

VERMONT'S VOICE FOR THE LESBIAN, GAY,  
BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY SINCE 1985

## Openly Gay and Lesbian Candidates Campaign in VT

STORY & PHOTOS BY PAUL OLSEN

MONTPELIER - Along with one lesbian who is running for statewide office, six openly gay men and one lesbian are campaigning to serve in Montpelier next year. Progressive Martha Abbott is running for state auditor. Progressive Jean Szilva hopes to join the following Democratic incumbents; state Reps. Steve Howard, Jason Lorber, Bill Lippert and Robert Dostis, and state Sen. Ed Flanagan, in the Vermont legislature.

As chair of Vermont's Progressive Party for the past five years, Martha Abbott is known to many Vermonters. In her first run for statewide office,



Ed Flanagan

Jason Lorber

Abbott faces incumbent Republican Auditor Randy Brock and Democrat Thomas Salmon. Abbott lives in Underhill with her partner Barbara Brody. As state auditor, Abbott plans to make sure "tax dollars are being spent wisely and legally."

"Being Independent of the two brand name parties, I will be in a unique position to monitor the administration and its fiscal policies," she says on her campaign website. If elected in November, Abbott would be the second openly gay or lesbian auditor in the state's history. The post was previously held by Sen. Ed Flanagan.

Flanagan was first elected state auditor in 1992 and publicly came out as a gay man in 1995. He made history when, in 1996, he became the first and only openly gay statewide elected official in the United States. He left the auditor's post in 2000 to run for the United States Senate, making him the first openly gay U.S. Senate candidate. In that race, he lost to incumbent Sen. James Jeffords. Flanagan was elected to the state Senate representing Chittenden County in 2004 and, following his recovery from a serious car ac-

CONTINUED ON P.5 →

BY LYNN MCNICOL

BENNINGTON - For the second year in a row, a gathering of enthusiastic LGBT citizens took over the four corners of downtown Bennington with colorful signs and slogans on National Coming Out Day on October 11.

Last year, students from the local high school started the tradition, and the students were joined this year by members of the Bennington Pride Coalition, Bennington College students, and several allies.

What seemed surprising to some of those joining the effort to increase visibility and defeat discrimination was the friendly reactions of those driving by. Many drivers honked their horns in support, an older woman on a passing bus waved, and one car paused briefly for a chat with demonstrators.

Louise Webb of North Pownal stood with a sign on the chilly afternoon in support of her son, Aaron, who is active in the gay-straight alliance (GSA) at Mt. Anthony Union High School.

"We both did it last year," Webb said, but since Aaron was working on this particular afternoon, she attended on his behalf.

Taylor Hayes, age 7, of Bennington, stood with her aunt, Sandy Barnard of Readsboro. Both held colorful signs that were created at a potluck a few days before.

Sandy repeated a phrase that Taylor said recently: "people that are gay aren't bad." Taylor then smiled at Sandy and said "cause you're gay!"

Sandy said she heard about the demonstration through mutual friends.

"I think it's a very positive thing for the Bennington Area," she said.

Breeanne Moffitt of Bennington joined the small crowd with a sign and smiled when an older man walking by said to "keep up the good work."

Breeanne said there had been "a lot of positive reception ... it's really been nice." Last year Breeanne was searching for answers to some important personal issues and finally found a transgender site on the Internet that was helpful.

"It's been so difficult without any answers at all ... Now I have friends that support and understand."

## → Fledgling Groups Make Big Splash



PHOTO: MICHEL YAEGER

Ann Coulter (l.) and Anja Pfeffer celebrate Coming Out Day in Bennington.

Last year, Coming Out Day happened to fall on an in-service day for Bennington teachers, so students weren't able to celebrate that day in school, said Anja Pfeffer, faculty advisor of Glow-Up, the school's GSA. When she asked what students wanted to do instead, a couple of them suggested standing with signs at the four corners. After some hesitation, everyone agreed it was a good idea and four corners became the spot to celebrate Coming Out Day.

Students had just organized Glow-Up (Gay, Lesbian or Whatever United People) a few weeks before, after much discussion with some parents and school board members who opposed their efforts as well as some who were supportive. That was in the fall of 2005. Eventually, Glow-Up was successful when the school board voted 5-4 to allow the group to continue.

The same year, Bennington Pride Coalition (BPC) was getting on its feet with help from a Unity Project grant. Cynthia Himmel helped with grant-writing, and co-coordinators Sadelle

Wiltshire and Ann Coakley have been working with other volunteers to get BPC going. Activities have included weekly gatherings at the local coffee shop, and organizing the well-attended performance of Peterson Toscano earlier this year.

National Ally Week, October 15 to 21, was also celebrated in Bennington. Pfeffer said Glow-Up made pledges for allies of LGBT students to sign in an ongoing effort to reduce stigma and harassment in the schools.

With other supporters, the students from Glow-Up and BPC, more and more LGBT residents are coming out of the closet and joining the growing community.

Mark McCourt joined the ranks on the four corners with a sign and waved as cars went by. Last year on Coming Out Day, he drove past the Glow-Up students at the four corners, and thought the action was "incredibly brave and cool ... I wondered if I would have the guts to do something like that. So I'm pleased to have the opportunity to do this, this year, with this great group of people."▼