

Out in the Mountains

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Controversy at the Quilt: Issues raised at St. Mike's Names Project display

Thom Courcelle
OITM Staff

COLCHESTER -- What kind of a success was the Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt display at St. Michael's College last December? The statistics are overwhelming: approximately 7,400 people visited the Quilt; over 1,000 people attended the Community Interfaith Service which featured Jeanne White as a speaker; total contributions from various organizations in the area came to \$21,000; sales of merchandise totaling \$10,000 went to benefit the Names Project and another \$3,500 in contributions went to benefit Vermont CARES. Board members and volunteers of Project Remembrance, the host organization of St. Michael's College, spent months organizing and preparing for the event held November 27-December 2, 1995.

So who could have a problem with any of that? The moneys raised and the dedication of so many volunteers were not points of contention. Trouble started when leaders in the g/l/b community learned that St. Michael's College, as a Catholic institution and host of the event, had certain rules that had to be followed -- namely, while HIV awareness information was available and open to discussion, HIV and AIDS prevention material that included safer sex information was not allowed on the campus, nor was the distribution of condoms.

"We were stunned when, upon our arrival, we learned that AIDS prevention information would not be permitted on the premises," wrote the board of the Vermont Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights (VCLGR) in a letter to Project Remembrance, dated Dec. 4, after being invited to participate in the display's opening ceremonies. "Learning of this prohibition," the letter



(Photo: Kip M. Roberson)
Incoming OITM editor Hugh Coyle (left) with current editor Fred Kuhr. This marks Fred's last month as editor. Hugh will be taking the reins with the April 1996 issue.

continued, "the Vermont Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights considered withdrawing from the ceremony. In respect for the lives honored by the Quilt, we decided to participate and to convey to you in writing our extreme distress over your policy."

The letter harshly reprimanded Project Remembrance: "Banning AIDS prevention information from the Quilt venue dishonors the lives commemorated by the Quilt as well as the lives of all who have died as a result of the AIDS epidemic ... The type of silence you imposed has caused the deaths of thousands and will most assuredly result in the needless creation of untold numbers of additional Quilt panels."

Continued on page 6

When Holly is Near: The OITM Interview

Nat Harrison
OITM Staff

BURLINGTON -- In March, Vermont will have it all ... Politics (the primary), Spring (on the calendar), and a celebration of community with singer, producer, actor, author, activist and teacher Holly Near in concert at Burlington's Memorial Auditorium on March 7th.

Touring all over the world, she has become one of our community's finest ambassadors. For her work with originally unpopular issues such as peace in El Salvador, AIDS research, education and services, ending the blockade against Cuba, confronting violence against women and children, unlearning racism, environmental protection, disability rights and the celebration of lesbian culture, Holly was named Woman of the Year in 1985 by Ms. Magazine.

Ms. Near has 16 recordings on Redwood Records, a company she founded in 1972 and which is now a multicultural arts organization in Oakland, California. They also carry her books, *Fire in the Rain ... Singer in the Storm* and *The Great Peach March*.

On the side, Holly works in film and television. Her appearances include *Slaughterhouse Five*, *L.A. Law*, and *Dog Fight*. Her most recent recording, *Musical Highlights*, presents the songs from *Fire in the Rain*, her one woman show that played off-Broadway last year.

Despite her busy schedule, Holly was able to answer a few questions for her many Vermont fans.

OITM: So what is the name of your tour this time? Is it based on your latest CD, *Musical Highlights from Fire in the Rain*?

Holly: No, this one is going to be a regular old concert-concert.

OITM: So, what's been going on in your life the last couple of years?

Holly: Lately, my life has been very exciting, doing as little as possible. I've been performing since I was seven years old, and I'm going to be 47 this spring. I've decided to slow down, not fill up my life. It's been wonderful as an artist to allow the void. My life was filled to way overfull, and I've learned to trust the void.

OITM: I'm in my forties, too, and found myself making changes around that. Is it an age thing?

Holly: I don't really know. Maybe when I look at it in retrospect, years from now, I'll have an idea.

OITM: How do your concerts fit into this?

Holly: One weekend a month I do concerts, make a living, and keep the connections that I love. Three weeks, I spend NOT doing that. My time at home has become very valuable. I've created a home now, where before, it was someplace to keep my stuff. Now my one week of touring is special. It makes the concert really lovely.

OITM: All the women I've talked to are psyched for your March 7th performance. We're ready.

Holly: Well good! I feel that people come with their hearts wide open, receptive, maybe needy for

Continued on page 10



(Photo courtesy of St. Michael's College)

The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt on display in Colchester