

Out in the Mountains

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VERMONT'S FORUM FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER ISSUES

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FREE



Vermont-based cartoonist Alison Bechdel, creator of the popular "Dykes to Watch Out For" comic strip, offered great gift ideas at the VCLGR Town Meeting.

Coalition Holds "Our Town Meeting"

4th Annual Conference a Southern Success

by Hugh Coyle

BRATTLEBORO — Over 350 gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people and their allies attended the Vermont Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Right's Conference and "Our Town Meeting" at the Brattleboro High School on Saturday, November 25. Subtitled "Politics as (Un)Usual," the event marked the fourth time the Coalition has brought together members of Vermont's g/l/b/t communities.

Beatrice Dohrn, the Legal Director for the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, served as the keynote speaker for the event. Addressing the crowd from behind an elegantly draped podium, Dohrn encouraged the audience to cultivate a sense of self-worth and deservedness as we continue to face the challenges ahead. She maintained that "coming out of the closet" should also mean doing away with "our own community's lack of a sense of entitlement to full equality."

"It's unfortunate that we can't tempt people out of the closet with a life free from discrimination," she continued. "But why not a life free from self-hatred?"

Dohrn pointed to the case of Wisconsin high school student Jamie Nabrozky (see story on page 6 and this month's Legal Briefs column on page 9) as an example of the progress our community has made over the past ten years. She hoped that the massive settlement awarded to Jamie following years of abuse at the hands of his classmates will lead schools to "wake up" to the fact that "it's not OK to condone some abuse" just because the victim happens to be lesbian or gay.

Dohrn contrasted today's sociopolitical climate to the scene ten years ago, when only one state had an anti-discrimination law on the books and AIDS discrimination was "rampant and vitriolic." Today, we can measure our progress by counting nine states among those with anti-

discrimination laws (Vermont being one of them), as well as "widespread sensitivity" to other issues throughout the general media.

In addition to the keynote address, a number of workshops and caucuses provided learning and networking opportunities for those in attendance. A special two-part session offered by Claudia Brenner attracted a significant amount of attention. Brenner was shot eight times in 1988 while trying to protect her lesbian partner, who subsequently died. The two had been hiking and camping along the Appalachian Trail when they were shot at close range by a male attacker.

Brenner shared her story with those in attendance at the workshop, and encouraged them to use their inner strength to survive and heal from trauma. Many who came to hear her speak were themselves trying to recover from the more recent deaths of Lollie Winans and Julianne Williams in Virginia (see related story on page 7).

On a lighter note, nationally noted journalist and comedian Ed Karvoski shared his humorous approach to being gay in the '90's in his workshop "A Funny Time to be Gay: Comedy Comes Out of the Closet." Karvoski's book of the same title is scheduled for release in January.

For many attendants, one of the highlights of the conference was the chance to see the statewide premiere of "It's Elementary," a new documentary on gay and lesbian youth in the school system. Produced by Academy Award winner Debra Chasnoff and Helen Cohen, the film intends to "make a compelling case for including gay issues in multicultural education."

Several people raved about the film during the "Town Meeting" at the end of the day, and remarked that it had moved them both to laughter and tears and strengthened their commitment to help gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered youth in the classroom. The Addison County group Youth Aware plans to show the videotape in Middlebury on February 4.

A focus on youth issues also found its way into the annual Awards Ceremony. Outright Vermont was honored with the Pride Award for its ground-breaking work with

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Hawaii Judge Gives OK to Same-Sex Marriage

Final Ruling Now Rests with Hawaii Supreme Court

HAWAII -- On Tuesday, December 3, Hawaii First Circuit Court Judge Kevin Chang declared that same-sex partners were protected from discrimination by the Hawaii state constitution and, as such, had the legal right to marry. Judge Chang's decision came after months of hearing testimony in the case of Baehr v. Miike, which involved three same-gender couples who sued for the right to marry.

Chang further ordered that the three plaintiff same-gender couples be issued the licenses they desired immediately. This had the State's Attorney General scrambling for an injunction to prevent same-sex couples from getting the licenses. The state also filed its formal appeal of Chang's decision. The case will now return to the state's Supreme Court, which originally ruled in favor of the same-sex couples three years ago.

The Supreme Court's original decision held that restricting marriage to heterosexual couples constituted gender-based discrimination, which is prohibited by Hawaii's Equal Rights Amendment. Because of that ruling, it was the state, not the couples themselves, that had to shoulder the burden of providing legitimate reasons for withholding the licenses.

In his lengthy summary of the case, Chang wrote, "If the government cannot cite actual prejudice to the public majority from a change in the law to allow same-sex marriages ... then the public majority will not have a

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Election Results Bring Happiness and High Hopes

by Hugh Coyle

Welcome to Vermont, The Most Progressive State in the Nation!

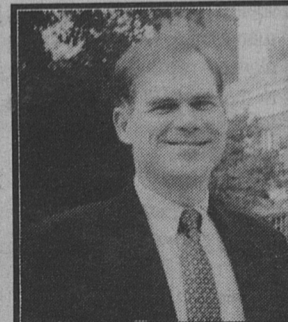
Though it's unlikely that our state's highway department will be putting up such signs at the borders anytime soon, Vermont's queer community had cause to celebrate on Election Day 1996 as Democrats and several gay-friendly Republicans were voted into the majority of offices throughout the state's government.

Of special note was State Auditor Ed Flanagan's reelection, which made him the highest-ranking openly gay elected state official in the country. Flanagan received top honors from the Victory Fund, a national group which promotes candidates from the g/l/b/t communities.

In a press release shortly after the election, the Victory Fund reported, "Consistent with their tradition of fairness and tolerance, the people of Vermont elected Ed by a ten-point margin." The group's Deputy Director went on to say that "every gay man and lesbian should feel

great pride in what Ed Flanagan has accomplished for us. Thanks to this courageous man, our community has finally broken through the lavender ceiling which has kept qualified openly gay and lesbian candidates from winning statewide office."

Mugging for the TV cameras with a floppy-faced bulldog, Flanagan took to the podium at the Democratic Party's election night headquarters and spoke with passion about Vermont's commitment to equality and human rights. He also reaffirmed his role as a watchdog of the state's accounts and promised that he would make sure taxpayers' money was spent wisely throughout the government.



Vermont State Auditor Ed Flanagan (file photo)

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