

SMC Equality: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back

BY EUAN BEAR

William Docker graduated from Saint Michael's College in 1975, married a woman, and divorced three years later. On September 11, 2004, he married again: this time with his partner of 10 years, Tom Stearns. It is a legal marriage in Massachusetts, where the couple lives.

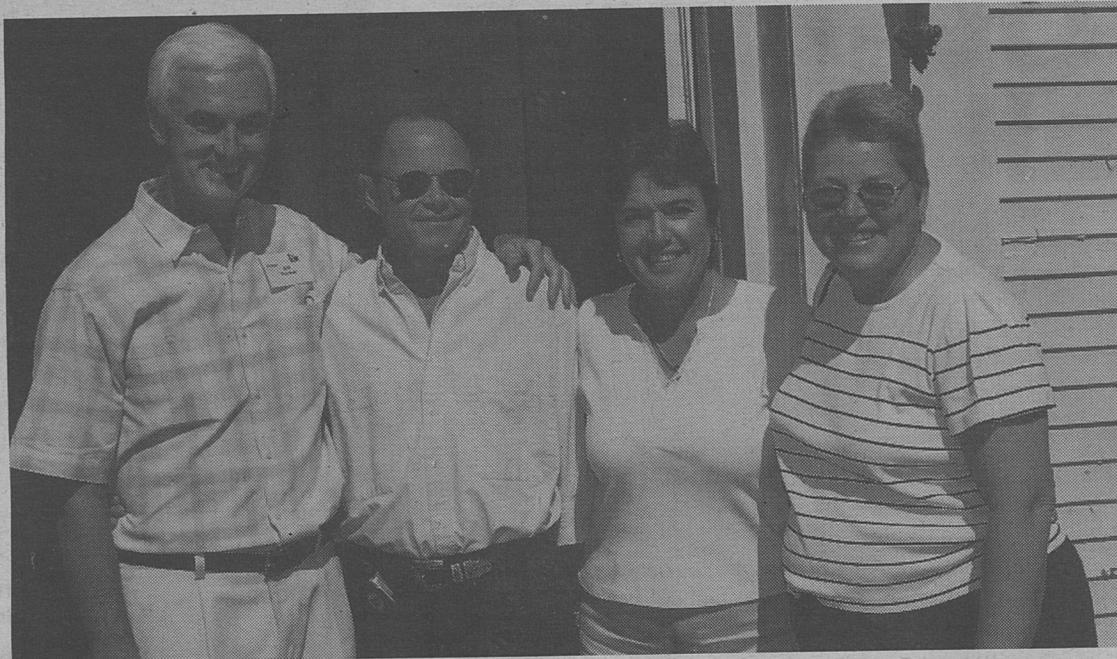
If you go to the St. Michael's College web page and click on Alumni, Parents and Friends, then on publications, you'll get to *St. Michael's Magazine* online. The alumni magazine is in its 5th year of quarterly publication, full of just what you'd expect: a feature or two, college news, and page after page of "Class Notes," interspersed with a few pages of wedding photos and marriage and birth/adoption notices. (As of mid-May, the most recent issue online was "Autumn, 2004, Vol. 4, No. 4.")

So, naturally, Docker, who has been a regular donor to his alma mater, called to find out the procedure for marriage announcements. "I called the editor, Caroline Crawford, and asked about the procedure, and she told me. Then I said it was for a same-sex wedding and asked if the college had a policy. She said, 'This is the first! I've been waiting for this call!' She seemed genuinely excited," Docker recalled in a phone interview.

He sent in the news to the alumni magazine along with a photo including himself, his husband, and two other St. Mike's alums who attended the wedding. "And then I waited for the next issue," Docker said.

His expectation that his wedding would make the wedding page wasn't unrealistic. After all, the college has a gay student alliance, and gay faculty and staff work there without sexual orientation-based difficulty. St. Mike's just promoted a gay faculty member to the dean's office.

