

## By EUAN BEAR

Lebanon, NH – In an ironic twist of funding fate, Tom Mock, director of ACoRN Community Response Network (ACoRN) of New Hampshire and Vermont, was recognized in late May for his Community Health Leadership by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and awarded \$120,000.

It was just last fall that the Vermont Department of Health declined to pass along to ACoRN any of its CDC grant monies, putting a big hole in the agency's finances.

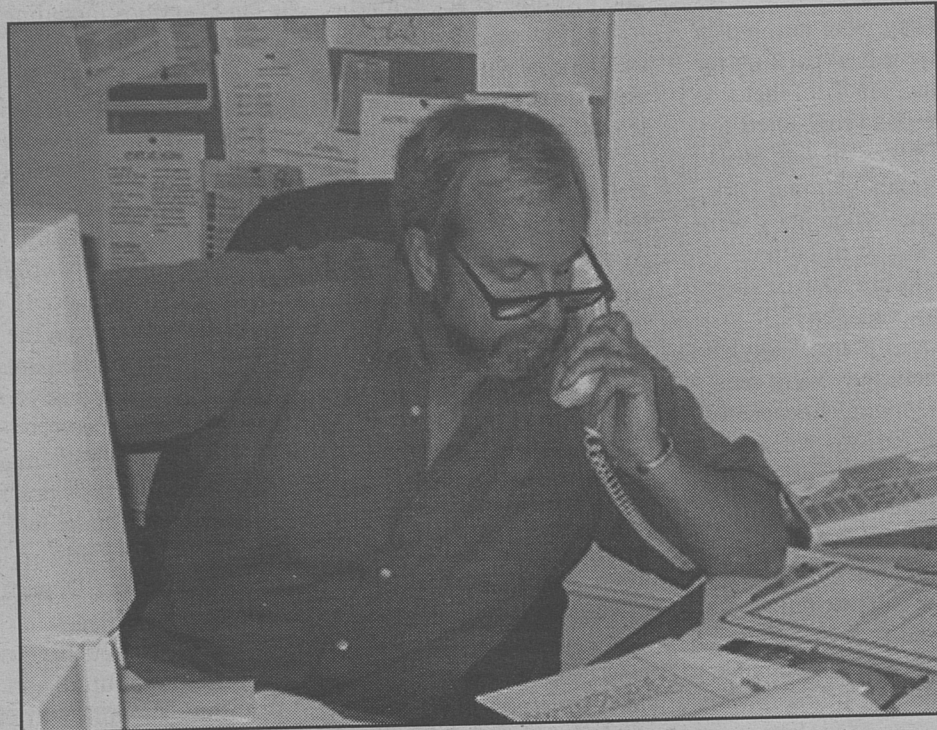
"Of course it's wonderful to be acknowledged in this way," Mock said in a phone interview. "If you believe in karma, you could look at it this way: Kurt [Kleier, Vermont's then-AIDS chief] got fired and I got a national award."

(According to a report in the *Valley News*, Mock was eventually able to convince VDH to locate \$28,000 in other grant funding, which may well be supplemented by an additional appropriation from the Vermont legislature for AIDS prevention. Further, New Hampshire awarded the agency \$53,000, an increase of \$12,000 over last year's grant.)

Mock receives \$15,000 of the award for his personal use. He said he hasn't decided yet how to apply the other \$105,000. "I'm going to DC next week for a week, meeting to share ideas with 30 award winners – this year's 10 and the awardees from the previous two years – before I decide. I'm going to take my time to think about how best to use these funds, and take advantage of the technical assistance at Robert Wood Johnson [Foundation]." The terms of the award allow the monies to be spent over a three-year period.

Among the other meetings Mock planned to attend were those set up by the foundation's "Project Connect" with New Hampshire's members of Congress. "I was nominated from New Hampshire, even though we serve as many clients in Vermont, but [Project Connect] didn't realize that until I called and asked them to set me up with Vermont, too. They said they would get me a meeting with [Vermont Congressman] Bernie [Sanders]."

In those meetings, Mock said he planned to ask the politicians, "Will you



# ACoRN's Mock Wins Award

## Foundation Recognizes Leadership

come to an ACoRN event?' This is one way to bring some light back to AIDS," Mock added, citing the way AIDS stories – the personal stories about how it is to live with the disease – have nearly disappeared from the media.

Mock will also use some of his new-found leverage to get New Hampshire lawmakers to designate Hepatitis C as a reportable disease. ACoRN decided last year to extend the agency's services to include people living with HCV, or Hep-C. According to Mock, "26,000 people are infected with Hep-C in New Hampshire, and there's no real treatment or outreach." And no national funding for research or testing.

