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

OUT IN THE MOUNTAINS

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State Files Response to Marriage Suit

The attorney general's office used some pretty curious language when it asked a Chittenden Superior Court judge to throw out three couples' lawsuit seeking the right of gays and lesbians to marry.

Many of the arguments Attorney General William Sorrell's office made in its 65-page filing were predictable. One of the chief points the state made was that the issue should be settled in the Legislature, not the courts.

"The social policy debate of whether to allow same-sex couples to marry should be addressed to the state's most democratic institution: the Legislature," the state said.

"That body is uniquely suited to assess the appropriateness of social change through legislative hearings and debate," it continued. "It has the capacity to examine the hundreds of laws relating to

marriage, marital status, child custody and family issues and determine which would be affected by an expansion of the definition of marriage."

But the reasons it gave for some of those arguments raise the specter of homophobia.

Some examples:

— "Reading the marriage statutes to encompass same-sex unions would lead to the incongruent result of allowing adoptive sisters to marry but prohibiting male and female adopted siblings from marrying."

— "The (Supreme) Court's rulings have noted the direct links between marriage, sexual intercourse and procreation. ... Indeed, even today, physical incapacity remains a ground upon which a marriage be annulled."

ATTORNEY GENERAL, back

photo Mari-Beth Delucia



Keynote Speaker Karen Williams "Laughs About Sex..." and other things at the 5th Annual VCLGR Conference.

300+ GLBT Vermonters Converge on Rutland for Town Meeting

BY DD TAYLOR-GARCIA

On November 8, queer folks from around the state gathered at Rutland Regional High School for the fifth annual Our Town Meeting. The Vermont Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights, which organized the conference, chose for this year's theme, "Our Family Reunion: Embracing All Shades of Lavender". Indeed, Rutland High had probably never looked more like a family gathering. Riot grrls could be seen gossiping with

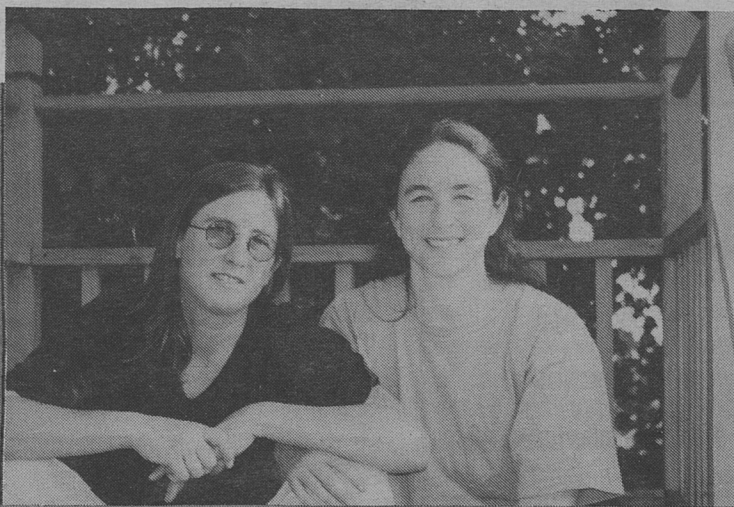
VCLGR, p23

Courtside Seats:

A Conversation with Vermont's Most Famous Plaintiffs

BY CHRIS TEBBETTS

On July 22, three couples filed suit against the state of Vermont and their respective townships after being refused marriage licenses. Vermont then became the second state, after Hawaii, to file such a suit, throwing those three couples — Stan Baker and Peter Harrigan of Shelburne; Lois Farnham and Holly Puterbaugh of Milton; and Nina Beck and Stacy Jolles of South Burlington — into the center of a national debate. On November 10, a response came from the Attorney General's office, arguing that relationships between partners of the same gender do not warrant the same state protections as heterosexual couples (see article, above). This is the third of three Out in the Mountains interviews, profiling the couples involved.



Nina Beck and Stacy Jolles

Eclipsing all other events in their lives this year was the death of Nina Beck's and Stacy Jolles' son Noah, who died this summer at age two and a half. Working to come back from that has included for them a re-dedication to their pending lawsuit. "I started this case for Noah," says Jolles, "and none of that has changed because he died." When asked at the beginning of this interview whether or not they wanted to talk about Noah in relation to the case, their reply was unequivocal: "All we want to talk about is Noah."

Beck, 42, is a physical therapist and Jolles, 39, a psychologist, directing residential programs in Burlington. The two have been together for eight years. They moved to Vermont in April of 1996, following a brief stay in North

Carolina where Noah was born, and many years of living in the San Francisco Bay area. "We moved here to have a safe place for our little boy to grow up...knowing he was one of many and not alone," says Beck. It also allowed for Jolles' adoption of Noah, followed soon after by the possibility of becoming married.

OITM: It sounds like you brought some motivation for this case with you to Vermont. Stacy Jolles: Nina had a legal relationship to Noah because she was his biological parent, and I had a legal relationship to him because I legally adopted him. But Nina and I did not have — and do not have — a legal relationship to each other.... That to me said it

PLAINTIFFS, p22

Healthy Vermonters 2000 Misses the Point

BY BENNETT LAW

What are your primary health care concerns as a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered person living in Vermont? Some that I've posed this question to have suggested our persistent need for a single-payor health care system. Others have mentioned protection against HIV transmission, addressing the challenges of sustaining health as a person living with AIDS, the increased incidence of certain forms of cancer in women who do not bear children, and relieving the stress and anxiety confronting youth coming of age in a homophobic environment.

Healthy Vermonters 2000 is the blueprint that the Vermont Department of Health is following in addressing the health needs of the citizens of Vermont. First established in 1991, this report is periodically updated to monitor the state's success in achieving a healthier population.

This year, the Office of Minority Health of the Vermont Department of Health, under the direction of Public Health Specialist Lauren Corbett, established a glbt task force with the aim of securing input on the needs of our community to the Healthy Vermonters 2000 plan. The task force was empowered to make recommendations to Vermont's Commissioner of Health regarding the appropriateness, inclusiveness, and weaknesses of the 2000 plan in addressing health needs specific to the glbt communities. Through a process that has drawn its share of critics, the Department recruited a gay man, a lesbian, a bisexual man and a transgendered woman to represent our community on this task force.

The task force was plagued by a number of problems over the course of its five meetings between June and October. The Office of Minority Health came under fire for the lack of geographic distribution in the composition of the task force, and for the narrow focus introduced by securing single representatives from each of the identified segments of the glbt community. Attendance of most of the six representatives was poor:

HEALTHY, back