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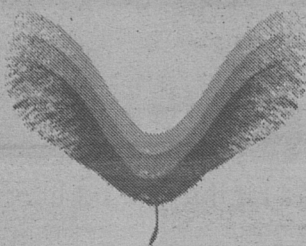
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FROM THE PAST

OITM Celebrates Fifth Birthday

A Look Back at the Paper's History

BY MIKI THOMAS

The following is a reprint of the cover story for the February, 1991 issue of OITM.

I remember back in the fall of 1985 when the idea of a gay and lesbian newspaper for Vermont started to gain momentum. As Philip Roberts wrote in an article celebrating the second anniversary of *Out in the Mountains* in February, 1988, the now defunct Vermonters for Lesbian and Gay Rights (VLGR) felt that "a vehicle was needed to help the lesbian/gay community develop a method of sharing what was happening in our political, social, and personal lives."

Late November of that year, a meeting was held at the Peace and Justice Center in Burlington to start up such a paper. Representatives from VLGR and interested community members such as myself attended the meeting. We discussed the contents of the paper and the name of it (*Out in the Mountains* was chosen based on past gay pride logos of New Hampshire and Vermont). To finance the enterprise, we applied for a grant from the Haymarket People's Fund of Boston for start-up money.

The grant from the Haymarket People's fund came through for \$2,000 to get the paper going. Several meetings were later held, and the next February, the first issue of *Out in the Mountains* appeared.

Carrie Coy joined OITM after moving to Burlington in February of 1986. She remembers that it was exciting for her to work on the paper. A small handful of people would meet at the beginning of each month to plan the next month's issues and then would meet later to read over and edit whatever stories and press releases came into the office, which at that time was rented space from the Peace and Justice Center. As OITM was not yet computerized, all of the layout was done by hand.

Once the paper was printed up, the collective members would then collate it and get it ready to mail to subscribers

and distribute around town. There were only fifty to sixty subscribers at that point, with the emphasis being on free distribution around the Burlington area. The only other areas to receive OITM were Montpelier, where a man distributed 200 copies, and Brattleboro, where copies were sent off to Colors, one of the town's gay bars.

Over the next four years, OITM began to gain power as the mouthpiece of Vermont's gay and lesbian communities. A case in point is the political polling often done.

When VLGR would poll candidates before the November elections regarding their stands on issues of interest to the gay and lesbian communities, it received little response. However, when OITM conducted a similar poll in 1986, almost all of the candidates responded when it was made clear that the results would be published.

OITM covered major stories as well. The first issue of OITM covered legislation that would ban discrimination against those who are HIV+. Since then, OITM has covered the Pride parades, the 1986 ERA campaign, the Gay Rights Bill hearings of 1987 and 1988, and the 1987 March on Washington.

Membership, however, did not grow during that period. A handful of people were still doing the jobs of writing, typing, laying out, and distributing the paper. By 1989, key people had left and new ones hadn't come in. The collective had dwindled to four people. One member was going to leave the area the following summer, and the other three had all reached the burnout point. This would have been the end of OITM unless,

as Carrie Coy put it, "we could scare up people to help out."

An insert was put into the January 1990 issue with the ominous declaration that "This



is OITM's last issue." The insert had one ray of hope - it also said that a meeting would be held the next month to discuss whether OITM should be kept alive or be allowed to die a dignified death.

On February 17, 1990 over forty people from all over Vermont met at the Fletcher Free Library in Burlington. Local media showed up as well, and the meeting was covered on WCAX News that night and the *Burlington Free Press* the following morning. The consensus was that OITM served a vital role in the lives of gay and lesbian Vermonters and their friends.

For Carrie Coy, however, even this positive reaction left her a bit skeptical: "I wasn't sure if the group was willing to put the work into it." But now, she says, "It's wonderful to see the paper thrive."

Since that February meeting, a group of fifteen or so individuals has met regularly to put the paper out on a monthly basis and to live up to the purpose as it was stated in the very first issue five years ago and as it continues to be stated today. ▼