

Giving Back to the Community

Jeff's Maine Seafood

BY CHRIS TEBBETTS

Located in St. Albans, Jeff's Maine Seafood is in the middle of Franklin County, an area many call one of the most conservative in Vermont.

It's not exactly the kind of place you'd expect to find drag queen Yolanda spilling out onto Main Street in all her splendor, surrounded by a restaurant full of queer fans and onlookers.

Certainly it's not something that happens all the time — only once to date, in fact — but owner Jamie West counts it among his favorite professional memories. "It was very...visual," he says, with obvious understatement.

West has been working with and for the GLBT community for the past three years to make Jeff's

Maine Seafood at least a some-time queer oasis. He is first and foremost a restaurateur, but sees being out in the business community and in the world as a big part of the picture.

West took over the business in August of 1996, along with his brother Tim and silent-partner siblings Pete and Becky. "I realized really quickly that there were a lot of gay and lesbian Vermonters who don't go out to bars, so I knew I could offer something, a very comfortable and 'equal' environment. I felt really proud that I could do that."

It began with a Third Sunday event for the Vermont CARES Men's Health Project, a congenial mix of munchies, drinks, conversation, and condoms. Never satisfied to leave well enough alone, West pushed for

capital-E Events. He added speakers, entertainment, book signings, and games to his list of ideas and changed the gathering's name to The Main Event.

Since that time, the restaurant has hosted Rainbow Business Association meetings and GLAD attorneys speaking on the Vermont same-gender marriage issue. Author Charles Kaiser has stopped by to promote *The Gay Metropolis*. "And if he sees this article, I bought two of his books and he still took them away," quips West.

The restaurant also hosted a tremendously successful fundraiser for Vermont Pride '98 — the night of the aforementioned Yolanda episode. Attended by


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photo Max Stroud



Jeff's Maine Seafood, Main Street, St. Albans, VT.

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