

## 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 Steven West at (802) 864-6399 or Bruce at BMH graphic design at (802) 8647198.

## Letter From The Editor: Welcome to Fantasy Island...Now what?

Fred Kuhr

**WINOOSKI** -- No, I am not a native Vermonter. Just ask any native and they'll tell you that they are a dying breed. Ever since my partner and I moved to the Green Mountain State, I have heard the word 'flatlander' used in my direction a number of times, but I don't mind. If you have something precious and beautiful, the desire to protect it is an understandable reaction. After all, the aspects of Vermont that make it special to natives are what lured the two of us as, well as other gays and lesbians, here.

Vermont is a very spiritual place - the beauty of its mountains and lakes are custom-made for a feeling of interconnectedness with the Earth and all its elements. Its size is ideal - big enough to feel like you are part of a greater whole yet small enough to retain a sense of dignity, privacy, and individuality. Politically it's bizarre - Vermonters elected the U.S. House of Representatives' only Independent (read Socialist) and yet celebrate the true meaning of conservatism. Vermont promotes an appealing mixture of allowing residents to live life as they see fit while always being there to help a neighbor and work for the common good.

Perhaps that is why so many gays and lesbians choose Vermont as their home. After all, Vermont just became the first state in the country to offer domestic partnership benefits to state employees. And even when a shocking tragedy occurs, such as the recent Vermont CARES arson, Vermonters banded together as a show of force sending out a message that this kind of violence is unacceptable.

But if you think that I am Mr. Rourke, your host, and that this is Fantasy Island, think again. Many of our gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered brothers and sisters, young and old, wrestle with coming out issues on a daily basis. The continuous act of coming out is made that much more difficult by the fact that Vermont is the most rural state in the country - a place where you cannot blend, unnoticed, into urban invisibility.

Even though many Vermont employers offer domestic partnership benefits, most do not. Of those that do offer such

benefits, some have criteria that are unreasonable and hard to meet. And some employers keep such files alongside other personnel files so supervisors have access to information many employees would rather keep, or need to keep, private.

AIDS still touches the lives of friends and lovers all around the state, the country, and the world.

So where does this leave us? Communication and connectedness are the keys. Isolation, and the closet, are our enemies. Two of the most empowering events for me over the last year were the Conference held last December by the Vermont Coalition of Lesbian and Gay Men (now known as the Vermont Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights) and the Pride Day celebrations in June. But let's not limit ourselves to two days a year at events that require excessive travel for some.

I believe that Out In The Mountains is part of the answer. I implore you to do your part to truly make this newspaper a voice for our community. Write that "Letter to the Editor" you keep putting off for another day. Make your thoughts known by responding to the question posed in the new monthly feature "Opinions in the Mountains". And if you have an interest in writing, please consider becoming a staff writer for *OITM*. Those living outside of Chittenden County are especially encouraged. Let's make this a newspaper for ALL of Vermont's gay and lesbian community.

Remember, you can always contact me by writing to *OITM* at P.O. Box 177, Burlington, VT 05402. For those who have Internet access, you may reach me at OutVermont@aol.com.

The second time my partner and I visited Vermont, we stumbled upon *OITM* at the Northshire Bookstore in Manchester. I was so excited that I brought it back to our room and read it cover to cover. I had not been introduced to the community here yet, but discovering and reading *OITM* made me feel connected. At that moment, I decided I wanted to move here. I want to thank all those who were part of *OITM* at that time and hope that you will consider reaching out through *OITM* to inspire others.