

# OUT in the mountains

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## OITM Says Good-bye Celebrating 21 Years!

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

BY KIM HOWARD

The decision was difficult. Sitting in the basement of the Champlain Mill last month, all seven Mountain Pride Media Board members pored over financial statements. For months, the organization that publishes *Out in the Mountains* had been relying on its savings and scrambling for donations to cover monthly shortfalls, while board members tried to restructure staff and operations and build a revenue model that worked. Though the monthly expense gap was closing, progress was not fast enough. Available funds were just a couple of hundred dollars — even before staff was paid for November's work.

The organization could not afford to go on.

After 21 years of service to the community, *Out in the Mountains* comes to a close with this final issue.

We want the community to know how we got here. But we also want to celebrate and honor the love, energy, time and passion put forth by so many people — board members and editors, writers and distributors, donors and advertisers, and a host of other volunteers — for the last two decades.

### How we got here

Dan Brink, former Board president and volunteer for eight years, said he first knew there were problems about four years ago, when the budget had to be cut by a third.

Activity had increased exponentially starting in 1999, Brink said, when the Vermont Supreme Court told the legislature to grant same-sex couples the same rights as heterosexual couples had in marriage.

"With all the attention that brought to Vermont, it also brought volunteers, donations and grants" to the paper, Brink said. Subscriptions went up, as did advertising dollars.

But the energy and money were not sustained.

"During the good years, we tried to convert it (from mostly volunteer) into an organization that was paying the key staff," Brink said. Eventually, the editor's tiny stipend grew into a modest part-time salary, and a part-time operations manager was hired.

"It never quite worked," Brink said. "We were never able to get an advertising model that would allow for that after things got more difficult."

The economy shifted and na-

tional advertising — a substantial revenue source — dropped off, Brink said. Volunteer energy, still vital to the operation, also dwindled.

Last spring, the two remaining board members, president Brian Cote and secretary Greg Weaver, met with community members seeking involvement and support. A strategic planning group recommended hiring a full-time executive director to focus on raising money and managing advertising, distribution and operations. Weaver was hired. But everyone knew it was a risk; money was already tight.

Cote said the struggle to nurture new board members — and the workload the small board carried — perhaps caused them to lose sight of daily operational struggles the paper had had for

years. He said it was perhaps naive for the Board and strategic planning committee to think a full-time executive director could simultaneously do all of the operational tasks and bring in money.

But the reality, too, said both Cote and Brink, is that the media landscape has shifted. While 20 years ago, there was no Internet and no mainstream coverage of gay issues, now there are both. Among queer media, *Out in the Mountains* has been one of a handful of nonprofit newspapers in the country. Others had folded, or had become for-profit.

Also, MPM decided long ago it would not sell ads for tobacco, alcohol or bath-houses, which often provide key revenue to for-profit LGBT papers.

"There were healthier ways

to be gay, and we wanted to explore those," said Euan Bear, a former *OITM* editor. "The choice has cost us, because we chose to not be exploitive of our own community."

Cote said he thinks changing ad policy would only have been a short-term fix.

"I think people in the community would have had an incredibly difficult time with that sort of advertising in our newspaper," Cote said. "We would have continued to lose both traditional advertisers, and I think, our subscriptions would have dropped even further."

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### A TIME TO CELEBRATE!

We invite you to celebrate all that has been accomplished by joining us at R.U.1.2? Community Center on Saturday, December 9 from 2-4 pm for an open house. Dozens of dedicated people have given enormous pieces of their lives to this paper so that all of us could be informed, so that we could help make change. Our state is a far better place because of them. Please celebrate what they have given to us and to everyone who has yet to arrive in Vermont.

SEE PAGE 9 FOR MORE DETAILS!



20  
years  
(and we're still queer!)

OITM looks back at two decades of community-building in Vermont

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