Cathy Dunham, a national program director for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, said that outreach, that expansion

of mission and services beyond HIV/AIDS to Hepatitis C, was part of what made Tom Mock and ACoRN stand out among the 600 other nominees, of which about a quarter were AIDS-related service organizations.

"It had to do with how the work persisted through ups and downs and adapted for its community," Dunham explained in a phone interview from Boston. And it was "Tom's devotion as first a volunteer and then making an investment when the organization was having difficulties, then stretching out to address Hepatitis C. The national committee was very impressed."

The foundation is not, she said, recognizing "Lone Rangers," but whole organizations, especially, as here, "organizations that are overwhelmed from their original tasks and

mission but then say 'Let's take on another task.' And it's driven by the need in the community. There came a point when they were losing more clients to Hep C than to HIV/AIDS."

In order to get researchers interested in a treatment or a cure, "we need statistics," Mock explained. "Hep C is the most prevalent blood-borne pandemic in the world right now. It's estimated that 1.4 million people are infected with AIDS/HIV in this country. There are 5 to 10 million with Hep-C." And many of those people do not know they are infected.

"A lot of people got infected just by getting a tattoo, in the days before we went into the parlors and insisted on clean needles because of AIDS. Little did we know that Hep-C was alive in the ink vats," Mock said. Tattoo artists now use individual vials of ink for each customer.

Further, Mock declared, "Hepatitis C is the leading cause of the need for liver transplants."

Tom Mock first got involved in HIV/AIDS work when he was counseling young hemophiliacs who had contracted the virus through blood transfusions. When he began speaking out against the prejudice and their families faced, some physicians stopped referring patients to Mock. "Undaunted, he became Executive Director of ACoRN, which had been struggling financially. Within a year, he had succeeded in winning back the full support and respect of the state agencies that funded the organization, increased the staff to seven, and quadrupled the budget," according to the official press release announcing the award.

David Chambers, a gay member of the ACoRN board of directors, nominated Mock for the award. He noted that Mock, straight, married and with five children, including his own and his wife's from their prior marriages, had gained the trust of the gay community in dealing with the AIDS crisis.

ACoRN provides HIV/AIDS services throughout the rural counties of Grafton and Sullivan in New Hampshire, and Windsor and Orange in Vermont – low-income areas with limited public transportation, where people with AIDS can easily become isolated. ACoRN also offers assistance with housing, food and transportation. ▼

## Samara Grants

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the agency's 2005 fiscal year, which ended on March 31. That represents the highest total since the \$78,178 the agency received in 2000. At the same time, Lippert's figures show annual income of \$141,976, and expenses for the year of \$141,225, leaving a slight gain of \$751. The figures provided show that the Samara Foundation has had deficits in four of the last eight years (1998, 1999, 2001, and 2003), including a loss of \$8700 for 2003.

Some of these data are available on the foundation's IRS Form 990, which is public information, available for most nonprofit organizations through a website called Guidestar ([www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org)). Basic information and a scan of the form are available free with registration. The most recent 990 form available for Samara is for calendar year 2003. The foundation changed its accounting process from cash to accrual and its fiscal year

from calendar to April 1-March 31 in 2004.

The grant figures provided to OITM by Samara show that Outright has been the recipient of the most money awarded in grants since 1998, with \$42,500, followed by Mountain Pride Media (publisher of *Out in the Mountains*) with \$34,500, and the Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force, with \$20,155. Other five-figure recipients since 1998 include the AIDS Project of Southern Vermont (\$12,600), R.U.1.2? Queer Community Center (\$12,400), Vermont CARES (\$10,600) and SafeSpace (\$10,550).

### This Year's Awards

Eight organizations will receive some funding from Samara this year: the AIDS Project of Southern Vermont, \$1500; Vermont CARES, \$2000; Outright Vermont, \$5000; Mountain Pride Media, \$4000; Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force, \$1750; SafeSpace \$1250; Transgender Day of Remembrance, \$1000; and R.U.1.2? Queer Community Center \$3500 for "improving and increasing lesbian health work" in providing "support, education and information about health care for LBT (lesbian, bisexual, transgender) women."

Three graduating Vermont high school seniors have been awarded 2005 Samara Foundation Scholarships. Larson Hogstrom of Killington, Lauren Parker of Williston, and Gavin Rouille of South Burlington were each awarded a \$1,000 scholarship. Twenty-two Vermont high school seniors have been recognized as Samara Scholars since the awards were established in 2000. ▼