

## Chiltern Mountain Club Celebrates 20th Anniversary

Chiltern Mountain Club, New England's Outdoor Recreational Club for gays, lesbians, and their friends will celebrate its twentieth anniversary this month. The Vermont chapter will mark the occasion on April 25th with a wildflower walk at Shelburne Pond and a bicycle ride from Waterbury through Middlesex and back through Moretown. The "home chapter" in Boston will celebrate with a return to the first site, Wachusett Mountain on the same date. That event will encompass a full range of outdoor activities, as well as dinner and contra dancing.

Chiltern began in Boston in 1978 when several people from the Unitarian Universalist gay group of the time decided they wanted to spend more time in outdoor interests. They advertised a hike up Wachusett in the Gay Community News and 20-30 people showed up in the designated parking lot. Sturgis Haskins, one of the founders, reported that, with no one knowing each other, the assembly involved a lot of looking at each other from inside cars until he stood out in the middle of the lot. "Eventually people started to wander over very tentatively and that's how we connected to start the hike. Some people were so shy that they didn't even do that, and simply followed the rest of the group at some distance during the hike."

In the first years, the club gradually became more formal, adding dues and a mailing list, and the policy that all events had to have an outdoor focus and not just be an excuse for partying. From the start, the club was composed of women and men. They sought a simple name that did not overtly proclaim gayness. Chiltern was chosen because Haskins had always liked the name since he saw it in a 1890's Bar Harbor Cottage Directory. The "cottage" was a mansion, whose gates still stand on Mt. Desert Island. One big step forward for the club was its first ad in the

Appalachian Mountain Club newsletter, which was initially refused. The refusal was protested to the AMC Board of Directors and a debate ensued. When the dust had cleared, not only was the ad approved but one member of the board had come out to the others. In fact, the ad was run free as an apology.

Since those days the club has grown steadily. It now has over 1,500 members across New England. While most of these are in the Boston area, the recent creation of local chapters has helped the club grow throughout the region. Members of the club lead events throughout the year, with 5-6 events most weekends. Activities regularly include hiking, biking, skiing, and canoeing, but have extended to practically every outdoor activity imaginable. Extended tours, such as upcoming visits to Costa Rica, Patagonia, England's Lake District, and Mount Rainer, supplement the local events.

The Vermont chapter was founded in 1996 by Bob Bland, a former club president who became a Vermont addict through frequent Chiltern visits, finally giving up visiting in favor of living here. In its first full year of activity, the chapter doubled its membership, to more than 50, and was experiencing attendance of 20-30 people on many of its easier local events.

For more information on the 20th anniversary events, the Vermont chapter, or the club in general, contact: Susan Baker (802) 223-5444 sbaker@inc.org \* Bob Bland (802) 333-9448 bland@sover.net \* Bill McBroom (802) 229-5910 \* Chris Sellars (802) 244-7726 grunhaus@aol.com \* or Ross Sneyd (802) 583-1299 SkiCyclist@aol.com.

## DEAN

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**OITM:** In the recent budget negotiations your administration opposed a \$100,000 increase in funding for AIDS services. In light of the fact that there has been a 65% increase in the number of people with HIV being served by AIDS service organizations in Vermont, why did you oppose the increase?

**Dean:** Because we have a bottom line that we have to meet. Every organization has a litmus test where we want more money for our organization. Unfortunately for me I'm in the position where I have 350 items in the budget. If every one of those 350 people comes and demands another \$100,000 I've got a \$35 million problem. Obviously this doesn't have anything to do with my views on AIDS or the gay and lesbian community. It has to do with the sanctity of the bottom line of the budget. I suspect that a good portion, if not all, of that money will be in the final budget.

**OITM:** In November you met with a group of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth from Outright Vermont. What did you learn at that meeting?

**Dean:** It really was a very emotional experience for me. It was one of the two most emotional things I'd done this year. What I really came away from that meeting was admiring the courage. There's an enormous amount of guts that it takes. It's one thing to be an adult and be gay and have to deal with all the things that a gay or lesbian adult has to deal with in our society. It's another thing to be a kid and be in a high school society where I think homophobia is not only more prevalent but also almost politically correct in some ways. I think the task of gay and lesbian students in high schools is five hundred times worse than the task of adults in the similar society. Their burden is so much greater because of the culture of high schools partly because sexual identity is a very scary issue for all adolescents. Because all adolescents are scared they make it worse on anybody who is different. So I came away with enormous courage. They asked me to write a letter, which I did. I've also agreed to go to Cabot to talk to the gay and lesbian alliance there and to talk to the gay and lesbian alliance at U32.

**OITM:** To date you have not taken a public position on same gender marriage. For the record, what is your position on the right of same gender couples to marry?

**Dean:** I'm still not going to take a public position on that. I think that my view is that's in the courts. It's a very, very difficult issue. Since it is in the courts I'm going to let the court case play out.

**OITM:** Do you think that gay and lesbian Vermonters have a right to know your position on this issue when deciding whether or not to support you?

**Dean:** If I had a position I'm sure they would have a right to know it, but I don't have a position right now. Unfortunately there are two very important principles that are clashing. One is the traditional view of Judeo-Christian marriage as a heterosexual institution. The other is a civil rights issue. I've had long conversations with the Freedom to Marry Task Force, before they ever filed their suit, over how to deal with this whole issue both from a political point of view and from a moral point of view. I don't think there is an easy answer. Since nothing is going to happen on this issue in the legislature until the court speaks there's no particular reason for me to take a public position on it.

**OITM:** Attorney General Bill Sorrell feels that this issue should be decided in the Legislature while you feel it should be decided in the courts. Who is right?

**Dean:** It is going to be decided by the courts first and then it may also have to be decided by the legislature so we may both be right.

**OITM:** How will you respond if the Supreme Court upholds the right of gay men and lesbians to marry?

**Dean:** The Supreme Court is the law of the land.

**OITM:** Would President Dean have signed the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA)?

**Dean:** No.

**OITM:** How do you feel about Take it to the People's (TIP) proposal to amend Vermont's Constitution to prohibit same gender marriage?

**Dean:** I would oppose that. I really think we have to see what the courts are going to say before we get all hyped up about what we're going to do or what we're not going to do. I'm not going to support any bills or constitutional amendments or anything of that sort until after we see what the courts do.

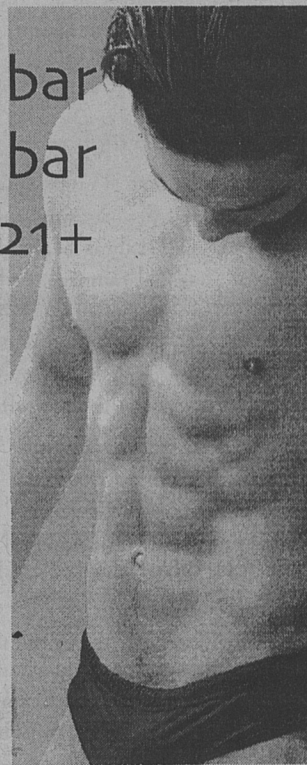
**OITM:** What is your position on the bill proposed by Nancy Sheltra (R-Derby) that would make same gender marriage in Vermont illegal?

**Dean:** I don't support that. I think we have to see what the courts say before we react preemptively.

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**Benefit for Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force**