

Out in the Mountains

established in 1986

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To Submit Articles and Letters

We encourage and implore our readers to do what they can to make *OITM* a paper both for and by gay, lesbian, and bisexual Vermonters. Please assist us by typing your articles and letters double-spaced and including your name and phone number in case we have any questions. Your submission should be received by *OITM* no later than the 1st of the previous month. *Thank you* for helping out!

How to Advertise

If you would like to run an ad in *OITM*, please contact us for rates, sizes, and information. Ad copy must be received by the 1st of the month to be included in the next month's issue. Copy can be mailed to: *OITM*, P.O. Box 177, Burlington, VT 05402, or call Ellen at (802) 860-1922.

Editorial

Making a Connection for Civil Rights

Bill Darker

On Thursday, January 7th at 1:00 in the morning, the city council in Lewiston, Maine, became the second in the state to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. The ordinance had the support of many community leaders, including Lewiston's mayor and chief of police. However, the ordinance had its detractors.

Largely Franco-American (many of its residents speak French as a first language), Lewiston's 40,000 citizens are blue collar, Roman Catholic and conservative. A group called "Citizens of Lewiston for the Repeal of Special Homosexual Rights" initiated a petition drive for the repeal of the ordinance. They garnered the necessary signatures.

Equal Protection Lewiston (EPL) was formed to mobilize support against the repeal effort. They worked hard to challenge the opponent's claim that civil rights are "special" rights. They organized an office, prepared flyers, took polls, and placed calls to get the message out. They gained endorsements from civic


groups and respected individuals in the community. My first contact with EPL was with Finance Coordinator Janet Welch, an impassioned woman who knows Lewiston well. She arranged for me and my colleague at HRCF, Julio Abreu, to come to Maine for the final push until election day on November, 2nd. We stayed with local businessman Denis Gilbert, an openly gay man.

Last May, Denis was the victim of a brutal attack perpetrated by two men who knew of him through his business. They had arrived at his home and asked if they could come inside for a glass of water. Of course, Denis obliged. Once inside, they attacked him with a knife, stabbing him fifteen times in the ensuing struggle. They left only when they thought a silent home alarm to police had been triggered. Denis Gilbert was victimized but refused to remain a victim. He got involved, and so did his family, including his uncle, Lewiston's chief of police, Laurent (Larry) Gilbert.

Larry Gilbert looks just as one might expect a Chief of Police to look. What was most unexpected was that this man was one of the most committed to seeing that the civil rights ordinance stayed on the books. I spent all of a Saturday riding around with him and his 13 year old son, canvassing Lewiston with EPL literature and knocking on doors to ask if we could place "Vote No! Discrimination" signs on lawns. During the day we discussed the ordinance repeal effort but most importantly we talked about our own personal experiences with this discrimination "thing", and he asked me about my own experience on being gay in today's society. I have rarely had such a deep and intimate conversation with, my own family, and here I was having one with a virtual stranger! A connection was made. It is all about connections.

Grass-roots canvassing is not an easy job, but a necessary one. Equal Protection Lewiston had a very committed team of volunteers to conduct information distribution, make phone calls urging supporters to vote, and on election day monitor the polling places. There seemed to be a problem however. Numbers. Having been to the local gay bar in Lewiston, which is owned by Roland Blais who was a member of the Hate/Bias Crime Task Force and instrumental in mobilizing sup-

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