

news

C2EA Coming to St. Mike's

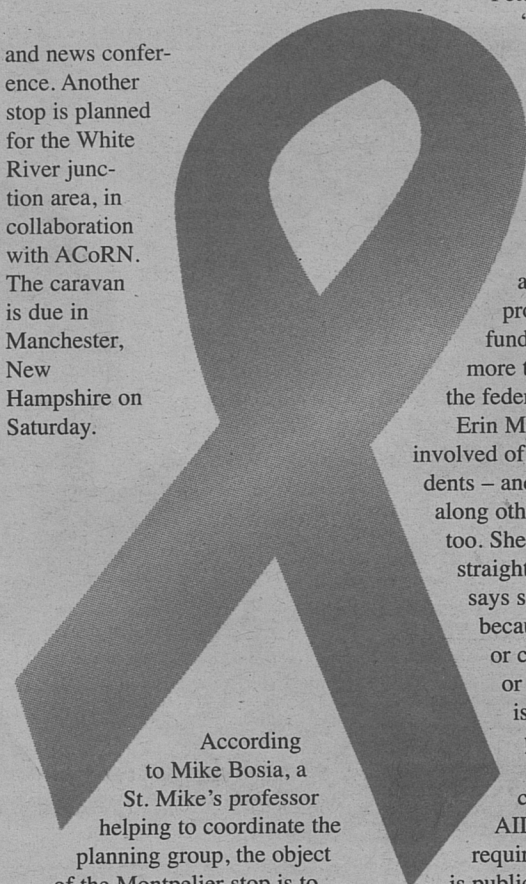
COLCHESTER — C2EA, the Campaign to End AIDS, is the focus of an intense group of young women who are students at St. Michael's College in Colchester. It's a national campaign that kicked off in Washington DC with a march last May by 3500 HIV/AIDS activists to the gates of the White House to place 8500 pairs of shoes representing the daily global death toll from the disease.

It continues this fall with a bus tour/caravan — or more precisely, nine of them, one of which begins at the college — to bring diverse voices to the capital with four demands:

- ▼ fully fund quality treatment and support services for all people living with HIV everywhere in the world;
- ▼ ramp up HIV prevention at home and abroad, guided by science rather than ideology;
- ▼ increase research to find a cure, more effective treatments and better prevention tools;
- ▼ fight AIDS stigma and protect the civil rights of all people with HIV and AIDS everywhere.

As currently planned, the caravan begins on September 30 at the end of a week of on- and off-campus AIDS awareness events and will wend its way across Vermont on Route 15 through Johnson, with a planned stop there, to Hardwick before dropping down Route 14 to Montpelier for an afternoon rally

and news conference. Another stop is planned for the White River junction area, in collaboration with ACoRN. The caravan is due in Manchester, New Hampshire on Saturday.



According to Mike Bosia, a St. Mike's professor helping to coordinate the planning group, the object of the Montpelier stop is to push Republican Governor Jim Douglas to urge other Republicans to "move" on the Ryan White Care Act funding. The idea of buses, Bosia says, is to reconnect activists who work on policy with local grassroots supporters, service-providers, and people with AIDS — those who live and work every-day with the consequences of the policy decision made elsewhere.

The Campaign to End AIDS, or at least the Vermont part of it, he

adds, "is more of a process than a conclusion." It encompasses the recognition that HIV/AIDS agencies are "underfunded, understaffed, and overburdened."

Vermont CARES Director Peter Jacobs warns that

"Ryan White [Act] cuts are coming in 2006. There will be no funds for case management or patient transport." There might be more funding for drug assistance (ADAP programs), but the funding will be even more tightly controlled by the federal government.

Erin McDonell is the most involved of the St. Mike's students — and she has brought along other young women, too. She identifies as straight, when pushed, and says she's not involved because a family member or close friend has HIV or AIDS. Her mentor is Patricia Siplon, a professor from whom she took a class on the global AIDS pandemic. One requirement for the class is public service. But McDonell is clearly not just fulfilling a requirement.

Few of the students involved at St. Mike's "have a personal relationship to the epidemic," Bosia points out, "but they can see the injustice" of how governments and corporations treat those who have the disease.

The week begins with the Vermont CARES AIDS Walk on Saturday, September 24 at 11 am at Burlington's City Hall.▼

Privatizing Social Security Hurts LGBTs

WASHINGTON — According to a new report from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (lgbt) Americans will be disproportionately harmed by President Bush's plan to privatize a portion of Social Security accounts. The plan, which has not gotten "political traction" among Americans generally, carves out a percentage of Social Security taxes for each person to invest in the stock market. It relies on estimates of a better than average return, increased deficits, and reduced benefits, the report finds.

