

more letters

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transition. We are Vermont's identified political contact for the newly formed National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Federation which now includes all fifty states. Often times we are contacted on how we passed laws and obtained benefits that other states are just beginning to work on. Our efforts in Vermont are seen as a model for other states.

We hope our community sees the continued importance of VCLGR. For those who do not, we welcome your calls and suggestions. The next coalition meeting will be held Jan. 24th, 1998 at Gifford Medical Center in Randolph from 10 am to 1 PM. We welcome you to attend. The Coalition is willing to re-evaluate structure and focus so that it meets current need. We are also available to speak with groups or individuals, so please call us. Again, our toll free number in Vermont is 888-825-4989.

Virginia Renfrew
Keith Goslant
Karen Cayer
Duane Gajewski

[Why does it take an editorial for the coalition to tell us what it is doing? My concern and that of many in the community is that we don't know what is happening with the coalition, and the coalition has not made sure that the community knows what is going on. If the coalition is going to advocate for the community, then it needs to be more accountable to the community.]

It troubles me that even here at OITM I am effectively in the dark as well. For example, Nancy Sheltra introduced a DOMA type bill? I didn't hear about it until Bill Lippert talked about it at the conference. No one from the coalition called OITM. I have offered OITM as a resource, and will continue to offer it. OITM is a valuable tool for communication in this community, and an available one.

I'm glad to hear the coalition is doing something, maybe next time I won't have to piss you all off to find out. —Ed.]

Thanks to Chris for his thought provoking editorial last month. I think we all need to reconsider our commitment to The Vermont Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights following the conference in Rutland. The VCLGR is an indispensable asset to "the community" in Vermont. It's the only group that strives to watch out for our interests in Montpelier. Without the VCLGR, legislation restricting the rights of GLBTQ Vermonters would likely pass unnoticed until it was too late. For instance- Because VCLGR volunteers were keeping their ears to the ground in 1996, the bad first draft of the Adoption Reform Bill that would have prevented same-gender parents from jointly adopting each others natural children was changed to uphold the rights of children who have parents of the same gender. Vermont is now one of the few places in the world where the same-gender domestic partner of a natural parent can adopt the child of their partner

without that partner giving up their own parental rights. Having our voice heard in state government requires an extraordinary amount of time and skill. That's why we need hardworking VCLGR volunteers, with experience in the law and politics, to work on all our behalf.

The idea of groups becoming members of the VCLGR is a good one as long as individual membership is still cultivated. Individuals have the power to vote or call their representatives and request specific actions on specific issues. Democracy is based on individual education and participation. (There is in fact a provision in the VCLGR by-laws for "corporate memberships". Perhaps all that's needed is a volunteer to solicit and coordinate such memberships. Any takers?)

The VCLGR does other work that is important, but if the organization can keep it together enough to continue their fine work in Montpelier, we'll all be better off for it. I believe the suggestion that this important work should cease is very short-sighted and a bit naive.

Joseph Watson
Leicester

For not the first time, Paul Olsen, in his annual Holiday Gift List, slammed Vermont Gay Social Alternatives (VGSA) this time by wishing the members of the organization an audit with the comment, "What does that \$15 go for?" While I find most of his wishes amusing and appreciate his ability to use this paper for personal vendettas, his suggestion that monies collected by VGSA are being misused must be addressed.

Since 1990, VGSA has provided opportunities for gay men and lesbians to meet in comfortable, non-threatening social surroundings. Membership dues are \$15 a year. This fee underwrites the cost of producing and mailing the monthly newsletter. This newsletter not only includes organizational activities, but informs people of other groups' events (local, regional, national and international). Perhaps Paul spends money on subscriptions of magazines, membership in other organizations or has access to this information via other means, but many of our members don't - and, in many cases, don't need to. Many of our members make no effort to attend our events, but continue to support the organization precisely for this information.

Most of the events sponsored or organized by VGSA are either free or are self-sustaining. Other activities, such as hosting the annual New Year's Eve-nt (the fifth just passed), take much money to organize and advertise without any guarantee that it will break even. Any money left over from mailing the newsletter is used to make up the difference.

VGSA is also very committed to community service. The organization has hosted fund-raising events for Vermont CARES, Mens Health Project, Vermont Pride and other groups. For the past four years VGSA has sponsored an appreciation dinner for

staff and volunteers of Vermont Respite House. For the past five years VGSA has assisted with a holiday party for the residents of St. Joseph's Home for the Elderly. Most of the money and items needed for these projects are donated by members, however, some organization money may be used for any shortfall.

It bothers me that Paul felt he had to air his unfounded suspicions in this paper. The VGSA Steering Committee meetings have always been open to members and members have always been encouraged to attend and participate in meetings. If Paul had questions, all he had to do was ask. But apparently it's easier and, in this case, more fun, to make not-so-subtle accusations in print rather than search for facts.

I would like to suggest to Paul that if he feels that he's not getting his money's worth from his membership, that he not renew again. Or perhaps he could become an active - rather than a distractive - member of this fine organization.

Bob Bolyard
Burlington
Former VGSA Steering Committee member

[Paul Olsen responds: Does this mean I'm not a candidate for the 1997 Real Mason VGSA Member of the Year award? P.S. Release the financial statements.]

correction

A letter from Autnum Venezia and Alison Hilber criticizing the flaws of the Burlington Women's Council and some of its members past and present (December 1997) was not printed as it was received due to an error in transcription. We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused.

The paragraph that was misprinted should have read as follows:

"However, it is unfortunate that that issue[whether or not Jennifer Matthews is homophobic] has seemingly overshadowed what we see as the major flaw in Jennifer's leadership style: she makes unilateral decisions without communicating with or consulting the Council as a whole. That was the major issue in July and should be the major issue now. When Jennifer hears that a large number of Council members object to her leadership decisions, she should be strong enough to address the issues with them and consider a possible change in style that better serves the organization rather than a style that serves her ego."

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