

letters

OITM, PO Box 1078, Richmond, VT 05477-1078 or oitm@together.net

Don't Can the Conference, Energize It

Editor:

First, I want to express my thanks for the November issue. It is best that I have ever seen from Out in the Mountains. Chris [Moes] took OITM a step up when he assumed editorship, mainly in layout, and now Barbara [Dozetos] seems to be taking it another step forward, with concentration on improved content.

I want to comment on the VCLGR Conference story, since I was one of the hordes that stayed away this year after attending for several years. The location was not at all an issue for me, since Vershire is, time-wise, equidistant from Brattleboro, Rutland, and Burlington. Nor were the Faerie gathering or the Black & Blue party strong draws for me.

In fact, I had hoped to organize a workshop for the conference on outdoor activities for GLBTQ Vermonters. But there seemed to be no way to organize such a workshop. Although I have paid dues to VCLGR for several years, I never hear from them except for conference announcements and all I get then is a list that has been put together already. As I looked at the list this year, my reaction was "why bother." The list was essentially the same as last year and there was nothing that interested me that I had not already done.

There were several potential workshops that would have interested me, either as a participant or an organizer, including "outdoor recreational opportunities," "gay life in really rural areas," "using the web to stay in touch," and "organizing to the election of favorable candidates in a critical election year." These come to mind just sitting here typing and I am sure there are many more that I alone could come up with, never mind what the whole community would create if asked.

It bothers me that VCLGR made no general effort to broaden the conference and then talks about not doing it again when very few responded to their "family values" agenda. I have done much organizing within the gay community myself, going back to 1970, and know that it can be a thankless task, but there is more energy out here to be tapped than has been reflected in the last couple of conferences and I hope that it can be channelled into better conferences and more activities during the rest of the year.

Bob Bland
Vershire

Horizontal Hostility in November "Voices"

Editor:

Kathleen Kalina's "Voices From the Mountains" in your November issue is one of the most ignorant, horizontally hostile pieces I have ever had the displeasure of reading in a queer publication. Her comments on bisexuals and transgender people are so exclusive, so arrogant, and so uninformed that I will not waste time trying to present an alternative view.

Instead I would suggest that she educate herself by reading the works of Leslie Feinberg and Minnie Bruce Pratt - a "real" lesbian (excuse me "gay female") - and by subscribing to Bi Women's Voices from Boston.

Ignorance can be cured. Stupidity can't. There may be hope for Kalina — or there may not.

Yours in struggle,
Susan Jordan, Editor
The Empty Closet
Rochester, NY

"Queer" Umbrella Covers Many

Editor:

I found Kathleen Kalina's thoughts regarding the ways in which various groups have come under the queer umbrella over the past twenty years interesting, but I also felt that it ignored some of the fundamental reasons those groups have been added.

A case in point is that of bisexuals. I was surprised to see the argument that bisexuals are included when they practiced homosexual acts, and don't really need protection or inclusion when they practice as heterosexuals. This argument fails to acknowledge something that the queer community stresses often — that sexual orientation is about feeling a certain way, not necessarily acting a certain way.

Thus bisexuals are bi whether they are sexually active with members of the opposite genders or with members of their own, and also when they aren't sexually active at all. The support needs of bisexuals are different from those of homosexuals, and it is for this reason that they are included under the umbrella.

The same is true of lesbians and gay men; the needs and wants of each group often differ, often in terms of political objectives. How many lesbians have a need for the abolition of sodomy laws? That's only one example; there are many more where the needs of the two groups differ.

The fundamental change that

has happened, and which Kalina ignored, is the growth from groups focused solely on homosexuality to groups focused on issues of gender identity; those issues include homosexuality, bisexuality, and trans- issues. The umbrella has grown to include more groups because we as a community have come to realize that all of these issues are related, and we can all support and protect each other as we fight for many of the same goals.

Thus the term "queer" has become more popular as it includes all of these various issues, as well as other issues of gender identification, and rather than weakening our force it has instead strengthened us we become as inclusive and non-divisive as we are trying to make society.

Sincerely,
Russell Plato
Middlebury College

An Open Letter of Thanks

Editor:

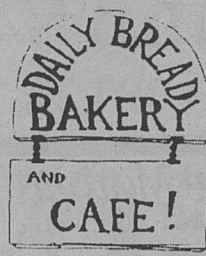
The sun shown down on a sea of hopeful eyes as the Vermont Supreme Court heard oral arguments about why Vermont should or shouldn't allow gays and lesbians the right to marry.

Although the Court had gone to extraordinary lengths to accommodate the spectators, only about 100 people were able to crowd into the court house during the hearing. The overflow supporters congregated at the nearby Unitarian Church to attend an Inter-Faith religious service led by VOWS (Vermont Organization for Weddings of the Same gender).

Time after time, participants of every faith stood to quietly light a candle and explain why they had felt compelled to witness the hearing. Personal stories, personal tragedies, personal beliefs, personal hopes and dreams spilled from the diverse group. Their voices shook with emotion as they tried to convey how deeply personal this case was to each of them. "I want to be able to tell my children that I was here" was the overwhelming sentiment as the service ended with a quiet prayer, a joyful hymn, and 100 shining candles held high in hope.

A jolt of electricity flew through the crowd as the plaintiffs and their lawyers came through the front door of the church. Pandemonium broke out as Beth Robinson, the lawyer who presented the oral argument for the plaintiffs, tried to speak.

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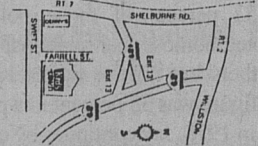
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