

# Out in the Mountains

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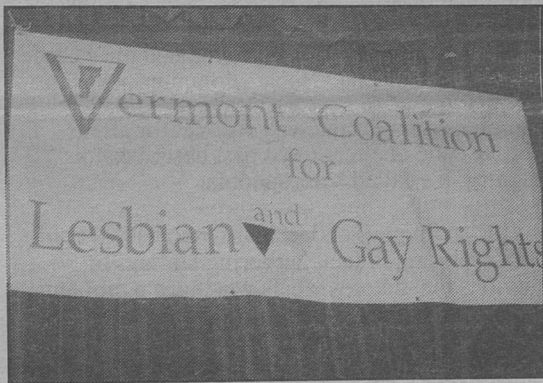
## EDUCATE! SOCIALIZE! ORGANIZE!

### Anticipating VCLGR's Queer Town Meeting '95

Joseph Watson

**MONTPELIER** -- "It's definitely reassuring to see so many people, so many faces out for the same cause." "This event is so energizing and inspiring!" "The most important aspect of the conference is looking for a boyfriend." "I went to a fabulous workshop on leadership." "The idea of the conference is great ... you get all of these people from all over the state here ... trying to connect and network with the rest of the state is very important to the community." These quotes, which appeared in the January issue of *OITM* earlier this year, are representative of how participants reacted to the 1994 VCLGR Conference.

The Vermont Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights' 1995 Statewide Conference and Queer Town Meeting, building upon the momentum of the previous two, will be held at Montpelier



(Photo: Kip M. Roberson)

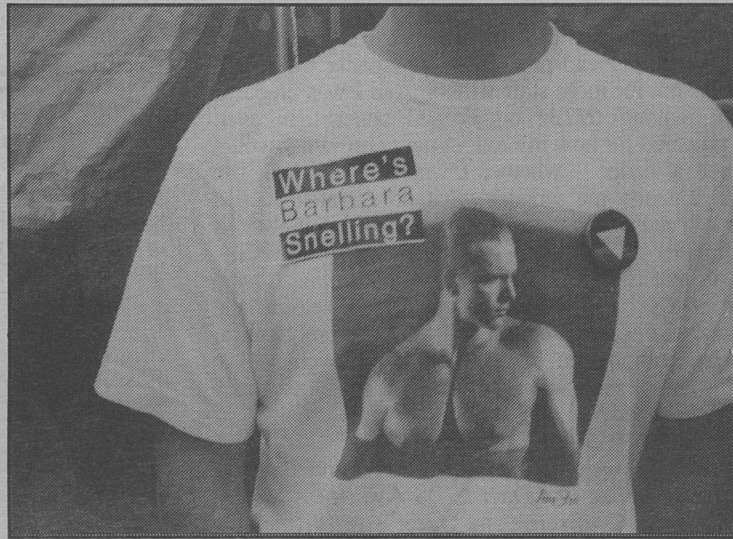
VCLGR banner at last year's Queer Town Meeting in Middlebury

High School on Saturday, October 28th from 8:30 am to 6:00 pm. Over forty workshops are planned with a wide range of topics including queer culture, health and sexuality, community leadership, same sex marriage, negotiated safe sex and AIDS prevention strategy, legislative issues, fight the right, insemination and adoption issues, religions and spirituality, censorship, transgender awareness, gay deaf community, youth, plus poetry readings, drumming, line dancing and other arts workshops.

This year's keynote speaker brings with him many years of community service and a unique perspective. Currently serving his second four-year term as a member of the City of Albany (New York) Common Council, Alderman Keith C. St. John made national history in the fall of 1989 by becoming the first openly gay African-American elected public official in the United States. After receiving degrees from Yale, Vassar, and Harvard, St. John received his Juris Doctor from Cornell Law School in 1985, and is currently a clinical instructor and staff attorney at Albany Law School, and is counsel to a private law firm there. Keith's extraordinary record of community service includes the Capital District Lesbian and Gay Community Center's representative on the Albany Police-Community Relations Board; director of the AIDS Council of Northeastern NY; chairman of the Community AIDS Partnership for the Capital Region; regional coordinator of the 1992 Clinton presidential campaign; and further service to numerous organizations. St. John introduced legislation to

Continued on page 3

## Take Me To Your Leaders: An Exploration of Leadership in the Community, Part 1



(Photo: Kip M. Roberson)

