

a e SPORTS

Five Vermonters Bring Home Medals

The Over 40 Crowd Wins at the Gay Games

BY LYNN MCNICOL

Five Vermonters, all of them over 40, participated in the Gay Games this summer, and all brought home medals.

Richard Alther of Ferrisburgh has returned to competitive swimming after a ten-year absence - and with great success.

At 66, Alther has jumped back into swimming and won four gold medals; in 100, 400, 800 and 1,500-meter races at the 2006 Gay Games in Chicago. Swimming freestyle, or crawl, in each one, Alther also won the silver medal for his 200-meter race, which he lost by half a second. He competed in the men's 65 to 69 age category.

"I trained all year," said Alther, who is retired and so has recently had the time to devote to swimming. "It's wonderful to get totally immersed" in other activities besides a career, said Alther, who retired as co-owner of Country Home Products in Vergennes.

Growing up gay, he said, was hard on his self-esteem, and he internalized feelings of inadequacy. While he excelled in scholastics, Alther was not particularly athletic.

Originally from the New York area, he remembers summers at his grandparent's camp on Lake

Champlain near Otter Creek. He was naturally a good swimmer and later was chosen for the swim team as a freshman at Cornell Uni-

Participating in the opening and closing ceremonies were the most gratifying part of going to the Gay Games, affirming of me as a gay world-class athlete.

JOAN GARDNER, CHARLOTTE

versity, but was not enthusiastic about it at the time.

Alther did not choose to get involved in competitive sports until a business colleague impressed him with her enthusiasm about her swimming competition. He joined her group, meeting for swim practice every morning at 5:30 at St. Michael's College in Colchester. When, at the age of 44, Alther swam in his first competition,

it was a momentous occasion.

"For the first time I felt strength physically," Alther said, referring to his entrance into competi-

When Alther heard about the Gay Games coming to Chicago in July, he decided the time was right for his return. Competing in the

Games were initially to be held.

Repp joined Alther at the games, "as my private cheer squad," Alther said. Asked if athletes are made rather than born, Alther answered "absolutely!"

"Swimming over 100 meters is mostly mental," he said, accomplished by pacing oneself and focusing on technique.

As for swimming competitively, "I'm going to keep going," Alther said. He plans to participate in

the May 2007 National Masters Championships, an annual meet.

Beth Mintz of Burlington, and Esther Rothblum, formerly a professor of psychology at UVM, now living in San Diego, have been playing raquetball together for 25 years, but mostly for relaxation, Mintz told OITM. They traveled to the Gay Games to compete to-

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l. to r. Elizabeth Campbell, Esther Rothblum (now of San Diego), Beth Mintz and Joan Gardner line up for opening ceremonies. far right: Richard Alther. PHOTOS PROVIDED



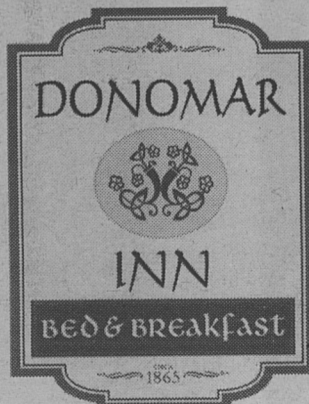
tive sports as his "revenge of the nerds."

He competed nationally for the next 10 years, including winning a number of medals at the second Gay Games in San Francisco in 1986, and at the New York Gay Games in 1994. Shortly after that, however, he stopped competing as a swimmer as he "got too involved in business," and did not compete again until this summer.

five events - the maximum number allowed - was "intense," Alther said. It was necessary to eat properly and get enough rest during the week's events.

Alther and his partner, Ray Repp, decided they preferred the Gay Games to the Outgames in Montreal, due to their disappointment over the dispute between Gay Games organizers and organizers in Montreal, where the Gay

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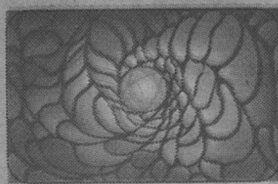


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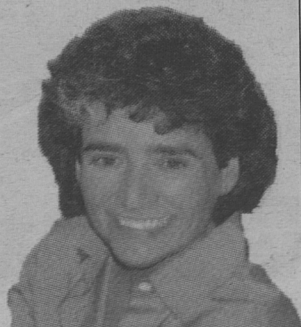
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