

news



SafeSpace director Kara DeLeonardis and Program Coordinator Hannah Hauser with their award certificate.

State Council Awards SafeSpace

MONTPELIER – October was Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and few organizations have worked harder than SafeSpace to spread that awareness. Toward the end of the month, their efforts – not just in October, but throughout the year – were recognized by the state's Domestic Violence Council with a "Community Leadership Award" at a gathering in Montpelier.

SafeSpace was one of three honorees. The weekly newspaper *Seven Days* and the council's former co-chair Judge Barbara Zander also received recognition in the form of framed certificates.

The three honorees were chosen from among five nominations for the recognition.

According to Council Director Robyn Maguire, Council member Kim Anderson said, in presenting the certificate, that SafeSpace's presence is "crucial to making the Council and other service providers 'aware of how to deal with cultural literacy' involving the LGBT community."

"When the rubber meets the road, there is not enough recognition of the occurrence of violence in same-sex couples. It's not an easy job," Maguire said in an interview.

Despite the involvement of "lesbians who have started and

done this work," in what are now mainstream domestic violence resource, prevention, and service agencies, Maguire continued, "same-sex domestic violence doesn't fit the paradigm of many service providers."

She credited SafeSpace with "looking at the hard questions and holding up a mirror" to the community and to other domestic violence agencies.

"It is necessary for SafeSpace to exist. If the queer community doesn't do the work for themselves, nobody else will do it," Maguire said. "Without SafeSpace, how would the [domestic violence] service organizations receive the education they need? SafeSpace has really been a driving force."

The Vermont Council on Domestic Violence, which presented the awards, is distinct from the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. "The Network is a coalition of the 16 direct-service programs throughout the state," according to Bethany Pombar, the Network's outreach manager. The Network is a member of the Council. The Council is the umbrella organization for county domestic and sexual violence task forces, which bring together representatives of various service agencies, including police, hospitals, and the like. ▼

Flanagan Hurt in Crash

RICHMOND – State Sen. Ed Flanagan remained hospitalized as *OITM* went to press, following a one-car accident in the early hours of Friday, November 18. There was no official news regarding his condition, as his family instructed Fletcher Allen Health Care not to release information on his injuries. However one news source reported that he was likely dealing with head injuries and hypothermia.

According to news reports, the 54-year-old Flanagan was traveling north on Interstate 89

when his car left the road, and traveled 275 feet down an embankment, striking a culvert and rolling onto its hood. Flanagan was still in the car 12 hours later when a hunter slowed for the Richmond exit and his 19-year-old son spotted the car.

In news reports, the young man's father was quoted as saying that the bottom of the car was difficult to see because it was covered in mud and grass. The young man scrambled down the embankment, saw movement inside the vehicle, and climbed back up to call for

help. Flanagan was admitted to Fletcher Allen by 3 p.m. Friday.

Ed Flanagan was elected as state auditor in 1992, came out in 1996, and was re-elected as an openly gay man. He was then the first openly gay statewide elected official in the country. He made history again in 2000 as the first openly gay candidate nominated by a major party for a U.S. Senate seat. He was elected to the Vermont Senate in 2004 from Chittenden County.

His 55th birthday is December 18. ▼

CARES Launches Quick HIV Test

BURLINGTON – As of December 5, anyone seeking an HIV test at Vermont CARES will have the option of getting their results back in 20 minutes. The old state-provided test requires samples to make a round-trip to the Department of Health with a two-week turnaround time for results to get to the consumer.

"This is huge!" declared CARES Executive Director Peter Jacobsen. "This will eliminate people's anxiety over the two-week wait. Many, many more people will get tested."

Jacobsen estimated that in the 2006 calendar year, the agency's testing sites would administer 1200 tests, compared to 800 for 2005.

Jacobsen's assertion of a major increase was based on a pilot project conducted at Maple Leaf Farm in Jericho, a substance abuse treatment center. In a normal session, six people ask for an HIV test, Jacobsen said. During the pilot project for OraQuick, three times that many asked to be tested.

About a third of people tested with the long-wait process never return for their results, according to national figures from the CDC. In Vermont, the Department of Health pays testing agencies for administering the tests only when its lab results are actually delivered, so absentee consumers put sexual partners at risk for infection and cost agencies money.

The DoH has refused to use

the new OraQuick test, contending that it will result in a high rate of false positives. The oral rapid test has been approved by the federal Food and Drug Administration since March of 2004.

According to Jacobsen, the results from the OraQuick test show only one in 1,000 come back as a false positive. "We always tell people that this is a preliminary test. But in the meantime, 999 people are getting correct results in 20 minutes." Anyone who tests positive is encouraged to get retested using the lab-based process.

"We started a year ago having a dialogue with the Department of Health," Jacobsen said, "and then we realized we had to go on our own, we had to find private funding."

The private funding is part of the agency's regular fundraising. No HIV-testing sugar daddy or mama has materialized to underwrite the program. Thus, anyone wanting the OraQuick results-in-20-minutes test will be asked to make a donation of around \$40. The exceptions include prisoners and substance abuse treatment clients, whose tests are funded by a specific grant.

"Because the rapid test is privately funded, we don't have to share the intrusive [client] data required by the CDC," Jacobsen pointed out, although the agency will share basic data on numbers of tests and results.

Jacobsen expressed gratitude to Fletcher Allen Health Care in

Burlington for a preliminary grant that helped to fund training, planning, and the pilot project.

"This is crucial for the people we serve who are high risk and the most rural population, where getting back to get results can be nearly impossible," Jacobsen said. "Inmates can be transferred, substance abuse treatment patients rarely come back for results on the long test. Overall, the return rates for our Burlington site are 96 percent. The corrections and substance abuse treatment return rate is 40 to 60 percent, depending on the center or the facility."

The test involves a swab of the upper and lower outer gums for "oral mucosal transudate" (loosely speaking, saliva). And at this point, said Jacobsen, "we always have to remind everyone that HIV cannot be transmitted through saliva." The results indicate whether antibodies to the virus are present. The test can also read a drop of blood from a finger stick, according to information provided by OraSure Technologies, Inc., the maker of the OraQuick test.

"This is such crucial technology," Jacobsen said excitedly, "and it's already being used almost everywhere else in the country."

CARES is the first agency in Vermont to use the OraQuick test, with the exception of a rapid-result blood test used at Fletcher Allen for occupational exposures. ▼