Pride Day participant protesting a decision made by community "leaders" by sporting a homemade "Where's Barbara Snelling?" sticker at this year's rally

Bennett Law

**BETHEL** -- I wrote to a number of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people with leadership experience, from all over the state, asking them to participate in "an exploration and examination of leadership within Vermont's g/l/b/t community." Nineteen people, ten women and nine men, responded for this article. I offered all participants anonymity, but many of them, as you will note, chose to be quoted "on the record." The following is the first of a multi-part presentation of their perceptions, concerns, and recommendations. This section reviews what it means to be a leader in our community, concerns regarding the seeming lack of accountability of leaders in our community, and the destructiveness of the public attacks that sometimes befall our leaders.

### Definition

"We have a strange relationship with the notion of leadership in our community. It has a lot to do with being an oppressed people and an oppressed community. We associate leadership with power and power with abuse and hierarchy and patriarchy -- we don't have a comfortable relationship with leadership. There is a reason we haven't gotten beyond this, but I don't know what it is." (anon.)

Perhaps the strongest common element of the responses was that few of our community leaders see themselves as anything more than leaders within a small niche of the community, whether it be in the bisexual awareness movement, in the fight against HIV infection and AIDS, on the political and legislative battlefields, addressing discrimination in the workplace, in Vermont's regional social organizations -- wherever their own interests, frustrations, and passions have lead them. This reflects the divergent paths of different constituencies within the l/g/b/t community, but suggests that the community lacks a cohesiveness. While many of us identify as part of the greater l/g/b/t community, the lack of specificity to this community leads some to frustration and alienation.

Continued on page 8

## Vermont State Auditor Ed Flanagan Comes Out

Paul Olsen

**MONTPELIER** -- In an August 6, 1995, Associated Press article in the *Burlington Free Press*, Vermont's State Auditor of Accounts, Edward Flanagan, disclosed his sexual orientation. In the article, titled "Gay official forgoes privacy to extinguish public bigotry," Flanagan indicated that he came out to combat some of today's anti-gay rhetoric. While the revelation of his sexual orientation did not come as a surprise to many in Vermont's lesbian and gay community, his decision is significant in that it makes him the only openly gay statewide elected official in the United States. Flanagan's disclosure was greeted with enthusiasm by many leaders of the lesbian and gay community. "Coming out is the most important thing any person can do in the equal rights movement. It is especially important for powerful public officials who can educate non-gay people and serve as role models" said Human Rights Campaign Fund (HRCF) spokesman David Hattaway.

Ed Flanagan's political career began with an unsuccessful race for Attorney General in 1988. In 1992 he was elected State Auditor and was reelected to this position in 1994. Flanagan, a Democrat, is an attorney and serves on the Vermont CARES Board of Directors. Flanagan's decision to come out publicly, the ramifications, if any, of his disclosure, and political life as a gay man. What follows are excerpts from the interview.

**OITM:** How did you come to the decision to reveal your sexual orientation now?



(Photo: Bennett Law)  
State Auditor of Accounts  
Ed Flanagan

did you accomplish it?

**Flanagan:** I'd hoped that my particular background is helpful in subverting the many stereotypes that exist. Mainstream America has

**Flanagan:** It was a combination of personal growth and maturity together with the degradation of the public dialogue and debate in Washington. I think that the bigotry and prejudices that have been explicitly expressed in Congress called for a very blunt response.

**OITM:** What did you hope to accomplish by coming out and

Continued on page 4

## OITM HISTORY: October Through The Years

**1987 ... Vermont Organizes for March** The Vermont Organizing Committee for the March on Washington is in full swing, preparing for what looks to be a major historical event in Washington, D.C., on the weekend of October 11th. Successful events thus far for the Vermont contingency include a "shopper's bargain" garage and bake sale, and a March On Washington dance at Pearls.

**1990 ... Russell Wins Primary** In an impressive finish, Howard Russell won the Democratic nomination for State Senate in the Chittenden Senate District. Russell, an openly gay man who has never run for office before, was one of the six candidates nominated in the September 11th Democratic primary.

**1994 ... AIDS Memorial Quilt blanketing Rutland** From October 30th through November 26th, portions of the AIDS Memorial Quilt will be on display in Rutland at the Chaffee Art Center and the Rutland Free Library. The Quilt was developed by the Names Project Foundation to commemorate those who have died of AIDS.