

Vandalism Strikes Queer Center

BURLINGTON – As OITM was going to press last month, vandals struck at 34 Elmwood Avenue, the building housing the office of Out in the Mountains and the R.U.1.2? Queer Community Center. It was the latest in a string of relatively minor attacks that provide “some indication of people not being too thrilled with us being in their neighborhood,” said Center Director Christopher Kaufman. He reported the vandalism to the police and to SafeSpace.

The police have no suspects.

In this incident, someone took two chairs and a black, tile-topped wooden table from the front porch and smashed them. According to Kaufman, police in a cruiser on a routine pass discovered the wreckage strewn across Elmwood Avenue around 1:30 a.m. on September 21 and piled the remains on the center’s lawn. The center director discovered the stack of pieces when he arrived at the building around 9:30 and “cleaned up the mess.”

“There’s no evidence that it was a hate crime,” Kaufman added. “I’m just thankful that the pieces went in the road and not through our windows.” Given the timing of the police discovery, Kaufman suggested, it was likely that it was random vandalism involving people leaving a bar, and not specifically directed at the Center because of its queer identity and constituents.

“Yeah, it makes me nervous,



34 Elmwood Ave., site of several “minor” vandalism events.

but we’re not going to let it slow us down or be less visible,” he said. “It makes me sad – it’s a very nice porch to sit out on in the summer.

“My larger fear is that someone might get hurt. We’ve had discussions with the staff that our first priority is safety, and they should call police if there is any question,” Kaufman added.

R.U.1.2? Staff member Clark Sheldon wrote in an email regarding the damage, “It’s shitty that we, the folks who are the targets of hate, are the ones who have to ‘be careful’ and ‘watch out,’ as we’re the ones who have been attacked. Random acts of violence are difficult things because holding someone accountable is nearly impossible

when you don’t know who did it and have no obvious evidence.”

He added, “My patience for having to keep my actions in check as a queer person is growing short, and I believe that the work to make our community safer cannot fall only on the shoulders of those attacked.”

In the 42 months Kaufman has directed the center, he says there have been five or six similar incidents. Since the Center moved from the Waterfront to 34 Elmwood Avenue in April, 2004, a rainbow flag and pole mounted outside a second-floor window was stolen, the *Out in the Mountains* sign in the front yard was ripped off its mountings, and anti-gay church leaflets were littered on the front lawn. ▼

Outright Cites Shift to Marriage Equality in Funding Crisis

BURLINGTON – Like many nonprofits – gay and otherwise – Outright Vermont found itself last month not just in a temporary funding hole for the fourth quarter of the year, but looking at large splashes of red ink into 2006.

An emergency email went out in early October to supporters, alumni, friends, volunteers and others detailing the agency’s plight – and their plans to stabilize Outright’s funding.

One major impact came from the Vermont Department of Health’s denial of \$10,000 in HIV prevention grants last fall, an exclusion that reaches into 2007. Another is the remaining fallout from the Vermont Department of Education’s cancellation of funding for presentations in schools following backlash from the civil unions battles of 2000.

“Our funding has always been cyclical,” agreed Outright Co-director Lluvia Mulvaney-Stanak.

“We’ve been having a rough year since January 2005. Two weeks ago we were looking at the projected final quarter budget and realized we would come up short.”

Many nonprofits, she added, “operate with a deficit, counting on a grant or the next phonathon to float you through.” But for Outright, there was no relief in sight for next year. “For 2006, we didn’t receive grants from Gill, Colin Higgins, or the Children’s Trust Fund.”

At least one of those funders, the Denver-based Gill Foundation, “told us they were shifting their funding priorities to programs with ‘statewide impact,’” Mulvaney-Stanak said, “and by that they mean marriage quality.”

Outright’s emergency email likewise cited the shift in funding priorities: “[W]ithin our own LGBT movement we are fighting the shift in resources to support marriage equality.”

Asked to comment on the competition for fundraising dollars, Robyn Maguire, field director of the Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force, said, “Gill usually doesn’t fund organizations for very long. Shifting their focus to support marriage is not new information.”

