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# Out in the Mountains

VERMONT'S NEWSPAPER FOR LESBIANS, GAY MEN, AND BISEXUALS

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## Coalition Takes Off

Terje Anderson

Riding a wave of enthusiasm following the successful December conference, the newly formed Board of the Vermont Coalition of Lesbians and Gay Men is gearing up for a new, high profile series of activities aimed at building a strong statewide organization and community.

The 19 member steering committee has now met three times since being elected in December, with initial meetings focused on structural issues (by-laws, forming committees, etc) and developing a vision of what the Coalition will do to address the needs of the Vermont lesbian/gay community. Board meetings have been marked by a high level of energy and excitement as members figure out how to work together and share their visions for the work that lies ahead.

The Coalition will soon begin a series of educational and organizational programs around the state, including screening of right-wing anti-gay propaganda films and video, activities around the Vermont Pride celebration in June, and further in the future, regional workshops held in conjunction with local groups.

Also in the works is a membership drive, designed to build a strong, statewide grassroots network, which organizers view as imperative to successful legislative work, public information and local organizing efforts. Planning is already beginning for the next statewide conference, probably to be held in early November. A Public Policy Committee has been created to monitor legislative and administrative activities.

Steering Committee members emphasize that this is an open process, and that in order to be successful, the Coalition needs the active involvement of people throughout the state. Community members interested in planning or participating in Coalition activities in their area should contact one of the two co-chairs (Sue Aronsen at 728-4121 or Bill Lippert at 482-3528). There are plenty of ways to get involved, and Board members have repeatedly emphasized that "we're going to have some fun while we get things done." ▼

## THE RIGHT RESPONSE: The Blues of VT Recognizes Domestic Partnerships

Fred Kuhr

On January 1, 1994, Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Vermont, one of the state's top health insurance companies, began offering domestic partnership benefits to its employees. Any eligible subscriber group, such as an employer or association, may opt to offer these benefits to their employees or group members as well. Health insurance companies, usually viewed as politically conservative, are slowly responding to outside pressures to recognize domestic partners and the partner's dependent children. For example, Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Massachusetts also began offering domestic partnership benefits at the start of the year. According to Karen Saudek, Director of Human Resources for Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Vermont, her company is merely reflecting the fact that "the definition of family has broadened."

The U.S. Census Bureau backs up Saudek's statement with figures showing that unmarried couples make up approximately 4.2 million households. Of those, 2.6 million are unmarried heterosexual couples and 1.6 million are gay or lesbian couples.

Most companies, however, still do not offer domestic partnership benefits. Aside from moral issues, cost is the reason many companies do not consider the option. In a recent issue of Employee Relations Weekly, Thomas Coleman, Executive Director of the Los Angeles domestic partnership advocacy group, the Spectrum Institute, was quoted as saying, "There's just a general fear with regard to escalating health care costs."

## Vermont's Coming

Paul Olsen

Vermont will be represented by at least one group of athletes at the Unity '94 Gay Games IV & Cultural Festival in New York City from June 18-25. A group of Vermont Gay Volleyball (VGV) players has organized a team of eight members who will travel to New York to participate in the fourth international Gay Games.

Founded in 1982, the Gay Games aim to bring together lesbian and gay athletes from around the world to compete in various sports including martial arts & judo, power lifting, soccer, wrestling,

and volleyball. Coinciding with the 25th anniversary of the 1969 Stonewall Riots, the Gay Games IV & Cultural Festival promise to be the largest lesbian and gay event since the 1993 March on Washington. Event organizers expect to welcome 500,000 spectators and 15,000 athletes from over 40 countries.

According to team member Bob Bolyard the idea for organizing a Vermont team began last fall. In

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