

## Pride Vermont: Still Here, Still Queer, Still Paying Off Last Year (But We're Almost Done)

BY TIM EVANS

What will Vermont's Pride Day bring to the GLBT community in 1999? Will past financial concerns and problems dampen this year's festive spirit? What can our relatively small yet vital community do to support the event and help future Pride Day activities?

As in any minority community, there are as many answers to these questions as there are people who take part in the annual Pride Day. There are many questions and details that the Pride Vermont committee has to attend to in order to put on a successful event, issues that may not always be obvious to the casual observer.

This year's Pride Day is scheduled for Saturday, June 19. Once again, it will be held at Burlington's Waterfront Park to accommodate the ever-increasing number of participants. The gathering starts at 11:00 at the waterfront. An hour later, the parade will start making its way along Main Street to Church Street, up to Cherry Street, and back to the waterfront.

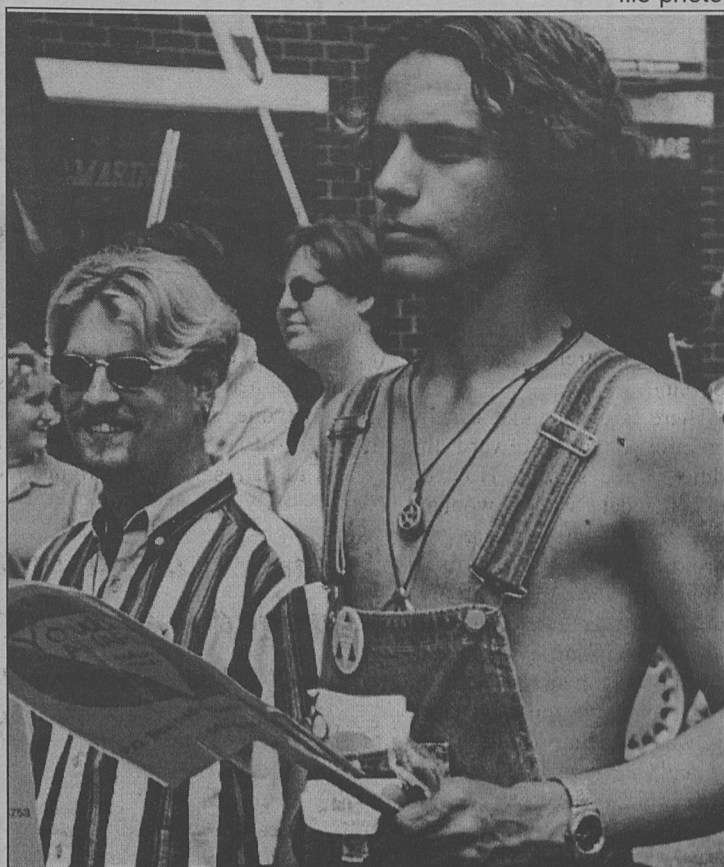
According to Tracy Kommons, chairperson and treasurer of the Pride Vermont committee, the differences start after the parade. The afternoon entertainment segment of the celebration following the parade will see some changes. The committee is still finalizing the lineup of fine local talent, but confirms that musician, DJ, and poet Craig Mitchell will emcee the afternoon. Also new this year is the tea dance planned to follow the entertainment.

Of course, the more things change, the more they stay the same, and there will be the usual food and information vendors for those revelers in need of sustenance and news.

Once you consider the costs of space rental, advertising, security, a shuttle system, tents, sound, trash removal, and all the other details, the price tag for Pride Day is in the neighborhood of a hefty \$10,000.

As if that weren't financially daunting enough, the committee is still working with last year's debt as it makes plans for this year. Unpaid bills left over from 1997 have had something of a "snowball effect," says Kommons.

"1998 started in the hole," she says, explaining that the committee has had to play catch-up to get those bills paid.



file photo

The old debt is just about taken care of and the committee is optimistic that it won't be a problem for next year. "The goal is to have some funds to start with," says Kommons, so that planning doesn't start with an empty pot.

So where does the financial support come from? Certainly not from money donated on Pride Day by the participants, generous though those contributions might be. According to Randy Violette, Pride committee liaison to the city of Burlington, organizers realized last year that the event alone would not pay for itself.

Local businesses have been a source of donations in the past.

### Organizers realized last year that the event alone would not pay for itself.

Violette says area merchants have usually been very supportive when approached; for example, last year Borders supplied the money for the shuttle system to and from Waterfront Park.

Pride also welcomes individual donations in advance of the event. The organization doesn't have its own official non-profit status with the IRS, but it does fall under the Peace and Justice Center's umbrella of coverage — which means that donations made through the Center in Burlington are tax deductible.

Besides cash donations, the committee depends on fundraising events from within the community. Jeff's Maine Seafood in St. Albans is again hosting a silent auction and evening of socializing to support the celebrations. (See Community Compass, p. 26, for details.)

But money isn't the only organizational challenge. There are a huge number of city rules and regulations to follow. Violette says that the security deposit on the park was not fully refunded last year because some vendors did not follow all the regulations. More frustrations came when both a park rental discount promised by the mayor's office

and one of the scheduled entertainment acts failed to materialize.

There are also a number of complaints to deal with from within the gay community. Some feel the parade should be better organized and not formed on the spot. Violette says that, at least for now, the parade seems to work best when it is assembled at the last minute. However, the committee does welcome groups that want to reserve a place in advance.

Another gripe has been that not all of the entertainers and vendors participating are gay or lesbian. The committee has had to struggle with questions of excluding friends and allies will-

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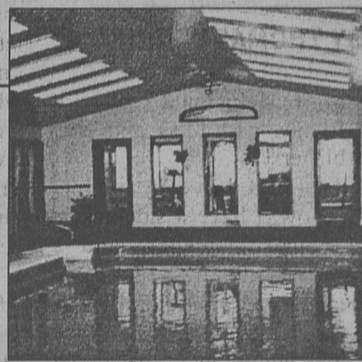
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