

New Foundation Dedicated to Vermont GLBT Community

photo: Scot Applegate

BY CAROLYN ASHBY

Bill Lippert has been a part of many of the organizations that sustain the GLBT community in Vermont: Vermont Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights, Out in the Mountains, Outright Vermont, Vermont CARES, and Pride. Now, another seed that Lippert planted and nurtured is blooming: the Samara Foundation of Vermont.

Lippert noticed patterns in his community work and personal life. Every time a GLBT community initiative or organization started up, money and resources

were always a critical first issue. He saw aging friends becoming aware of getting older and younger friends facing their mortality due to the AIDS epidemic. With no family or no family ties and often few friends, how should they apportion their estates?

These patterns merged into a single thought for Lippert following two particular deaths. One older man, wanting to leave his estate to a GLBT organization but not knowing of one in Vermont, left fifty thousand dollars

to the Lambda Legal Defense Fund. Another acquaintance became ill and died suddenly, leaving his estate to his local church at which he had been totally closeted.

Lippert thought, "Wow, if only I had been able to offer them a way to leave that money to our community, in Vermont." This seed began to take root in his imagination in the late '80s when he paid a visit to the Pride Foundation in Seattle, WA.

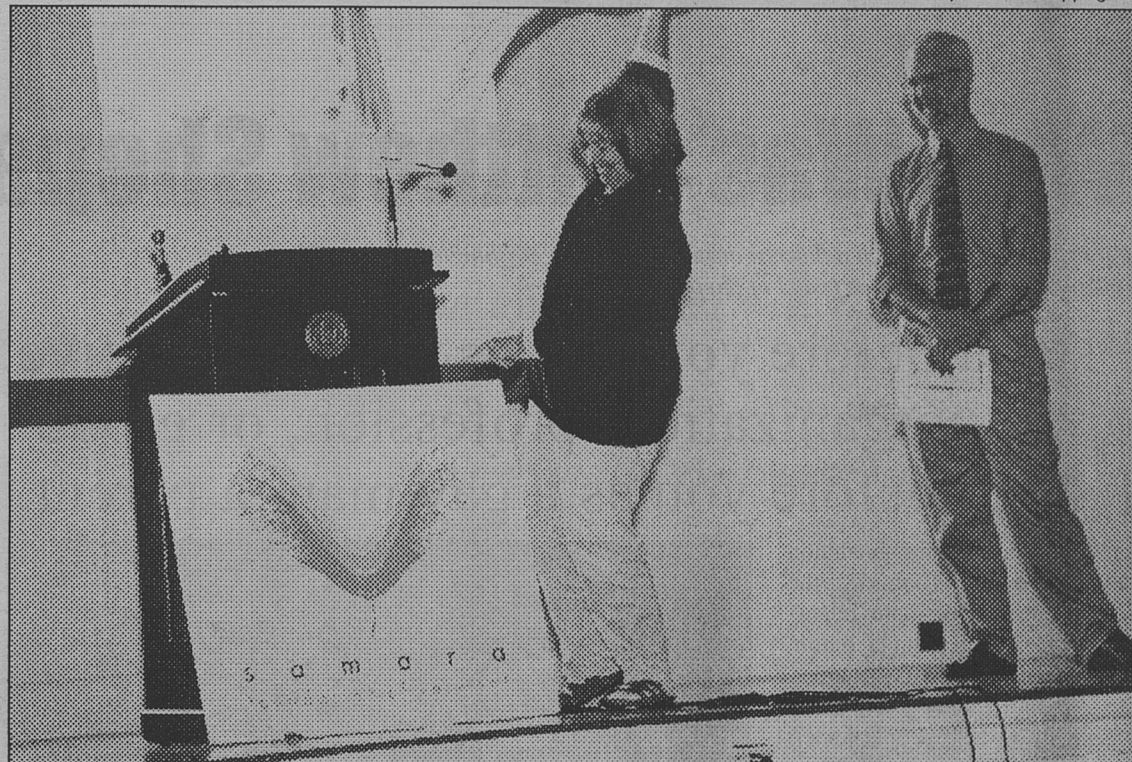
A fledgling organization, the Pride Foundation was functioning as a sort of gay United Way and was also becoming a vehicle for bequests. This example inspired Lippert to discuss with friends the possibility of a similar foundation for Vermont, but no one knew quite how to do it.

Attorney David Curtis discussed a special fund with the Vermont Community Foundation in Middlebury, but ultimately decided it would be best to create an organization that could be politically autonomous.

Enter Bob Mundstock. He was a candlemaker in Weybridge, coming out of a marriage when he met Lippert. Mundstock moved to Montpelier, switched to painting and glasswork, got involved with Out in the Mountains and VT CARES, and discovered that he was HIV+.

Lippert discussed the foundation idea with Mundstock, and in 1992 received an ultimatum. Mundstock had reached a critical stage in his illness and put it quite bluntly and colorfully to Lippert, "It's time. If you don't have something organized before I die, I can't leave you anything."

Lippert got the message. David Curtis did the paperwork, and



Mary Hurley and Bill Lippert unveiled the Samara Foundation at the VCLGR Conference in October. They announced inaugural grants to Youth Aware, Outright Vermont, The Pride Committee, and OITM.

the country, and he began to think that, with the network's support and technical assistance, the HRF could become a more active reality. But it would take another personal intervention to once again nudge the seedling toward the sun.

