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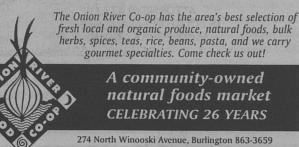
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voices from the mountains

the changing face of

by Skeeter Sanders

It's been a little over a month since GLBT Vermonters celebrated Pride Day in Burlington and millions more celebrated Pride around the worldincluding the longest-stretching Pride parade in history, a fivemile-long march in Paris on June

However, the Pride Season is not quite over yet. By the time many of you read this, the last major Pride celebration of 1998 in North America will have taken place north of the border in Montreal, as Quebec's GLBT community celebrates Divers/ Cite from July 29 to August 2. Montreal's celebration is held in August instead of June to avoid conflicting with Quebec's Fete Nationale holiday on June 24 (St. Jean-Baptiste Day), a two-century-old celebration of pride in being French-Canadian.

And 1999 will see the biggest Pride celebration yet, as GLBTs the world over mark not only the last Pride season of the 20th century, but also the 30th anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising in New York, which is credited with launching the modern gayrights movement.

And in a wonderful coincidence, the actual anniversary of the June 27, 1969 Stonewall Uprising will fall next year on the last Sunday of June- The traditional "Stonewall Sunday" when the GLBT Pride Season reaches its peak in number of celebrations and in attendance.

As a native New Yorker who was just 16 years old at the time of the Stonewall Uprising, never in a million years would I have imagined that three decades later, not only would GLBT Pride celebrations draw millions of spectators, but would also draw major corporate sponsorships. Toronto's Pride Parade on June 28 drew 750,000 spectators (Sydney, Australia's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade is the all-time attendance champion, with 800,000 people in attendance).

Nor would I have imagined that a GLBT Pride Parade would be telecast live from start to finish on a major commercial TV station. But that's exactly what has happened in San Francisco, where an estimated 1.2 million Bay Area viewers watched the parade on the WB Network affiliate, KOFY-TV (This on top of the 500,000 spectators who lined up to 10deep along the 2.5-mile parade

Still, that pales in comparison to Sydney. The Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade was telecast live, in

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GLBTs the world

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prime time and nationwide on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, which is to the land Down Under what the BBC is to Britain and CBC is to Canada.

After three decades, Pride Day has become an in-

stitution. In addition, it just keeps growing and growing, drawing spectators from all occupations, including a growing number of entire families with children. You know it's Pride Day when you see rainbow flags hanging from lampposts and store windows. Indeed, the rainbow colors have become such a dominant symbol of GLBT pride in the last 10 years that you hardly see pink triangles anymore. And when was the last time you saw the Greek letter lambda?

It was not always this way. It's hard for many GLBTs under 30 to imagine that it took incredible courage and perseverance to hold a march to celebrate what was then known as gay liberation. What is now a festive celebration of GLBT pride began as a protest against discrimination, intimidation and violence.

Those early-'70s marchers braved hoots, catcalls, and frequent threats of physical violence and actual violent attacks to stage their march. And they were

marches, not parades. Much like the civil-rights protest marches of the early '60's, the early gay-liberation marches had a definite political purpose-and, given the temper of those times, extremely radical acts.

In the late '70's, the gay pride parades—particularly in San Francisco and Los Angeles-became wild and woolly celebrations of sex and eroticism, reflec-

> tive of the sexual revolution which had reached its peak during the disco years. Bars and bathhouses were heavily represented.

> In the early '80's, as AIDS reared its devastating head, the mood of many gay-pride events was far more somber. The 1984 Lesbian/Gay Freedom Day Parade in San Francisco felt more like a funeral pro-

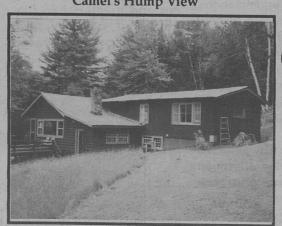
cession than a celebration of gay pride, as contingents from groups dedicated to the fight against AIDS dominated the parade.

The big turnaround came in 1989—the 20th anniversary Stonewall- when GLBTs realized that a new generation had come of age in the two decades since the uprising. This new generation was coming out more assertively and at a much earlier age than the "Stonewall Generation"—and meant that there was now turning back for the gay-rights movement.

Now, as the 30th anniversary of Stonewall approaches, Pride Day is changing yet againnot only into an institution that Corporate America is paying attention to, but also into our own version of Thanksgiving Day, as we take time to celebrate not only our pride, but also to give thanks to the many, many GLBT pioneers whose determination and sacrifice made our present-day Pride celebrations possible.

I can't wait till next year!

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