

Vermont Pride Shines Through

By GABRIELLE CELESTE

Burlington - Members of the queer community were invited to take part and to watch the Pride 2005 parade in downtown Burlington, which was the kickoff for the day's events on Saturday, July 9. The march started in the back parking lot of Edmunds Middle School despite the relentless rain. Among them were the QLA Queerleaders, who kept up the crowd's spirits. Marching in the parade as well were Outright with their handcrafted dragon puppet. The Freedom to Marry Task Force, and PFLAG, among others.

The parade route ran along South Union St. to College, down College for a block, along South Winooski Avenue to

Cherry St., then down Church St., ending up at the steps of City Hall, where the Kitchen Sink Samba played their last piece and Queerleaders danced until the speakout began, led off by activist Peggy Luhrs.

The guest speakers brought many interesting things to light. Their messages rang throughout the street and were received by an eager crowd.

A few words of the Speak Out could even be heard inside City Hall where local and queer organizations had set up stations. Among them were the Unitarian Church, Planned Parenthood, The Peace and Justice Center, and Noah's Arc, along with numerous others. Each stand had either items for sale, information pamphlets, or other give-aways.

For those with growling stomachs, R.U.1.2? and Mountain Pride Media had a

barbecue from 12 to 4 with a grand variety of food, including real meat and even veggie meat, to choose from. The food was prepared outside under a tent, and then transported inside where there was a bustling but friendly crowd, happily munching and chatting. There were so many people, in fact, that some people decided to sit out on the porch and welcomed those coming later.

Pearls had a fabulous gallery showing 30 artists from 3-7 pm. The entire downstairs was covered in marvelous works of creativity, some sold for a price. There were oils, pencil, ink, and even a movie! Included in the show was a film fest, drawing many observers.

Over 200 people, bringing in \$850 for Outright Vermont, came to see the Second Annual Vermont Drag Idol Show and Contest

to see its contestants perform from 7 to 9.

There were ten amazing participants including runners up Mario Brothers and Skippy. But Momma Morton came in first place, winning \$50 cash, a gift certificate to Old Gold, and a trophy.

The festivities went out with a bang at 135 Pearls where everyone over 21 attended the big Pride Party.

Pride Committee treasurer Hannah Hauser estimated attendance at 1500 for all venues, a figure which does not take into account people visiting multiple venues or events. ▼

Gabriele Celeste will be a freshman at BHS. She lives in the New North End with her mother and two guinea pigs.

Leahy Reintroduces Gay Partners Immigration Act

By PAUL OLSEN

The immigration of international partners of gay and lesbian Americans will be eased if legislation recently reintroduced in the United States Senate by Vermont Sen. Patrick Leahy (D) becomes law.

That's good news for Tom, a teacher in Burlington, who would consider having his Canadian partner of seven years immigrate to the United States. "It would be nice to have the option," Tom told *OITM*. "It's about time especially now that democracies like Canada, Spain, Belgium, and the Netherlands have recognized that [marriage] rights and freedoms should be extended to gay people. When is the United States going to wake up?"

By adding "permanent partner" to the federal Immigration and

Nationality Act, the Uniting American Families Act (S.1278) would treat same-sex domestic partners the same as heterosexual spouses for purposes of immigration rights and benefits.

Tom sees passage of Leahy's bill as an important step in the struggle for gay equality especially since Canadian law would recognize his relationship for immigration purposes. "The way that the laws are implemented now - that would block immigration of my partner to the United States, whereas moving to Canada is an option - has caused us a great deal of concern and disappointment toward the policies of the US government," Tom said. "It is something that should happen in spite of the rhetoric about defending marriage."

Leahy said he introduced the Uniting American Families Act to help gay and lesbian families. "I have heard

from gay and lesbian Americans throughout the United States about the unfairness of our immigration laws in the effect those laws have had on their loved ones," he said in an email to *OITM*. "They simply want their loved ones to have the same opportunities under our family immigration system as the loved ones of other Americans."

A draft of the Uniting American Families Act, formerly known as the Permanent Partners Immigration Act, says it is designed to "provide a mechanism for United States citizens and lawful permanent residents to sponsor their permanent partners for residence in the United States, and for other purposes."

The bill defines permanent partner as an individual who is 18 years or older, unmarried, and in a financially interdependent, committed, lifelong intimate relationship with another indi-

vidual 18 years or older.