Doug Howe's partner Frank Shivers had died, and Howe called on Howdy Russell for ideas about plans he needed to make for their estate. Russell pointed Howe to Lippert, a long-time friend. Howe felt that his family did not need the money that he and Shivers had accumulated and was determined to have it do something for the gay community.

Howe's commitment to contributing to the community, especially to benefit GLBT youth, following his partner's death and facing his own epitomized Lippert's vision of new growth in the midst of

During the year and more that it took for the lawyers to settle the estate, Lippert invited experienced, respected, committed members of the community to form a board of directors for the Foundation, laying the groundwork for the Foundation to bloom.

In 1998, the board began the hard work of defining the mission statement, creating grant guidelines, and developing a way to present the Foundation to the community at large. As money began to accumulate and the desire to start to give back to the community grew, the board set itself a deadline.

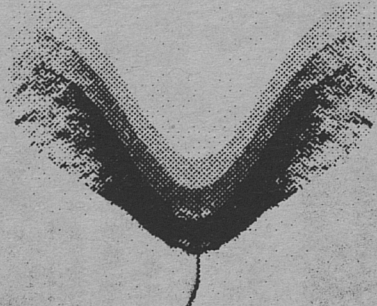
The Foundation would be ready to come out at the VCLGR Annual Town Meeting on October 10 and the first grants would be awarded. The board decided, in the initial year, to choose grant recipients from among organiza-

felt that it was important to consider changing the Foundation's name. All the standard names were sorted through, left to sit, and sorted through again. Discussions flared up, died down, still nothing was being decided upon.

One name, not one of the usual ones, kept bobbing up to the surface over and over again. Lippert had told a story during one discussion about a suggestion that Bob Mundstock had once made. He had spoken of a word filled with symbolism — planting seeds, new life, possibilities, a connection with Vermont—that would be a wonderful name if the foundation idea really got going. The word was samara.

More commonly called helicopters, samara is the distinctive winged fruit of the maple tree which spins its way

photo: Scot Applegate



s a m a r a
foundation of vermont

The Mission:

The Samara Foundation of Vermont is a charitable foundation whose mission is to support and strengthen Vermont's gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered communities today and build an endowment for tomorrow.

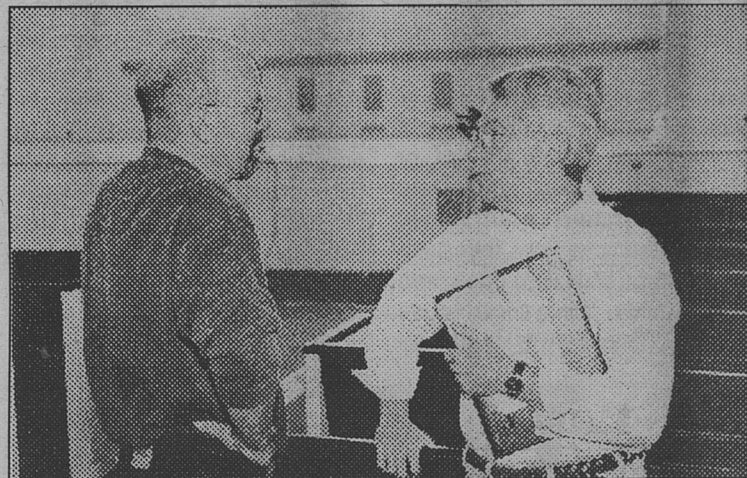
Members and supporters of the community can have an effect beyond individual mortality.

the Human Rights Foundation was in place in time to receive its first bequest of four thousand dollars from Bob Mundstock. Curtis and Lippert chose the non-GLBT specific name to facilitate privacy for people who might want to leave money to the community without the worry of outing themselves to their lawyers.

For the next few years, the Foundation remained virtually dormant, an aside to Lippert's increasingly busy life now that he was in the State Legislature. At the same time, a national network of foundations like Pride in Seattle was forming. Human Rights Foundation funds provided Lippert with the means to attend a conference and meet with people from organizations from across

tragedy—the creation of an "endowment to benefit the community in perpetuity," a way for "members and supporters of the community to have an effect beyond individual mortality, a vehicle for supporting everything else in the community, for creating money in order to give it back."

Doug Howe died in January of 1996, sooner than he had expected, before he could realize his desire to help others contribute in the way that he planned to. Lippert got the call from Howe's attorneys: the Human Rights Foundation was the beneficiary of an estate of over \$500,000, in trust and direct bequest. Lippert decided it was time to make good on the commitment that he had made to Mundstock and Howe.



Samara board member Howdy Russell, left, and Vermont CARES director Tim Palmer were among the community leaders attending the Town meeting.

tions that had already been at work for some time, organizations which Howe had mentioned as examples: *Out in the Mountains*, *Pride*, *Outright VT*, and one new one furthering the scope of *Outright's* work with youth, the *Queer Youth Provider Network*.

Guiding his seedling to a new period of growth, Lippert

down to fertile ground to begin its new life. A little piece of the old life in motion on its way to the new. A familiar image for a new name and a symbol of new vitality for the Foundation which will acquire layers of meaning over time.