Selling Us Short: How Social Security Privatization Will Affect Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Americans documents that lgbt Americans, on average, have lower incomes than their heterosexual counterparts, which translates into lower Social Security benefits when we retire. In addition, same-sex couples are not eligible for Social Security's spousal and survivor benefits, making the lgbt community disproportionately vulnerable to the benefit cuts and risks inherent to the president's plan.

"There is a widespread myth that gay people are economically advantaged compared to heterosexuals," said Sean Cahill, director of the Task Force's Policy Institute. "In fact, gay and bisexual men earn anywhere from 13 percent to 32 percent less than heterosexual men."

Selling Us Short finds that lgbt people of color, in particular, face an income disadvantage that leads to lower Social Security benefits. According to the 2000 U.S. Census,

black and Hispanic same-sex couples earn roughly from \$1,000 to \$9,000 less in median annual household income than black and Hispanic married opposite-sex couples.

"Gay people have to report domestic partner health insurance as income to the IRS, but married spouses don't have to report their health coverage as income," explained Cahill. "Not only do we earn less, we are less able to keep what we earn."

Mandy Hu, author of the report, added, "Even though lgbt Americans pay into the Social Security system at the same rate as everyone else, our families and children receive fewer benefits, often in times of crisis." Hu Cited the Defense of Marriage Act as the source of discriminatory policies.

Amber Hollibaugh, NGLTF's senior strategist and specialist on lgbt elders, explained that lgbt people "are more likely to age alone and less likely to have children than their heterosexual counterparts." This fact, along with lower earnings, makes us more likely to be in need of Social Security.

Selling Us Short finds that lgbt elders could be negatively affected by privatization. President Bush's privatization plan (now called "personal accounts") was characterized as a "gamble," by NGLTF executive director Matt Foreman. "Social Security privatization is a gamble with the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender elders. It is a gamble our community simply cannot afford." ▼

Rowing for Habitat

BY EUAN BEAR

In mid-August, I got phone calls and emails about Gunnar and Heather Baldwin, a husband and wife team who were rowing from Albany to Canada in a "modified" Adirondack guideboat to promote Gunnar's company's support for Habitat for Humanity.

Gunnar works for Toto, which makes low-flush toilets ("that really work," declares Heather). The company is donating a toilet and washbasin to each of seven Habitat for Humanity houses in New York (5)

and Vermont (2) along the way. Gunnar offers that he'd be doing the row whether or not his company agreed to sponsor it; he's been rowing since 1951.

You're probably wondering where the "gay" angle is in this story. Well, there are two: renovation and conservation. And then there's good works and messing about in boats.

Think about it: nearly every waterway west of the Green Mountains and north of, say, Benson empties into Lake Champlain eventually. Most of those streams carry some portion

of the effluvium we all (regardless of who we love) flush away. The Baldwins — and anyone else swimming, sailing, rowing, or otherwise using Lake Champlain — are floating on that effluvium. The less of it there is, the better for the environment, and the less water is wasted moving our (ahem) movements.

And as for renovation, aren't we known for that? Whole neighborhoods have considered inviting gay men to move in and fix up their aging tenements and make over their defunct factories. I just paid to have someone put in an upstairs bathroom. Did I get a Toto toilet?

Well, no. But that was before I knew about Gunnar and Heather.

They are not novices doing a stunt. The pair has rowed over a thousand miles from Key West to South Carolina — except for 60 miles of swamp ("There were no take-outs," says Heather, and she means places to land on shore, not fast-food) — through the Intracoastal Waterway. When we spoke, they had already negotiated the 12 Champlain Canal locks, linking the Hudson River to the lake.

"The greatest thing is the people," both rowers say at different times during the interview. They recount tales of strangers helping them retrieve their car at the end of each day. Often, the strangers have been Habitat volunteers. Of

them, the Baldwins couldn't say enough about how wonderful they were.

The Vermont affiliates are Habitat for Humanity of Addison County and Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity. Each plans to complete a home this year and either has received or will receive a toilet and washbasin from Gunnar's company, Toto USA, Inc. "These are high-end toilets," notes Margaret Carothers, board chairwoman of Habitat for Humanity of Addison County. They would not otherwise have been able to put a Toto toilet in the house for which they just broke ground (on Pleasant St. in Middlebury), and are about to select a family. This will be the third Habitat house for the group.▼