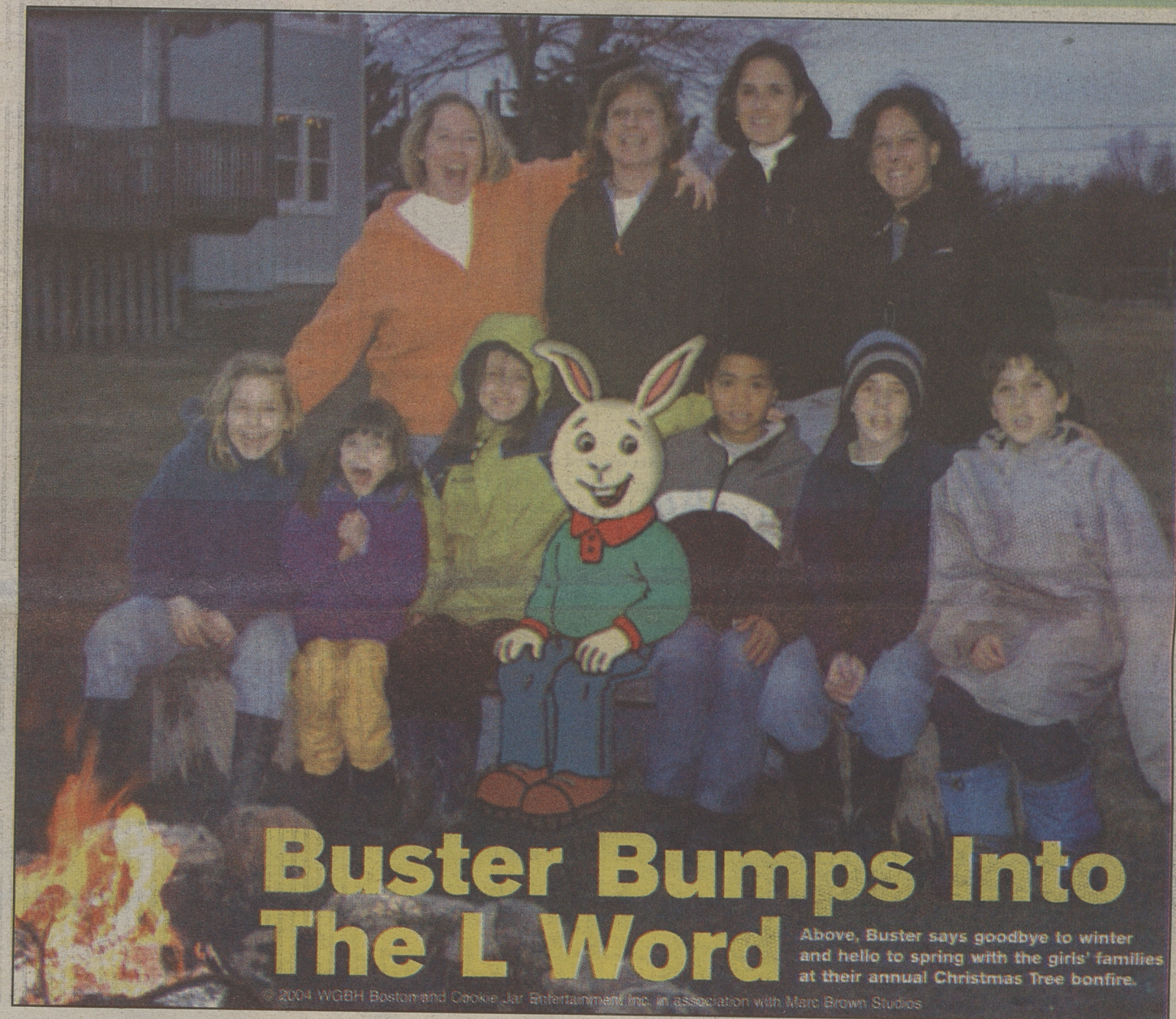
You've probably read about Buster Baxter, PBS's animated afternoon bunny. The little fellow was busted by the feds in late January. The new Department of Education Secretary, Margaret Spellings, took issue with Buster's visit to Vermont. During the episode "Sugartime!," Buster hangs out with the children of lesbians while he's learning about sugaring and dairy farming.

If you missed the firestorm flaring about this harmless hare, *Postcards From Buster* is an afternoon children's program, nestled in between *Arthur*, an eight-year-old aardvark, and *Zoom*, an interactive show challenging kids to turn off the tv and do stuff. Buster travels with his airline-pilot father whose job is to fly a rock band all over the continent on a concert tour. He stays in touch with friends through video postcards from all the cool places he visits. Except for the animated rabbit, the show is live footage of Buster's travels.

Upon hearing that the PBS bunny interacts with lesbians during his visit to Vermont, Secretary Spellings announced, "Many parents would not want their young children exposed to the lifestyles portrayed in the episode." In a letter to PBS, Spellings denounced the spending of public money on a show with lesbians, and asked that the tax dollars spent on the episode be returned to the government. Spellings raised the issue of the Senate's control over the appropriations for the literacy grant which partially funds Buster. PBS subsequently cancelled distribution of the episode to its 349 stations. Pat Mitchell, President of PBS, has since announced that she will resign when her contract expires in 2006; a PBS vice president claimed the decision is not related to Buster.

WGBH-Boston, producer of the *Postcards* series, quickly made the episode available to all public television stations. In a press release, WGBH regretted that PBS would not air the show and added, "We consider it the responsibility of public television to give children and parents the resources they need to understand the world they inhabit — without excluding any segment of our society." To date, 46 stations plan to air the episode.

Where does that leave the two Vermont families who opened their homes and



Buster Bumps Into The L Word

Above, Buster says goodbye to winter and hello to spring with the girls' families at their annual Christmas Tree bonfire.

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hearts to Buster's camera? The initial pride at their part in this little corner of public television turned to anger and disbelief for the Pike-Pieper and Harris-D'Ambrosia families. The episode has blossomed into an opportunity to teach a once-in-a-lifetime lesson, and the families have chosen to turn away from the hatred demonstrated in Spellings's words.

Karen Pike, her partner Gillian Pieper, and their kids Emma (11), James (11),

and David (10), live and make maple sugar in Hinesburg. Life-long PBS fans, the family was really excited to be in the show because Buster represents much of what Pike believes. This bunny's grand purpose, according to PBSkids.org, is to encourage 6-8 year olds "to sample the colorful details that make other cultures so distinctive." Pike and Gillian want their kids to appreciate the world in all its variety and to not be afraid of something

because it's *different*. The kids — including Lilly, the daughter of dairy farmers Tracy Harris and Gina D'Ambrosia — had a blast sharing their lives and families, working nearly 40 hours in three intense days of filming.

And then they were verbally attacked by a representative of their own government as Spellings rebuked the show. Pike reflects that, in our lives, we "get only a **cont'd on p. 28**

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