

# Statewide network plots course

by Ed Trebitsch

"We are a statewide coming-together of individual lesbians and gay men and groups of such, forming a network of persons active in advancing our common interests, including educational opportunities and political action."

Such was the definition of the Coalition which was agreed upon by the 30 people attending the third statewide meeting of lesbians and gay men in South Royalton Saturday, June 8.

The three-hour meeting covered a wide range of topics ranging from announcements of the then-upcoming Pride celebration to discussions of the group's purposes.

The meeting began with announcements. Then Heather Wishik reported on the statewide lesbians' meeting in South Royalton June 1: the 20 women attending declared themselves Lesbians of Vermont (LOV), an autonomous group affiliated with the Coalition. The group discussed issues of positive visibility, legislation, organizing a telephone network for rapid responses to events, and coordination with the men's group. They intend to have one workshop on legislation and one on the media.

Ed Trebitsch and Jeff Tewell reported on the statewide gay men's meeting June 1 in White River Junction. The nine men discussed C.A.R.E.S. (see Resources), the newly advertised position of AIDS public health program coordinator, promoting regional organizations such as SAM and RAGS (see Resources) and forming a central agency for soliciting funds for related organizations, along the lines of the United Way.

Louise Brill reported on the networking that the statewide meetings had already accomplished. Writing letters and telgrams and phoning legislators has been a problem in the past, she said, but much can be done with our increased interpersonal connections. "If C.A.R.E.S. lets us know, we'll act," she said.

Howard Russell added a success story: within a week of last year's Pride rally, the governor asked to talk about liaison with representatives of Vermont's lesbian and gay communities.

The group unanimously agreed to have four joint meetings a year -- with additional special meetings if necessary.

Beth Dingman raised the question of the structure and definition of the Coalition. After much discussion, consensus was to rotate coordinators and to consider Out in the Mountains the group's mouthpiece. The discussion of the goals and focus of the group will continue at the next meeting, to be coordinated by Louise Brill and Jeff Tewell, Sunday, Nov. 2.

A letter from Terje Anderson, who was

unable to attend the meeting, sparked discussion of the Sept. 6 meeting of the State Human Rights Commission in Montpelier. The consensus of the group was to provide a spokesperson and to get as many people to attend as possible.

Heather Wishik mentioned the bill expanding prohibition against discrimination in rental housing, which does not deal with discrimination based on sexual preference. She emphasized the need for people to act as local coordinators of action (writing, phoning, buttonholing legislators) in response to pending legislation, and the need for a task force to coordinate quick media

response, especially letters to the editor.

Along the same lines, everyone was urged to write Vermont ACLU about the ERA and gay rights, since the ACLU's position on those matters is imminent.

A discussion of fundraising followed, including of the idea introduced earlier of setting up a fundraising process for the Coalition similar to United Way's and about trying to come up with names of possible contributors of \$1,000 contributions (or more).

The meeting ended with an informal resolution to have shorter meetings.

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