

Out in the Mountains
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Statement of Purpose

The purpose of *Out in the Mountains* is to serve as a voice for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgendered people, and our supporters in Vermont. We wish the newspaper to be a source of information, insight, and affirmation. We also see *OITM* as a vehicle for the celebration of the goodness and diversity of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered communities here in Vermont and elsewhere.

Editorial Policy

We will consider for publication any material which broadens our understanding of our lifestyles and of each other. Views and opinions appearing in the paper do not necessarily represent those of the staff. This paper cannot and will not endorse any candidates and actions of public officials on issues of importance to lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and trans-gendered persons.

We will not publish any material deemed to be overtly racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, ageist, classist, xenophobic or homophobic.

Writers' guidelines are available on request. All materials submitted must include a name and contact number. However, within the pages of the newspaper, articles may appear anonymously upon request, and strict confidentiality will be observed.

Articles, letters, and artwork should be sent to us by the 15th of the month prior to the month of publication (i.e. January 15th for the February issue). We encourage and implore our readers to do what they can to make *OITM* a paper which represents the many voices of our communities.

Materials should be sent to:
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Editorial

"Community" First Step Toward Community Center

by Hugh Coyle

Over the past few years, a number of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered groups and individuals around the state have discussed the idea of opening a Community Center that would serve all our constituencies. For some, the Center would offer much-needed office space; others envision the Center as providing a safe alternative social space for both youth and adults. Nearly everyone agrees that such a Center would work wonders toward strengthening our political presence in the state and, in general, contribute toward the health and well-being of those within our various communities.

In her recent visit to Middlebury and Burlington, Torie Osborn emphasized the importance of community centers on both political and social fronts. As the former Executive Director of the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Community Center, she knows first-hand the value of working together to build and strengthen coalitions. Her subsequent work with both HIV/AIDS activism and as Executive Director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force only strengthened her commitment to such a vision. For many of us, a Community Center could easily be regarded as the "home" referred to in the title of Osborn's recent book, *Coming Home to America*.

Here in Vermont, the growth experienced by a number of g/l/b/t organizations, *Out in the Mountains* included, has made it necessary to seek out new office space. Financial concerns have virtually demanded the consideration of shared resources such as office space and equipment, mailing resources, and staff, both salaried and volunteer. Communication between organizations has increased, particularly as electronic media such as the

Internet and the World Wide Web gain in popularity and effectiveness.

Though we share a number of common concerns and have improved upon our own connectedness, we have yet to form the alliances necessary to lead us forward in the quest for a Community Center. Internal conflicts and agenda politics create an atmosphere of distrust, particularly when it comes to bringing together the men's and women's communities. Regionalism has also hampered our progress, since many non-Burlington groups feel rather marginalized by their Chittenden County peers. This has been made quite clear in recent weeks as a number of people in the Burlington area have expressed disdain at having to travel two or three hours south to Brattleboro for the annual VCLGR town meeting.

Even if our first Community Center were to exist in Burlington (and there are a number of reasons to favor such a situation), Chittenden County residents cannot overlook the valuable influence and support of groups from other areas such as southern Vermont and the Northeast Kingdom. Our own grass-roots origins necessitate such fluid and dynamic communication. For that reason, a VCLGR town meeting in Brattleboro makes perfect sense; it is a gesture of good faith, an active step toward meaningful outreach. It brings us that much closer toward recognizing just who it is that comprises our "community."

Without such a sense of "community," we may never be able to reach our goal of having a Community Center. For that reason, planning such a monumental undertaking will require a great deal of shared understanding and compromise, as well as an initial decision to set aside certain differences in order sim-

ply to engage in the discussion. I would argue that if we cannot achieve this first step, then we aren't yet ready for a Community Center, at least not one that could thrive and prosper. There must be some sacrifices made, whether that means sitting at the same table with groups perceived to be "this-ist" or "that-phobic," or making a three hour drive in whatever direction.

At the upcoming town meeting, there will be a caucus to discuss the viability of a Community Center for Vermont's gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people. This will be a chance for members of every group and every constituency to be present as the first tenuous steps are taken toward realizing such a goal. There is a strong likelihood that we will need new leadership on this issue, and that our standing community organizations may need to make additional commitments toward seeing such a project through.

Any Community Center we do eventually create will be just

that — a center. As such, it will stand as an intersection, the hub around which our real work, however mainstream or radical, can be accomplished. This symbolic common ground is vital for the health of our communities, particularly as we support one another on our various issues. To claim that common ground, we must all move toward one another, not away from one another. If we are to move forward at all, each of us must commit to that first step.

It's time to fully realize the meaning of the word "community," a concept that for so many years has remained ill-defined and arbitrary for one reason or another. We need to bring together an actual coalition which truly represents the various groups and organizations now working toward making Vermont a better and safer place for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people. Once we achieve that, we will be halfway home toward creating our first Community Center. ▼

ACLU-Vermont Opposes DOMA

MONTPELIER — The Board of Directors of Vermont's chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union recently issued a statement opposing passage of the so-called "Defense of Marriage Act," or DOMA. The act, signed into law by President Clinton, restricts the federal definition of marriage to one man and one woman, and allows states the option not to recognize legal same-sex marriages performed in other states.

ACLU-VT called the act "an unwarranted curtailment of individual rights based on prejudice rather than reason" in the latest issue of the *Defender*, ACLU-VT's newsletter. "ACLU recognizes that there are differences within the gay and lesbian com-

munity — as there are within the heterosexual community — about the value of marriage, but supports the right of individuals to have access to the benefits and responsibilities of state-sanctioned marriage."

Both of Vermont's Senators, Leahy and Jeffords, voted in favor of DOMA, while Congressman Bernie Sanders voted against the act when it came through the House of Representatives earlier this year. Though the offices of both Leahy and Jeffords were contacted recently by *OITM* and asked to address a statement of explanation regarding their votes to Vermont's gay and lesbian community, neither has yet submitted a response. ▼

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