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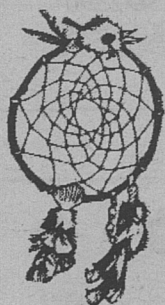
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OUT in the MOUNTAINS

Welcome to the Prom?

Some Concerns But No Expectation of Trouble, says Champlain Valley GSA

BY JENN BAUDREAU

When Meg Howard was in high school, she and her best female friend tried to go to prom together. Her friend was going to wear a tuxedo, and Howard was going to wear a dress. Unfortunately, the two young women never got that far. Their tickets were torn up by the administration and they were told the school "would have none of that."

Today Howard is the advisor of the Gay/Straight Alliance at Champlain Valley Union High School. Prom season is approaching, but a lot has changed in most Vermont schools since she was a student.

"My sense is anyone who wants to attend prom is welcome to," Howard said. She believes that most GSA students feel comfortable taking a same-sex partner to the prom and described CVU as an "amazing school" in that regard.

Students at CVU echoed her sentiment (none of the students willing to be quoted for this article wanted their last names used). A junior named Morgan, who identifies herself as bisexual, is not only planning on attending prom, but is part of the prom committee as well.

"Students at our school are very open to same-sex couples and don't seem to have a

problem. When I was dating my ex-girlfriend, no one had a problem with us being together. And I've seen girls go to proms/winter balls together and no one really cares," Morgan said.

CVU isn't the only school in the area with prom plans that are open to GSA students. Other area high schools seem to be of a similar mindset.

Karen McGurl, the advisor of Rutland High School's GSA, said that although she hasn't heard anything yet, she suspects a few same-sex couples plan to go to prom together. She mentioned that this is usually the case and in the past there hasn't been much response to it at all; it is very much accepted.

Jean Berthiaume, who advises Harwood Union High School's GSA, agreed that he isn't particularly concerned about the approach of prom.

"The culture here is pretty open and tolerant to GLBTQ students...it's positive, accepting, and open to all couples who want to go together," he said.

The advisor of Burlington High School's GSA, Anya Schwartz, said the same was true for BHS.

In addition to all the positive outlooks toward prom, however, there were several concerns voiced as well.

One student member of

Burlington High School's GSA who wished to remain anonymous had a more hesitant view. "I believe that there will be mixed responses to same sex partners. Some will be fine with it and others will probably have a problem with it. Hopefully those who have a problem with the idea will not voice it, at least not in an insulting way."

A sophomore at BHS named Casey said he was invited to go to prom with a girl, however, he will be wearing the dress and she will be in a tuxedo. He acknowledged the mixed responses queer couples are likely to get.

"A nice handful [of people] would have no problems, but also a handful of people would have a lot of problems. We have a generally diverse school with mixed opinions... A lot of people are accepting, and if they are not they wouldn't do anything besides spite and/or shun the couples."

Meg Howard of CVU also identified some areas that still need improvement. She mentioned that in general young women seem to be much more comfortable than young men when it comes to taking their partners to events such as prom. "Young men get a very different response than girls do," Howard said. "It's something we talk a lot about."

Howard also mentioned that many GLBTQ students prefer to attend Outright sponsored events such as the drag ball and youth pride. Several students echoed this sentiment as well.

As the school year moves toward its end and prom time draws nearer, it seems that all students – regardless of sexual orientation – have a lot to look forward to. ▼

Jenn Baudreau is a 2003 graduate of Wesleyan and a recent arrival in Vermont. She lives in Williston.