It is common nonprofit wisdom that funders would prefer to underwrite start-ups or special projects than ongoing direct services. “The object,” added Maguire, “is for the [receiving] organization to diversify its fundraising so it won’t be dependent on Gill.”

Mulvaney-Stanak said that Outright has “a strong ally relationship” with the Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force. “We watch each other’s backs so that the kind of backlash that hurt us in 2000 doesn’t happen again.” The agency, she said,

was watching out for “divide and conquer” tactics.

Maguire confirmed that the two organizations have met to “talk about how to work together on fundraisers and other events, so we’re not stepping over each other.”

One solution for a nonprofit in financial straits is to merge with another nonprofit with deeper pockets. “The Portland [Maine] Outright – to whom we’re connected only by a name and a summit meeting once a year – in June decided to become a program of an outpatient clinic. We can’t let that happen here,” declared Mulvaney-Stanak.

One result of the Community Alliance Initiative process in pursuit of a Unity Project grant that proved elusive, Mulvaney-Stanak indicated, was consistent feedback “from founders, youth, and others was that we should stay separate, maintain a youth-only space. Losing a youth [to suicide] this summer has really made that point.”

The agency’s co-director acknowledged that Outright has been in dire financial straits before. But the point this time, she said, is to put in place the structures to ensure a more stable future. To that end, she is expecting that the board of directors will double in size this fall to 13 members, including four youth. Fundraising efforts will be intensified. The board will be working on a strategic plan that not only addresses ending the current year in the black, but provides funding for services and programs into 2006 and the future.

Otherwise, Mulvaney-Stanak said, “we’ll be having hard conversations about which services to cut.” The hardest services to fund, she said, are those in the education program that had been funded in part by the Department of Education. “We’ve rebuilt a lot of those connections” in schools, but schools generally cannot fund such training on their own. Outright is seeking funding directly from the Commissioner of Education. “You can’t pass anti-bullying legislation and not fund the training to make it work. We’re the only culturally competent people doing this kind of work.”

On the bright side, an anonymous donor promised that if they could raise \$10,000 before the end of the year, the donor would match it. The agency has also received \$7,000 from the Funding Exchange for the first time.

“The community won’t let us not exist,” Mulvaney-Stanak declared. “We’re working on positive growth and not just crisis response.” ▼

For information on how to help, see www.outrightvt.org, or call 865-9677.

Final Unity Grant Update

MIDDLEBURY – The Unity Project has officially announced its grants in a press release received after OITM’s October issue went to press. Some numbers are different from those cited by a source on the Unity Project Grants committee.

The press release announced four grants of up to \$7,000 each to be used in Bennington, Rutland, and Windham counties, and in the Northeast Kingdom (which includes Orleans, Essex and Caledonia counties), for activities that “reduce homophobia, increase understanding of LGBT individuals, and reduce the isolation of LGBT community members.” Our unofficial source had listed two grants of up to \$8500 to the Bennington and Windham County projects.

Additional grants cited in the official press release:

\$3,000 to the Turning Point Club of Bennington to expand its addiction recovery services to the LGBT community and to build bridges with LGBT organizations and individuals.

\$500 to the Champlain Valley Union High School GSA for the 2005-2006 school year.

\$1,000 to the Queer and Allied Anti-Racism Collaborative to reserve five seats for low-income LGBT youth at an Undoing Racism Training with the People’s Institute.

\$500 to Otter Valley Union High School to send six students and two advisors from the Otter Teen Network Players to the Youth Institute of Tolerance at

Castleton State College.

\$500 to Bellows Falls Union High School to support a Dance for Diversity sponsored by the Gay/Straight Alliance.

\$500 to the Moore Free Library to strengthen the library’s collection by purchasing DVDs and videos dealing with LGBT themes.

\$750 to Youth Services, Inc. to support an LGBT Alliance at Leland & Gray Union School.

\$423.19 to the Fletcher Memorial Library to enhance LGBT resources for youth and adults.

\$350 to the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the Upper Valley to hire guest speakers to raise awareness of LGBT issues within the greater community. ▼