



Lil Venner (right) of PFLAG receives her Hometown Hero Honorable mention award from Andrea Rogers, coordinator of the United Way's Volunteer Connection. The bear came with a \$500 check.

PFLAG's Lil Venner Recognized by United Way

Home Town Hero Runner Up Nominated by Outright

BURLINGTON — Lil Venner has never — quite — given up, though she has felt discouraged at times, especially on those nights when she sat alone at the monthly PFLAG meeting. But, she said in a phone interview after the United Way of Chittenden County's volunteer recognition breakfast at which she was recognized with an "Honorable Mention" Hometown

Hero award, "Just when I'm ready to stop doing this, someone contacts me who needs to talk to another parent."

Kate Jerman, co-director of the LGBT youth organization Outright Vermont, nominated Venner. "Some of the youth here call her 'the Cookie Lady' — she bakes for us on an almost weekly basis. She's always at Youth Pride to offer hugs.

Besides," Jerman declares, "she is PFLAG."

PFLAG is the Parents, Friends and Family of Lesbians and Gays. As outlined on the national group's website, "The idea for PFLAG began in 1972 when Jeanne Manford marched with her gay son in New York's Pride Day parade," carrying a sign reading, 'Parents of Gays: Unite in Support of Our Children.' "After many gay and lesbian people ran up to Jeanne during the parade and begged her to talk to their parents, she decided to begin a support group. The first formal meeting took place in March 1973 at a local church. Approximately 20 people attended."

"I was so touched when Kate [Jerman] began reading the nomination. I thought I was going to get a free breakfast and then go home. It was such an honor to actually win an award, I'm still just kind of mulling it over. I'm used to working in the background. I don't expect any return, just knowing deep down that I'm making a difference."

Venner has some concerns about the continuance of PFLAG, not that she's leaving any time soon. Those meetings where no one else came are one concern, although she said, "We've got some new blood in, but there isn't really anyone else to grab the ball and run with it."

Most of the parents find her through the PFLAG national website (www.pflag.org). Asked whether PFLAG is still needed

when it has become easier to "come out," especially in Vermont, where our civil rights are legally protected, Venner doesn't hesitate to answer a clear yes.

"One woman came up to me [at the award breakfast] and said, 'You're just very important in my life. I was rejected when I came out, and I have to know there are parents who are accepting.'" Recently, a lesbian family with children new to the neighborhood told Venner that their kindergarten-age child was subjected to a homophobic remark at C.P. Smith school. Venner encouraged her neighbor to raise the issue at school and offered her help as a parent advocate; her grandchildren attend the same school.

Venner volunteers for several organizations, and for some of her volunteer colleagues elsewhere, her recognition for PFLAG came as a revelation. It also came with a \$500 check for PFLAG, which she promptly signed over to Outright Vermont.

Organizations who are not members of the United Way can nominate volunteers for recognition, Jerman explained. Outright is not a member and has had two of its nominees in a row achieve "Honorable Mention" Hometown Hero status. Last year, Dan Berns took the honors. "We don't have the resources to do the kind of volunteer recognition that we'd like to, or that the United Way does. We have two staff members — we wouldn't be here without volunteers." ▼

Unity Project Makes Final Grants

BURLINGTON/MIDDLEBURY — The Samara Foundation and the Vermont Community Foundation, acting as the Unity Project, at press time were expected to release the list of the project's final grants. According to sources on the UP Grants Committee, ten organizations will receive a total of \$74,000 in this round of funding.

Outright Vermont, the R.U.1.2? Queer Community Center, and Mountain Pride Media, publisher of *Out in the Mountains*, all located in Burlington, each received \$12,500, \$2,500 more than each had requested. The three groups are part of the Community Alliance Initiative and saw that proposal rejected by the

grant committee earlier in the process (see *OITM*, September, "Community Alliance Initiative Phase 2 Denied Funding").

Outright's grant is to "build capacity" for its mission of reaching under-served lgbt populations, to support its work in Vermont schools, and to fund a social marketing campaign.

R.U.1.2?'s award is to help the center to develop materials and curriculum addressing the health care needs of queer elders, and support its ability to provide consultation for or collaboration with other lgbt organizations.

Mountain Pride Media will use the funding to develop youth-

focused information on the website and in *OITM*, including possibly, a youth page. The project will require both independent outreach and support for young writers, artists and photographers, and collaboration with Outright and other groups.

The Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force was awarded \$10,000 to fund the creation of two short films promoting acceptance of marriage equality in Vermont.

The Unity Project funded SafeSpace's request for \$6100 for a media awareness campaign. According to agency Director Kara DeLeonardis, the grant was unexpected, since the group's preliminary proposal for rural outreach had

been rejected. In addition, Ghost Media of Brattleboro requested funds under SafeSpace's nonprofit umbrella for a film on hate crimes. According to DeLeonardis, Ghost Media's proposal was rejected. The letter notifying SafeSpace of its grant, DeLeonardis said, suggested that the group was under no obligation to complete the project outlined in the preliminary proposal. SafeSpace will likely spend at least part of the money on a public awareness film.

Faerie Camp Destiny received \$5,000 toward construction of water and sewer systems. Vermont TransAction received \$5,000 for community education about issues facing the trans community. PRIDE Vermont applied for and received \$4,000 for its 2006 celebration.

The Twin State Women's Network received \$3,400 to support its "Peer Natural Leader Program" with respect to lesbians and gay men with Hepatitis C. And the Howard Center for Human Services received \$3,000 to establish a support group for people with developmental disabilities who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender.

In addition, two "Community Projects" were awarded "up to" \$8500 each: the Bennington Pride Coalition for start-up funds for its Community Action project to reduce homophobia through education; and LGBT Windham County for the creation of a community center modeled on R.U.1.2?.

The Unity Project has said it will disband after fulfilling its mandate to disburse all its funds. ▼

Upper Valley Men's Project Office Closes

WEST LEBANON, NH — Although the Upper Valley Men's Project will continue, its office will not. As of October 1, when the grant that supported the office runs out, the furnishings will be gone, the

lights will be turned off, and the door will be locked.

Neither Fred Pond, acting secretary, nor Donald Blake, the chairman and acting treasurer, whose names were on an email announcing

the closing, responded before press time to several emails requesting an interview.

The decision to close the office was made at the UVMP board of directors meeting on August 9. The

office had been open Tuesdays from 5:30-8:00 pm.

According to its website, "The Upper Valley Men's Project is a support and social group. Our mission is through educational, social, and supportive events to establish a healthy and active community for gay, bisexual, transgendered, closet-

ed, and questioning men of the Upper Valley to meet in a safe and welcoming environment where All are welcome." That description was adopted as the organization's mission statement in November of 2003. ▼