But Bill Docker's wed-



The photo Bill Docker submitted to his alumni magazine. From the left: Newlyweds Bill Docker and Tom Stearns, and St. Mike's alumnae Rosemary Carroll and Paty Wallen.

ding photo wasn't run at all, and his announcement wasn't listed with the other marriages, but with the small-type "Class Notes" for 1975. "It wasn't treated the same as other marriages," Docker said. And they didn't even get the date right, printing that Docker was married on September 11, 2001.

Docker said he then called Crawford back. "Oh, I've been dreading this call," he remembers her saying. According to Docker, Crawford told him that the president of the college, Marc vander Heyden, pulled the announcement from the page proofs.

In a phone interview last month, Crawford confirmed that Docker did send a wedding announcement and a photograph. The Winter issue had been laid out "before I was made aware of the policy," she said.

"The policy was revealed to me this way: Because we are a Catholic college, our publications must reflect the mission and policies of the Catholic Church, and we could not treat his marriage the same way we treat other marriages. Marriage is a sacrament in the Catholic Church," she continued. Crawford confirmed Docker's recollection of the content of the conversation, but said she's not

sure that the decision to pull the photo and announcement was actually made by vander Heyden.

Crawford said the alumni magazine has run photos and announcements of civil unions, most notably that of Stan Baker and Peter Harrigan, and that they have run in the same section as the "gallery of wedding photos."

So, Bill Docker, a Provincetown resident and fundraising consultant, then called his other contact at the college, Richard ("Rit") diVenere, the Associate Vice President for Alumni Relations. "He said there were a lot of issues, a lot of older, conservative Catholic alumni, and it was an issue of serious donors, what wealthy donors want from the college and from the magazine," Docker recalled.

Docker was indignant enough to insist that his name be removed from all solicitation and donor call lists. "I told him I did not want to be contacted any more or contribute to a college that would not treat my marriage equally." He also confirmed that he had requested the return of the money he had already donated to the college.

When asked for a comment for this article on William Docker's situation, DiVenere

said, "We are not at liberty to discuss anything with you at the present time."

Called for a comment, Buff Lindau, executive editor of the magazine and director of public relations for St. Michael's said, "We are very respectful of individuals. We never intended to cause the upset that we have caused. We are a Catholic college and we live within our mission."

Lindau said the "editorial board" made the decision to withdraw Docker's wedding photo from the magazine. The editorial board consists of the "Institutional Advancement Office managers," she said, which does not include the editor, and suggested that the issue of how to deal with same-sex alumni marriages is the subject of "ongoing dialogue." She said she did not have the dates on which the policy was decided.

"It is important to be clear," said Publisher Anne Whitmore Hansen, "that the alumni magazine is a marketing tool, not a news journal. It is published to promote the mission of the college, to provide a liberal Catholic education."

Hansen added, "St. Mike's has done a great deal in support of individuals and toward promoting tolerance and accept-

ance." Printing a same-sex wedding photo "would put the college in direct challenge to the Catholic Church." The situation has been the occasion for "a tremendous amount of dialogue" on how to handle such issues in the future.

The publisher denied that as a marketing tool for the college, the magazine's concern was to avoid offending wealthy conservative alumni and donors.

The real issue for him, Docker said, is hypocrisy. "They're saying 'We'll let you on the bus, but we'll put you in the back seat.'"

"There's nothing I can come up with to answer that," said Crawford. "Part of the mission of St. Mike's is to uphold the values and mission of the Catholic Church. We absolutely support the worth and dignity of every person."

Docker also wrote to President vander Heyden and copied the letter to magazine editor Caroline Crawford, to Rit DiVenere, and to the Diversity Office. "No one has contacted me. Nobody has called to say 'We're right and you will always be wrong' or 'We're reviewing our policy,' or anything. Nothing."

"I know I'm not going to change the Catholic Church. But I'm concerned that they want to have it both ways: it's okay to be gay on campus, there's a gay student alliance, there are gay faculty. But [they're saying] don't expect to have a traditional life afterward, and if you manage to make one, we won't recognize it."

"If they're going to have a litmus test for 'legitimate' marriages, why aren't they asking other couples to sign affidavits? 'I have never used birth control,' 'I have never had an abortion,' for the women; 'I have never been divorced or married a second time.'" ▼