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foundation of vermont

is pleased to announce our 1998 Inaugural Grants

Outright Vermont - \$7,000 Burlington, Vermont

Serving lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning youth of Vermont. A Challenge Grant used in Outright Vermont's 1998 Phone-A-Thon to raise additional money for general program support.

Vermont GLBT Youth Provider's Network \$1,000

Supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning youth throughout Vermont. Serving youth in Montpelier, Middlebury, Norwich/Hanover, Woodstock & St. Johnsbury.

Mountain Pride Media / Out In The Mountains \$2,000

Granted for the purchase of a laser computer printer for Out In The Mountains, to support the production of Vermont's GLBT statewide newspaper.

Vermont Pride - \$500

General program support for underwriting the 1999 Vermont GLBT Pride activities.

These inaugural grants are made possible through generous bequests from our Founding Benefactors:

Robert Mundstock (1947 - 1992)
Douglas C. Howe (1949 - 1996)
The Douglas C. Howe and Frank E. Shivers Trust

Our 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.

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Giving Back to the Community: The Original Common Ground

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seemed that the meeting was still going on strong. I listened to the people putting everything out on the table to be mulled over. They were going over schedules, and restructuring between themselves, which Mike had told me was what was going on.

There have been many rumors on the street that the Common Ground was closing, but Mike was quick to point out that that was not the case at all, they were merely restructuring from within. I unexpectedly realized that I was happy to hear that.

"If we stay open month to month then we win, survival is our main focus." As I watched this group of individuals, I noticed how everyone seemed to pull from one another's energy. They have discovered a secret that mainstream business seems to have overlooked, they actually care about one another, their customers and their community.

Chris Porter relates that the Common Ground is "beyond a job, it's like running a household," when asked what the place meant to her. I certainly felt like I was visiting a person's home rather than a restaurant.

As I watched their meeting I felt like I was home again watching my parents, brothers and sister argue over what we should do next to accomplish some goal we had set for ourselves. I find it hard to put into words the feelings I felt as I began talking with each person. I guess it was like going to a family reunion where you barely know anyone, but they know who you are and make you feel comfortable because that's just the way it's supposed to be.

"It's like a 25 year old sociology experiment which never came to an end." Gray Zabriskie related to me when I asked him what the place meant to him. "It's a revolving community, which is like an extended family. The Common Ground has a strong hold on you, an energy."

"This place is like school," relates Shawn Holden, "you learn a lot about diversity, people, and that you are investing in community, but in yourself as a person. I woke up and it's powerful." Asked where they get all their energy Shawn related, "We survive on each other's energy. There's real connection here, people for people."

My biggest question was where do they get the money to keep on going. I was referred to Ron Walter who does the book-

ings with bands across New England. "We book various types of bands, from dance to reggae, basically world music. People of all ages come and party."

Some of these bands usually play for huge audiences, but book with Common Ground and play for around sixty people. They appreciate the small crowds perhaps more than the larger gatherings they would normally play for.

"Everyone has their time at the Common Ground. There is a constant rotation of the characters. It's like a sort of theatre or sitcom."

Ron spoke of his fears that the common Ground may be forgotten or fall by the wayside, but the locals don't think that's the case at all. I questioned several people on the street and inside, and all agreed that it is part of Brattleboro's culture and they hope it will stay around for a long time to come.

"This is a great place to work, you can raise issues easily and sometimes it can be difficult, but rewarding at the same time." Everette Rand told me. Most of the staff had been patrons of the restaurant at one time or another and, somehow, the place's magic kept them there. Demian Wood says, "I had eaten here before, and I really liked it. You work with good people, you have good experiences, and you want to help it out and keep it open."

"You honor what it stands for to the community. It is ethically good, and I feel good about it." Janis Bliss tells me as she's running around trying to clean up the kitchen. "I used to bring my artwork here, that's how I came to know the Common Ground. I've eaten here and worked here for over five years, and there's no place like it in the world. I've come back many times because of that."

The Common Ground is, indeed, a very special place. Not only do they host a free Thanksgiving dinner for less-fortunate souls, they give so much more to the community.

She is noble in her work, from the heart. she works tirelessly to ensure her own survival because she seems to know that her extended family is depending on her. She is Mamma Common Ground and she is dignified, magical and beautiful. She gives back to the community, her family, like any mother would take care of her own children. ▼

Marriage Argument Heard by Supreme Court

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Robinson maintained her cool and level delivery throughout some intense questioning by the justices.

"It's puzzling to try to understand the state's argument," Robinson said. "To argue that things are fine now, that we don't have to worry about long-standing discrimination because we have an anti-discrimination statute, is to ignore the continuity of history. ... We're dealing with a class of people who have been historically discriminated against."

Two lawyers presented the state's case in defense of banning same-sex marriages. Most of the argument was offered by Assistant Attorney General Eve Jacobs-Carnahan, who appeared unsure and nervous from the beginning.

The basis of her case was that marriage traditionally has been defined as a union between a man and a woman. That, she said, serves to further the link between procreation and child-rearing, the one argument that Chittenden Superior Court Judge Linda Levitt did not reject when she threw the case out late last year.

"To say (otherwise) would be to say there's absolutely no connection between marriage and procreation," Jacobs-

Carnahan told the justices. "It's a unique social institution based on the sexual communion of a man and a woman."

Besides, she argued, no other state in the union has permitted marriage between two men or two women. Justice Denise Johnson apparently found that argument a little weak.

"Somebody had to be the first in an interracial state," Johnson said, referring to Robinson's argument that interracial couples were unconstitutionally denied the right to marry 50 years ago, just as same-gender couples are today.

Carnahan replied that there was a clear difference between same-sex marriage and interracial unions because common laws have always made a distinction between a man and a woman in marriage but not between the races. Justice John Dooley found that one weak.

"What does that show other than how long-standing the discrimination was?" Dooley asked.

For more than an hour, the arguments went back and forth. Clearly, the day was an historic one at the Supreme Court. Normally, the justices allot 15 minutes or 30 minutes for cases. This one was sched-