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ATTORNEYS AT LAW

#### BY EUAN BEAR

**H**anover, NH – It's been – can you believe it?! – 25 years since a small group of women began subletting the basement of the New Victoria Press building for a bar and social gathering space. And now, the group – and all its new and old members, friends, sisters and newcomers, whether “L,” “B,” or “T” – is throwing a party to celebrate.

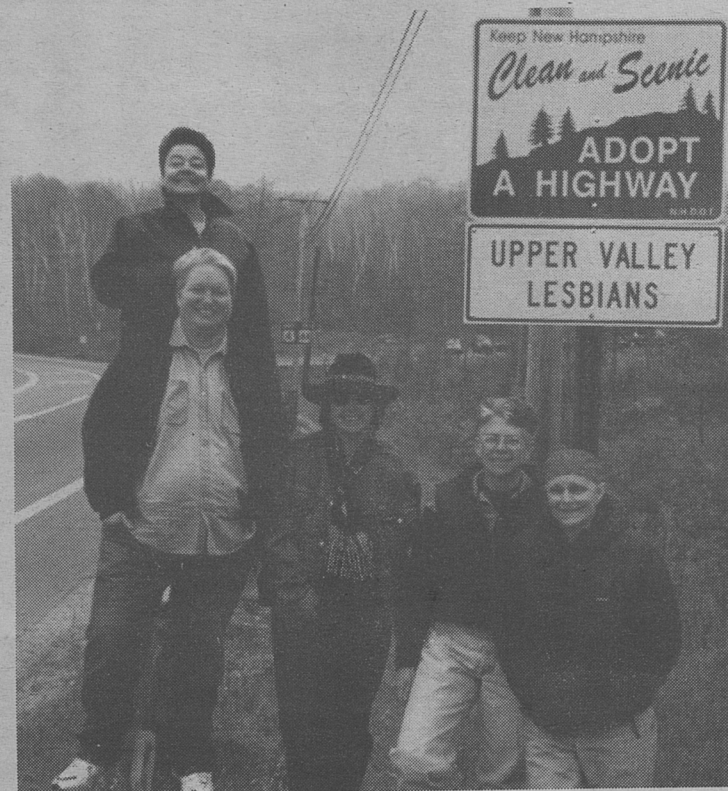
The party-dance-social is June 25 at the Dartmouth Outing Club in Hanover, beginning at 7, with an hour of “historical presentation” and recognition of various members following the first hour of mingling and noshing on hors d'oeuvres. Dancing with a DJ commences at 9 pm.

According to Mandy Vernalia, one of the group's founding mothers, in 1979 or so, she and her then-girlfriend were wishing for someplace to hang out, a gathering place or even a bar. It wasn't long thereafter when someone had the bright idea to ‘renovate’ the basement of the space where New Victoria Press ran its business and trained budding printers. The group wanted to honor Amelia Earhart, one of the founding members had an old propeller, and since it was in the basement, the space – and the group – became known as Amelia's Underground Flying Society.

“My girlfriend had connections to the [women's] softball team. I was more of a hippie-earth-mother type. It was the softball team that did a lot of the ‘renovating,’” Mandy recalls in a phone conversation from Arizona. New Victoria's Beth Dingman also remembers the “baseball buddies” and the “earth mamas” as two distinct social groups who came together under Amelia's roof. The bar existed for about two years and closed its doors a couple of years before New Victoria ceased running its own printing presses and moved out of the space.

But Amelia's continued. After the bar closed, several lesbians sat down and put together the addresses and phone numbers of over 100 of their sisters – and possible sisters – in the vicinity. That list became the mailing list for the Amelia's newsletter, which kept everyone in touch.

It is and was mostly a social group, Mandy says, “though a few people wished we were more political than we were. The most political thing we did was adopt a stretch of highway in 1997. We had to promise to clean it four times a year for two years.” So the group adopted a section of U.S. Route 4 near Enfield New Hampshire as



## Flying Underground Amelia's Gala Celebrates 25 Years

“Upper Valley Lesbians.”

They later heard from a young woman, Mandy remembers. “She said, ‘Every time we went past that sign, my family talked about sexuality and sexual orientation. For my family to do that was pretty amazing.’” The project actually had its roots in Arizona, where early member Suky Grover saw a highway ‘adoption’ project sign. “‘We’ve got to do that,’” Mandy recalls her late friend insisting.

Another lesbian couple, who joined Amelia's after moving to the Upper Valley, hosted a newcomers' potluck every month for four years, an activity Mandy characterizes as a generous act of community building. “I think community is a big deal, really it's the most important thing.”

The Unity Project agrees – and funded the gala event to celebrate this lesbian social organization's 25th year.

Amelia's was definitely a social group, says Beth Dingman. “We used to do talent shows every year. They were fun. I suppose that's a little self-aggrandizing, since I was in most of them.” A main feature was the comedy sketch. In one that Beth remembers, two women came onstage in their underwear to “strip-per” music and proceeded to put on

stereotypically “dyke” clothes – flannel shirts and overalls.

“It gave people a sense of not being isolated and alone,” Beth says. “We always had a presence, we ran an ad in the newspaper so people would know there was a group new people to the area could come to and get connected.”

But it also wasn't just for newcomers. Beth remembers one woman born and raised in White River Junction, who said at a gathering last year that Amelia's was the place where “a whole world came to her, and her life changed.”

Amelia's Underground Flying Society has certainly morphed into different forms with different members over the years, as groups will, Beth says. “It has been enduring. It is a special place to be that really has existed all this time.” ▼

For information, reservations (tix are \$15 per and include 2 drinks), and directions, see [www.barney.org/25anniv/home.html](http://www.barney.org/25anniv/home.html).

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