

# OITM IS EVERYWHERE

Adamant	Adamant Co-op	Annie's Bookstore
Barre	Barre Books	Book King
Bennington	Bennington Free Library	Season's Circle
	LGBA@Bennington College	Vermont CARES
S. Burlington	Bennington HIV/AIDS	The Edge
	Spice 'n' Nice	Coffee Exchange
S. Royalton	United Counseling Service	Barnes And Noble
	SVC	South Burlington Community Library
Berkshire	South Street Cafe	Hannah's Cafe
Brattleboro	Old Jolly Store	Vermont Law School Library
	Brattleboro Area AIDS Project	Old Schoolhouse Books
Springfield	ALANA Community Program	New Beginnings Women's
	Brattleboro Food Co-op	Support
St Albans	Everyone's Books	Morning Star Cafe
	Rainbow Cattle Company	Springfield Co-op
St. Johnsbury	Save The Corporations	Rail City Market
	Mocha Joe's	Jeff's Main Seafood
Bristol	Bristol Market	Chow, Bella
	Kingsland Bay School	Bellows Free Academy
St. Johnsbury	Bristol Bakery	Planned Parenthood
	State of VT Reg. Library	Natural Provisions
Burlington	STWENTY FIVE + LOCATIONS	St. Johnsbury Athenaeum
	Cabot HS GSA	Northern Lights
Castleton	College STEP Learning Center	Bookshop & Cafe
	Misty Valley Books	Umbrella Women's Center
Stowe	St. Michael's College	Vermont CARES
	Video Town	Food for Thought
Underhill	Sterling College	Memorial Library
	Craftsbury Public Library	Video Exchange
Waterbury	Greenhope Farm	KC's Bagel Cafe
	Westford	Planned Parenthood
White River Junction	Loretta's	Westford Public Library
	Fair Haven Free Library	Upper Valley Food Co-op
Williston	Buffalo Mountain Coop	Paradise Corner
	Galaxy Books	Bread & Beyond
Winooski	Main St. Museum	The Bookrack
	CVU	18 carrots
Woodstock	Good Times Cafe	MASSACUTSETTS
	College Counseling Center	Glad Day Bookshop
Boston	Tones	We Think the World of You
	French Press	Third Wave Books
Northampton	Garden Market	NEW HAMPSHIRE
	Lyndonville	Highlands Inn
Bethlehem	Jon's Automotive	Concord Feminist Health
	Lyndon State Project EXCEL	Center
Concord	Center	New Hampshire Citizens
	Woodknot Book Shop	Coalition for LG Rights
Hanover	Isley Public Library	Gay Info Line
	Middlebury Natural Food Coop	Dartmouth Bookstore
Keene	Addison County Women in	Dartmouth College, Collis
	Student Activities	Hanover Food Co-op
Lebanon	Vermont Book Shop	Bookland
	Vermont CARES	Acorn
Littleton	Gary Library	Bean Gallery
	Dawnland Center	Hanover Coop
Manchester	Hunger Mountain Co-Op	Healthy Rhino
	Elkins	Frontrunner
New London	Counseling Ctr. of N. VT	Colby-Sawyer GLBA
	VT PWAC	Cafe Chimes
North Conway	State Street Market	NEW YORK
	Morrisville	Blairs
Plattsburgh	Morristown Centennial Library	SUNY Plattsburgh Campus
	Appletree Natural Foods	Plattsburgh State Library
Life	Moore Free Library	SUNY Plattsburgh LGBA
	Woodknot Bookshop	Plattsburgh Coop
Canton	Newport Natural Foods	Unitarian Universalist Church
	Brown Public Library	Capitol Dist. Gay & Lesbian Center
Albany	Norwich Bookstore Inc.	New York City
	Winooski Valley Food Coop	Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop
Putney	Goddard Gay/Lesbian Alliance	A Different Light
	Maple Valley Country Store	ELSEWHERE
Washington D.C.	Putney Library	Lambda Rising
	Putney Co-op	Philadelphia
Philadelphia	Kimball Public Library	Giovanni's Room
	Vermont Technical College	Montréal
L'Androgyny	Daily Bread	L'Androgyny
	Rutland	PFLAG
Rutland	Grace Congregational Church	Rutland
	Rutland	Rutland

## Coming Out in the Classroom

BY MICHAEL C. ALBERO

He was a student many wanted to help, but nobody knew what to do. Quiet, reserved, sincere and living very within himself, he obviously suffered from depression. After failing to meet the requirements for graduation, he returned to U-32 high school the following year intent on completing the curriculum.

Despite long conversations with Maggie Desch, a science teacher, and her frequent reassurances that he could share anything, life's problems soon proved too overwhelming. "I saw him... in the art area working by himself [one day] and it kills me just to think of the look he gave me," said Desch. Suffering a great deal and feeling "misunderstood," he dropped out of school and never returned. Although he seldom stated the problems with which he was trying to cope, Desch believed he was struggling with issues of sexuality, and she cannot forget him even two years later. It was then when she first realized the importance for gay teachers to be open about their orientation, and she made the decision to come out in the classroom.