In addition to Leahy, the bill is cosponsored by a number of New England senators including Lincoln Chafee (RI), Edward Kennedy (MA), and James Jeffords (VT). A version of the bill introduced in the US House of Representatives has 57 cosponsors including Barney Frank (MA), Michael Michaud (ME), Bernard Sanders (VT), and Rob Simmons (CT).

Representatives of the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR), a San Francisco-based gay advocacy group, praised Leahy's reintroduction of the Uniting American Families Act.

"Over the last 28 years, NCLR has seen countless families separated by immigration laws that cruelly exclude same-sex couples from any recognition or protection, no matter how committed their relationship or how long a couple has been together," said Lena Ayoub, NCLR's Staff Attorney. "The Uniting American Families Act allows bi-national couples to remain together without fear of separation or deportation."

The Washington DC-based Human Rights Campaign (HRC) also supports the bill. According to the HRC, fifteen countries - including Canada, Denmark, Israel, South Africa, France, and the United Kingdom - recognize same-sex couples when it comes to immigration policy.

At this point, Leahy is not optimistic the United States will become the sixteenth country to recognize gay partners. "Unfortunately, few Republicans have supported our legislation so far. Since Republicans are in the majority in the House and Senate, it will be difficult to pass this bill until enough Republican Members of Congress come to understand the unfairness of our current system." ▼

Paul Olsen lives and works in Colchester and also writes for the Boston-based gay paper In Newsweekly.

Lars Hits 1000: Unicycling Pastor Finishes Tour

Washington, DC - Cracked cranks, a split seat, and a broken post could not stop Lutheran pastor Lars Claussen from unicycling 1000 miles on his "Straight into Gay America" tour.

The minister completed his tour in Baltimore, MD on July 19, when he boarded a plane to fly home to Washington state. His mission was to discover what it's like to be gay or lesbian in America today. Claussen wondered why so many straight people were using religion to exclude lesbians and gay men from equality, and whether a straight, white Lutheran pastor could act as a bridge from one community to another.

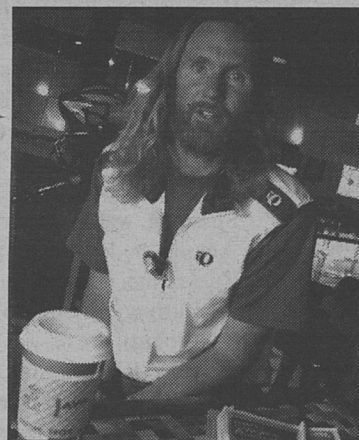
He learned a lot on his pedal from Burlington, Vermont, to

Baltimore, and so did those who followed his journey in "tour updates" posted on his web site (StraightintogayAmerica.com). Claussen stayed in the houses of people he'd met online, people they knew, others he met on the road, and occasionally, when the web of acquaintances and friends failed, in a hotel. He listened to stories: of gay and lesbian civil unions in Vermont, of marriages in Massachusetts, of neighbors who objected or who didn't care. The further south Claussen rode, the harder it became for him to be open about the purpose of his ride, and the more he understood about anti-gay prejudice and discrimination.

His ride took him to New York City on Pride weekend, and he

rode in the parade: "My own place in the parade is at the end of the Religious and Spiritual Section. Straight Into Gay America follows the Queer Dharma Buddhist group, the St. Francis Xavier Catholic church, the largest LGBT focused synagogue in the world and dozens of other religious organizations that are reaping the benefit of living out their faith tradition's calls to compassion. ... I think the beeline distance is something like three miles. I take a queer route, circling and figure-eighting back and forth, riding in place when the parade stops. ... By the end of the ride my odometer tells me I've done a 12-mile parade."

Further south, in Pennsylvania, the energy was a bit dif-



Pastor Lars Claussen

ferent: "Intercourse, Pennsylvania. Amish Country. When I asked this tourist what he thought of gay rights, he shook his head, NO. But after a moment, he told of having gay and lesbian friends who were every bit as

good as his other friends. And then after I told about people I met in Vermont who now have the right to hospital visitation, inheritance, and taxation equality, he nodded his head once more, 'Yes, everyone should have those equal rights.'

"I have yet to find a person on this ride, no matter how vociferously they might believe homosexuality is wrong, who doesn't also believe that everyone is entitled to equal rights."

As of the end of his ride, finishing up at a Black gay conference in Washington, DC, Lars Claussen had ridden 1,024 miles on his unicycle over 35 days through eight states. He's seen and felt the hate LGBT communities face. He's gone beyond labels to speak of equality and found a potential bridge. And now he's writing the book. ▼