

# Out in the Mountains

VERMONT'S NEWSPAPER FOR LESBIANS AND GAY MEN

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## Maintaining Our Rights to Health Care

by Alyx Lyons

Suppose you have a partner, whom you love and share a commitment with. And just suppose that you have been in this relationship for five, maybe ten, years. You both may consider yourselves to be a couple, but no governing body will recognize such a union.

Or suppose that you are single, yet have many close friends that you consider to be your "family". They are friends with whom you share your joy, grief, happiness and sadness.

Now just suppose that the unthinkable occurs: an accident or illness incapacitates you. You are unable to make decisions regarding your health and well-being. Who then, has the legal right to make those decisions for you? Even though you may have wished for your close friend or your partner to make those decisions, they will not be able to. The power to make decisions concerning your health will fall to the nearest blood relative, such as a parent or sib-

ling. The people that you may love and trust the most may be prevented from being involved in any discussions about your needs and/or wishes.

Such a scenario happened in Minnesota in several years ago. Sharon Kowalski's car was hit by a drunken driver, leaving her unable to provide for herself and make important decisions. Her long-time partner, Karen Thompson, wanted to be involved in helping to decide what was best for Sharon and to be an active participant in Sharon's rehabilitation. But Sharon's father was granted legal guardianship and Karen was denied total access to Sharon. Thereby denying Sharon the right to have the love and support of her partner. Their story does have a bittersweet ending. After many years of legal battle and time lost in Sharon's rehabilitation, Karen was recently allowed visitation rights.

Could all the legal and emotional entanglement have been avoided? Is there a law that would protect the rights of indi-

viduals in same-sex relationships in the state of Vermont, if there were to be an incapacitating illness or accident? Fortunately, the answer is yes, and it is called Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care (DPA/HC).

A DPA/HC is a legal document that allows you to appoint someone of your choice (called the "agent") to make health care decisions for you if you are unable to make those decisions for yourself, for whatever reason. It covers all health care situations. The document can contain specific or general instructions for many different circumstances. Obviously, the "agent" should be someone you know and trust, someone who understands your beliefs and values.

Forms and informational booklets are available from the Vermont Ethics Network. Forms can also be obtained from Area Agencies on Aging, town clerks offices, hospitals, and home health agencies.

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## Attention: Volunteers Needed for OITM

Have you ever been interested in the field of publishing? Do you love hacking apart stories with your little red pencil? Are you an avid photographer that would like to see your pictures of lesbian/gay events splashed across the front page of a newspaper? Do you want to become one of George Bush's "thousand points of light"?

Whether any of these questions apply to you or not, we on the OITM staff are in dire need of new people. New faces, fresh ideas and quick typing fingers are necessary for OITM to remain alive.

We are also making a special appeal to all the men in the community. For the past 2 years or so women have greatly outnumbered the men in OITM. We want to ensure that our paper doesn't take on a women oriented slant to the exclusion of gay men.

This past summer OITM acquired an office so our meetings can now be planned much further in advance. Hopefully, with our new space and by publishing our meet-

ing times far in advance you will be able to join us.

We have a shopping list of vacancies that need filling, but for the most part we need people in every area of production.

1) We are looking for a coordinator for OITM- possibly a part-time paying position. To coordinate meeting times, office duties and staff departments.

2) Journalists/writers are needed. You don't have to live in the Burlington area to write for OITM. We are always looking for fresh ideas from around the state. Send us your name and phone # if you can't make it to a meeting and we'll keep in touch with you for story ideas. We need copy in all areas current events articles, politics, lesbian/gay health (physical, mental, etc.), commentary, and reviews.

3) Copy editors/typists- it requires no special skills to be an editor all you have to do is come to the editing meetings. We need typists who have an AT&T or IBM compat-

ible pc or access to one and know either WordPerfect or WordStar word processing. Come to the editing meetings to pick up copy to type.

4) Mail/Calendar- we need people to pick up the mail at our PO Box and organize the calendar events for the layout staff.

5) Advertising- chase down old delinquent accounts, drum up new accounts and keep the layout staff updated every month. Advertising revenue provides the bulk of our funds to pay our printing and mailing costs. You don't have to live in the Burlington area to do this job either, in fact ideally we would like several advertising groups in different areas of the state to bring in more advertising dollars. Are you interested? Call either 865-9759 or 860-1922 evenings.

6) Layout staff- be the anchor leg of the OITM pre-printing relay! Our layout staff is completely burned out! We need people

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