Like Desch, who felt she "dropped the ball" in failing to connect with the troubled youth, many gay teachers now feel an obligation to share their sexual orientation with students. "There is only so long that you can live in the closet," says Desch. "It becomes so confining and it does so much damage, not only to you, but to everyone around you."

Barry Mitchell has witnessed the destruction first hand, as he fought through a disastrous marriage, only coming out to himself two years ago. A media technician at U-32 high school, Mitchell believed he "owed it to the kids to be out. [After] reading books and articles, like *One Teacher in Ten* by Kevin Jennings... I [realized] I was not doing myself or anybody else a favor by remaining in the closet." Others, like Joe Spinella, a third and fourth grade teacher at Hanover Street School in New Hampshire, felt an obligation to students because, "...it's who I am as a person. I have a partner and an adopted family. It would be a chore to make up that big piece of my life."

While making the decision to come out can be difficult, devising a method to disclose the information has been remarkably easy for some. For instance, Spinella holds a discussion on families at the beginning of each school year. "We talk about how each family has a different make-up. Some children don't have grandparents, other parents don't live together, still more have two mommies and two daddies. My children live with two men."

For Mitchell, the opportunity presented itself when Desch asked him to participate in a class discussion involving sexuality and the experience of growing up gay. "I didn't even hesitate. I just decided to go in and do it. At first they were surprised, and they all went off and discussed it. Then they came around and said, 'We don't have a problem with it.' They basically think you just hate women. So, whenever I get the opportunity, I try to give them a little insight... [into my life]. It was the first time I came out in public and it was a great experience," said Mitchell.

As a result of coming out to their students and co-workers, several teachers have witnessed key changes within their schools. At U-32 high school in East Montpelier, a group named "Common Ground" has been established to deal with all aspects of diversity, but the major focus is sexual orientation. While the health teacher at the school, "has always struggled with the issue," according to Desch, "he now comes into classes and talks about sexuality."

However, the most significant change that has occurred throughout the school system is in the language of students. While abusive words, like 'queer, dyke' and 'faggot' continued to be used by many, the frequency with which they are spoken has decreased tremendously. Students are now aware of the hurt these words cause, and consider the ramifications before speaking.

Although there are many benefits to coming out in the classroom, some teachers continue to keep their sexuality a secret from students. Paul, a school teacher in the central Vermont area, fears the community reaction. In a recent lunchroom conversation with a fellow co-worker, whose child also attends the school, he had to struggle to keep his emotions in check. "We were talking about a foster child who had two gay foster parents... She brought up how kids should not have gay parents because it was not right and being gay is not okay." Another conflict which added to his anxiety involved disciplinary measures taken within the school. "I asked this student to sit down and he refused. I told him to sit and he said, 'You are nothing, but a fucking fag!' Then he walked out the door. He was only suspended half a day and his letter of apology was three lines long. It said, 'I am sorry for calling you a fag. I will try not to do it again.'" Further uneasiness was felt at an in-service dealing with sexual harassment. According to Paul, "A series of yes and no questions were asked. One involved homophobia and over fifty percent of the people admitted to having done something homophobic recently."

Even for those teachers who are relatively out about their sexuality, dangerous situations sometimes arise. Last fall at Spaulding high school, Lisa Lemieux, a driver education teacher, had to deal with a vengeful tactic from one of her students. "She failed my class, and the next day her mother came in and told the counselor I had... touched her daughter." An immediate investigation was conducted, in which Lemieux was interviewed twice by an assistant principle. "They did an initial interview and she [the assistant principle] asked me some questions. The next day was a much more detailed interview. She asked me the same questions, and I gave her the same answers. Then she asked me the questions again, but [only then] did she write down the answers." A similar process was conducted with the student, and several discrepancies arose in her story. The mother then called the school and apologized for her daughter, while Lemieux was cleared of all charges.

The decision to come out in the classroom remains a heated topic of discussion in most educational circles. For those who may be considering such an action, though, Jeanne Comuche, a third grade teacher at South Royalton School, offered the most practical approach. "Start with one person at a time. It's not like you have to come out at a faculty meeting. Come out one faculty member at a time. That's what I did, and it wasn't as bad."

### Editorial

*continued from page two*

come out to do so much for their community. It always amazes me when people don't do something they had committed to and almost always the reason is because they were busy doing something else for their community. I am proud to work with people who are able to see a far off goal and come together and work on it.

I am proud to work with a healthy mixture of gay men and Lesbians. It often feels like gay men and women have so little in common, even on a basic level, our bodies and our attractions are different. Every time we come together to work our differences become inconsequential.

I am proud how we seek out diversity, I only wish Vermont had a greater diversity of people to reach out to. It is no small task as anyone can tell you and we have work to do. I am proud to share a community with groups like TRANS and BiNet who remind us that we are not all the same but that we are all in the same boat.

I am proud of this paper, and the twenty or thirty people that come together in some form or another every month to contribute in some way to create a paper that speaks for and informs a community, I only hope that this paper is something that the community can be proud of.