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"Our Town Meeting" in Brattleboro

by David B. Boyce

BRATTLEBORO -- The Vermont Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights will hold its fourth annual statewide Conference and "Our Town Meeting" in Brattleboro on Saturday, November 23rd, at Brattleboro Union High School. On-site registration will begin at 8:30 a.m.

The theme of this year's conference is "Politics as (un)Usual," and keynote speaker will be Beatrice Dohrn, the Legal Director of the Lambda Legal Defense Fund. Dohrn has been the legal representative in the West Virginia court case of lesbian mother Sharon Bottoms, and is active in both the gays-in-the-military case and The Marriage Project, of which the upcoming same-sex marriage case in Hawaii is an important component. Her commitment to and work for social change is evidenced by her statement, "It's a mistake to separate the legal arena from the social one, as each feeds the other in important ways. So, too, Lambda's legal and educational work constantly catalyze one another."

Claudia Brenner, author of *Eight Bullets*, will offer a special presentation during the workshop sessions entitled "Surviving Anti-Gay Violence." In 1988, Brenner survived a violent gun attack on the Appalachian Trail. Her partner was killed. With the recent attacks on the Appalachian Trail, Ms. Brenner's experience and insights into the issue will offer strategies for surviving and healing, and for social change. Workshops on recovery from trauma will be offered in tandem with this presentation.

Though the Conference is often perceived only as an opportunity for discussion of political activism, organizers wish to give equal emphasis to other interests in our communities and will offer approximately thirty workshops covering a variety of topics. One such area is "Families Valued," which will look at issues such as financial planning, responsibility, and protection in relationships; care and handling of parents, pets, and children; auto care, legal ramifications of breakups, etc.

Under the main theme of "Politics as (un) Usual," workshops will present the art of political activism in all its many manifestations. Paj Wadley-Bailey of Plainfield will offer a workshop on racism entitled "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," and requests that attendees have read in advance *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice* by Jewish writer Paul Kivel. Since the workshop space can only accommodate fifty people, Paj requests preregistration by calling her at 454-1135 or writing to her at PO Box 152, Plainfield VT 05667.

The arts and creativity in all endeavors are especially important to our communities and will be equally emphasized. Caucus time will be available for those who wish to meet and network with others sharing similar interests (professional groups, mutual interest groups, etc.). Sign-up for caucuses will take place at registration. In addition, an art exhibit and craft display will be on view, and at least one dance workshop offered.

Children's Programming will offer such activities as the making of a Peace Mural, weaving, journal writing, arts and crafts activities, as well as morning and afternoon snacks. Preregistration is highly recommended for Children's Programming.

Tentatively, the day's schedule is as follows:

8:30-9:30	Registration & Coffee
9:30-9:45	Welcoming Remarks
10-11:15	Workshops I
11:30-12:45	Workshops II
1-1:30	Keynote: Beatrice Dohrn
1:45-3:00	Lunch and Shopping
3-4:00	Caucuses/ Workshops III
4:15-4:45	Awards and Election Results
4:45-5:45	"Our Town Meeting"
5:45-6:00	Closing Remarks

CabarAIDS, a successful feature of past Conferences, will feature the gay men's a Capella singing group "Sons and Lovers" in a concert to benefit the Brattleboro Area AIDS Project. The concert will take place Saturday evening at 8 p.m., at the nearby Brattleboro Inn & Conference Center. Additional local programming is being developed, including

the possibility of Friday and Saturday evening screenings of a gay-themed film at a local movie house. Locations and times can be secured by calling the phone numbers below.

Brattleboro has much to offer attendees, and gay and lesbian owned and gay-friendly businesses will assuredly roll out their red carpets. The Rainbow Cattle Company in nearby Dummerston is an intimate bar and features a dynamic drag scene on Sunday evenings, should anyone wish to make a weekend of their Conference attendance.

Restaurants such as Peter Havens and T.J. Buckley's, and three coffee houses (Mocha Joe's, Coffee Country, and Cafe Beyond) are conveniently located downtown. Book shops abound, with Everyone's Books committed to peace and social justice and offering a large selection of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered merchandise. Others include Collected Works and the Book Cellar. Used books may be acquired at Brattleboro Books, Every Now & Then, and Mystery/Trek.

Brattleboro's Main Street is lined with specialty shops and boutiques, including Vermont Artisans, Beadniks, Kitchen Sync, and Homebody; two art galleries (Winham Art Gallery, and the Hays Gallery); a food co-op, an international award-winning bakery (Hamelman's); two microbreweries (McNeill's and the Latchis Grille); and the renovated art deco Latchis Hotel.

The Conference presents an ideal opportunity for attendees to become familiar with this charming southern Vermont town, and to reach a greater understanding of our statewide communities, as well as their similarities and concerns. We urge all members of our communities to come together to meet, to learn, to contribute, and to acknowledge and celebrate our lives.

ASL interpreters will be provided upon request by preregistration, due by November 9th. For further information, contact Carey Johnson at 258-2826, or Gabriel Q at 257-4871. ▼

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