

## Controversy at the Quilt:

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Deborah Dudley, co-chairperson of the VCLGR board, admitted that the letter "was written in the heat of the moment. We were very upset at the circumstances at the time." Dudley stated that the letter, proposed at a general meeting and written by four members of the board, was completed within several days of the event and "focused on what didn't happen as opposed to what did. In retrospect, we should have been much more appreciative and thanked all the people involved who worked so hard to bring the Quilt here ... They did work tremendously hard."

"We were disappointed by the restriction of prevention activity," stated Tim Palmer, Executive Director of Vermont CARES and reader at the opening ceremonies for the Quilt. He went on to say, however, that, "St. Michael's does deserve credit. In 15 years of the epidemic, no other institution has brought the Quilt to Burlington." Palmer had no problem with freely speaking about safer sex and prevention of HIV infection while manning a table during Friday's exhibition. Individuals who asked questions were verbally given any information they wanted without any hassles or objections from the St. Michael's staff.

Bob Pine, a member of the Washington, D.C.-based Names Project organization and Quilt Display Coordinator (QDC) for the St. Michael's Quilt display, stated that HIV and AIDS education is not one of the prime directives of the organization. "It recently was added as a fourth objective on our list of goals, but was not

originally part of the organization's intent. ... The purpose of the Quilt is to link the Quilt with the pandemic by putting it in context of how large the AIDS crisis is."

Pine went on to say that he hoped the atmosphere the Quilt provided would encourage people who are interested in safe sex information to link-up and make contact with people and organizations that could provide that information.

A tradition initiated by the Names Project in which panel openers at opening ceremonies wear white clothing also became an issue. The very first Quilt display had white walkways placed between the Quilt panels and Quilt workers wore white so as not to detract attention from the colorful panels themselves. Some have been concerned that the wearing of white does not take into consideration the native or traditional colors of various

groups or people of nationalities that may be represented at the ceremonies.

Former VCLGR board member Judith Beckett felt strongly enough about the issue to do some research on the subject herself. After getting conflicting answers from the San Francisco offices of the Names Project, Beckett felt the best way to address her concerns was with a handout outside the Quilt auditorium. Her handout also contained strong language and images meant to make her point that the "purity" many people associate with the color white may have negative tones for people of color: "We were told it is a 'tradition' to wear white because white was worn at the very first opening ceremony. Racism is a tradition, too."

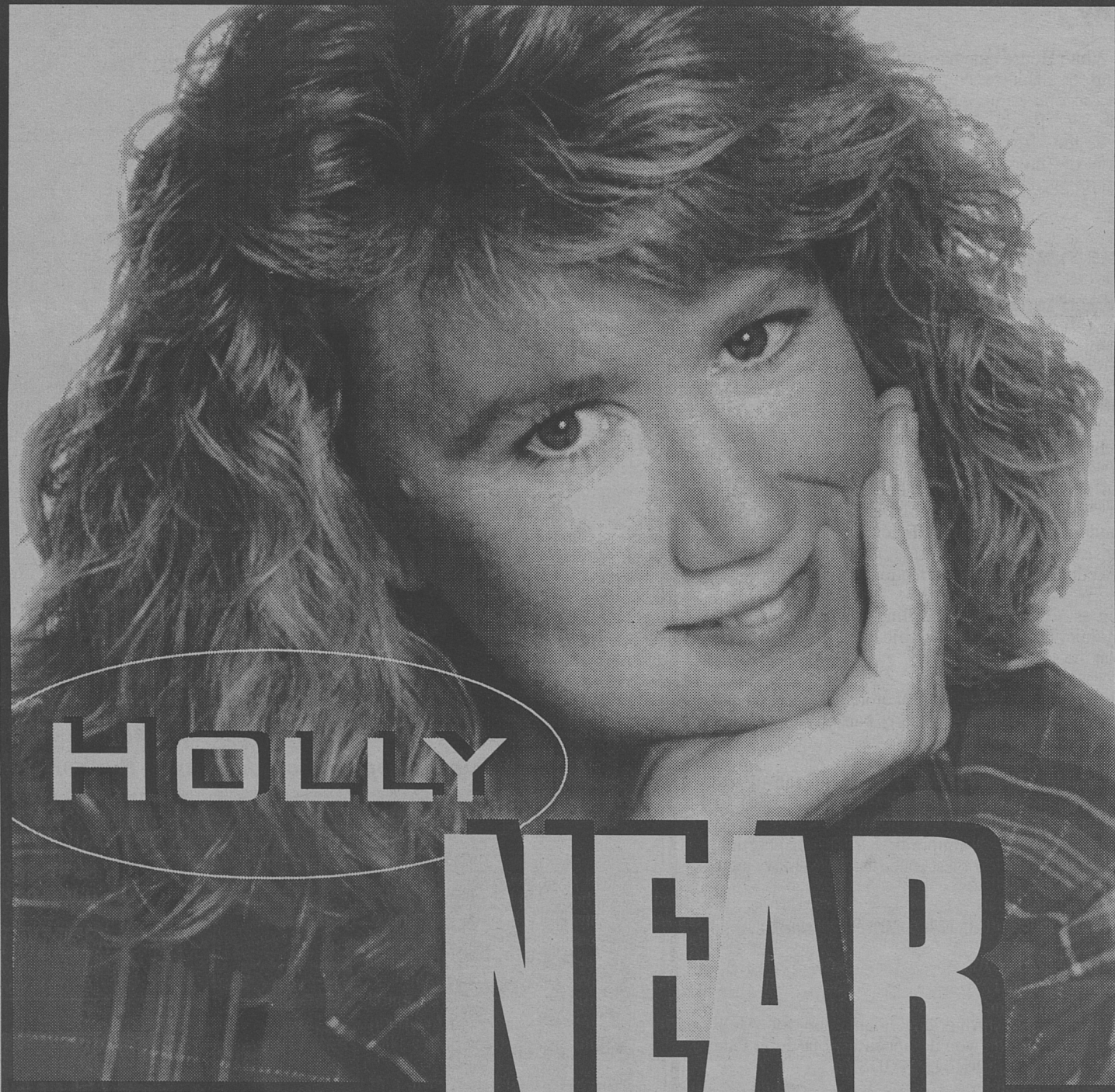
Project Remembrance, aware of this concern, had also contacted the San Francisco offices and learned that the wearing of white was not a mandatory

requirement at the opening ceremonies. In fact, a number of groups including some members of VCLGR, certain foreign representatives, as well as members of ALANA (African/Latin/Asian/Native Americans), did not wear white during the ceremony.

While Beckett still serves as VCLGR's volunteer coordinator, and used this credential on her leaflet, she was adamant in affirming that the leaflet and its distribution were her own responsibility as a result of personal conviction. "In the gay and lesbian community, we all have important concerns that shouldn't be ignored just because it is a small group that has the concern." She conveyed her feeling that the diversity of the gay/lesbian community is part of its strength, even when that diversity means differences of opinion.

As Quilt Display Coordinator, Pine was aware of many of these conflicts. His main concern was that literature such as Beckett's was not fair to the Names Project because it did not allow for rebuttal. His overall response to the event, however, was positive. "It was an amazing display. You could say that the St. Michael's display was a model for how the Quilt can obtain its objectives. The organization of the host committee was exemplary in the way that they planned months in advance. The people are to be commended on their devotion and the effect that was able to be attained by the Quilt." ▼

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