

OUT IN THE MOUNTAINS

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FREE

inside OITM

ARE YOU HIP TO T.I.P.?

▼ Full-marriage coverage and updates, p8, 10, 19

HEALTH & WELLNESS

▼ Look into the life of Esther Rothblum, p23



NEW! ▼ 8-page center pull-out arts & entertainment section

▼ Saga & Sage advice column, p18

▼ The OITM Travel Guide, p17

Mansfield Union Loses Its 'Balance'

■ Local high school schedules and then postpones "ex-gay" counselor for talk

BY CHRISTOPHER MOES

Mount Mansfield Union High School found itself in the middle of a controversial practice last month when it scheduled an appearance by an "ex-gay counselor" to give a talk on "Why I decided not to be gay."

The school's associate principal, Joe Corasaniti, insisted that the appearance was intended to balance a performance by local musician Craig Mitchell, who is gay.

But the appearance by counselor Mark E. Williams was postponed at the last minute when Mitchell failed to show up for his own performance. Mitchell denied that he refused to appear out of pro-

test. He said there were "personal reasons" for his absence.

Still, the fact that the school would schedule a speaker from such a controversial movement as the ex-

gay ministries has created an ongoing debate.

Williams is the director of New Journey, a part of the ex-gay movement. Many conservative Christians believe that with prayer and counseling

one can overcome homosexuality. The theory has come under a great deal of fire, most recently from the American Psychologi-

APR 10 1998

EX-GAY, p20

VT Supreme Court allows military recruiters on law school campus

BY BENNETT LAW

Gay and lesbian students were among those vying for positions in the JAG (Judge Advocate General) Corps, the military's legal team that aggressively prosecutes gays and lesbians in the military, in controversial interviews conducted on the Vermont Law School (VLS) campus this past February.

The Association of American Law Schools (AALS), of which Vermont Law School is a member, has a policy prohibiting member schools from hosting recruiters for employers that discriminate. This prohibition would clearly extend to the US military, a known discriminator against gays and lesbians.

According to current interpretations of a federal law known as the Solomon Amendment, though, schools that bar access to recruiters for the US military may be denied defense funding, Perkins Loans, and work-study funding. A host of undergraduate and law schools around the country, including law schools in Oregon and Connecticut, have lost their federal funding for non-compliance with the Solomon Amendment. The students of Vermont Law School currently benefit from roughly \$400,000 of this federal financial aid each year, and a number of them feel dependent on its continuation.

On November 6, 1997 the school's administration convened a public forum, attended by professors and members of the Alliance, a coalition of gbt and supporters in the VLS commu-



Andrew Tarasevich unsuccessfully sued Vermont Law School to prevent the military from recruiting on campus.

nity, to consider the options available to the school in addressing any potential requests for access by military recruiters. The JAG Corps had not made the trip to South Royalton to conduct interviews at VLS since the AALS policy was enacted in 1990, but the military, with its well-known "don't ask don't tell" policy regarding homosexuality, and the law school, with an anti-discrimination policy in place since 1986, were on a likely collision course.

In what seems like a reversal of roles, Dean L. Kinvin Wroth, somewhat of an activist, explored options with a student body that ultimately adopted a more conservative, conciliatory stance. While some students worried openly about the potential loss of their federal aid, it became readily apparent that not only did straight VLS students want the chance to interview locally with the JAG Corps, but gay and lesbian members of the Alliance wanted to interview as well. The Alliance chose not to oppose visitation by military recruiters, on the basis that it didn't want to restrict the choices of its members and other students.

Nothing undermines a civil rights struggle faster than the ambivalence of the abused, but many of the students saw justice in their position. Reported Michael Mercer, co-chair of the Alliance, "we didn't want to tell other students what they could or could

not do. That's what happens to gays and lesbians constantly - another group trying to control their behavior. We didn't want to oppress our oppressors." Added his co-chair, David-Eric A. Dayton, "I don't want to oppress anyone any more than I want to be oppressed."

For the gay and lesbian students who ultimately interviewed with the JAG Corps, oppression isn't an issue. The JAG Corps offers students fresh out of law school the chance, as officers of the military, to practice litigation without having to put in years of virtual indentured servitude in the back rooms of a private law practice. The JAG Corps is seen by some students, confronting huge student loan debt, as offering highly paid government positions with all of the attendant civil service benefits, including attractive opportunities for travel. The draw is so powerful that one of the interviewees, when asked how it might be to face a life in which sublimation of so elemental an aspect of identity as sexual orientation, replied, "I try not to think about it."

Dean Wroth, frustrated that his school and others were being blackmailed by the federal government into sacrificing their strongly held anti-discrimination ideals on behalf of economically needy

HIV/AIDS Services updated in Bennington

BY ALICE MAZUR

The Bennington HIV/AIDS Service Program began in July 1997 through the working of the AIDS Consortium and the Brattleboro Area AIDS Project to bring a program to Bennington that followed the Quality Assurance Standards set down by the Vermont Health Department.

Part of the program was to assess the needs of the Bennington Community. Although the initial services were directed toward people infected with the HIV/AIDS virus, it soon became apparent that little was going on in the area of education and prevention.

The Bennington Service Program enlisted the help of Elaine and Teddy DePrince. Teddy is 17 and has AIDS. He has lost two brothers to the virus. Elaine and Teddy spoke to students in area schools and received a very favorable response from students around Teddy's age.

This led the way to the formation of a Gay-Straight Alliance for adolescents. Eight students attended the first meeting on February 4 and the numbers have increased at each meeting since then. There is also a MSM group forming with the help of Carey Johnson from Brattleboro.

The needs of people living with AIDS is a constant concern in the Bennington area. The funding for medications is high on the list, as is the need for HOPA housing spaces.

Because AIDS is often a dual disease, the Bennington agency is fortunate to have a drug and alcohol counselor and two psychologists on the advisory board. The board also includes PLWAs, mental health professionals, social workers, HIV/AIDS counselors, two students from the Gay-Straight Alliance group, as well as other concerned persons.

The agency doors are open to students after school and testing is available for anyone who feels they may have been involved in a risky behavior. Gay, lesbian and straight adolescents know they have a place to come and feel free to talk about who they are and how to protect themselves from risk.

PROGRAM, p5

VERMONT, p20