



4



31

21



Legal Briefs:
The Boy Scout Decision

VERMONT'S FORUM FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER ISSUES

OUT IN THE MOUNTAINS

Volume XV, Number 7

August 2000

www.mountainpridemedia.org

WILB
HQ75
.0971

REC'D
AUG 2
BAILEY HOME
BR A B Y

First Civil Unions Celebrated

BRATTLEBORO — T. Hunter Wilson helped to write a piece of American history on July first.

"By the authority vested in me by the state of Vermont, I now declare you joined in civil union," Wilson, a justice of the peace, declared shortly after midnight.

And with that, Carolyn Conrad, 29, and Kathleen "K.P." Peterson, 41, became the first same-sex couple in America to become legal spouses in the eyes of the law.

Later that day, the sun rose and the sky didn't fall. The launch of civil unions, besides granting gay and lesbian couples all the rights and benefits of marriage, generated nothing more than a lot of media buzz and more loud complaints from opponents.

Photo: Bari Shamas



Just after midnight on July 1, Carolyn Conrad and Kathleen Peterson became the first couple to become legal spouses under Vermont's civil union law.

That's pretty much how it's gone throughout the first month of the civil unions law. The first weekend, which coincided with the long 4th of July holiday, only a dozen or so town clerks were even open to issue civil unions licenses.

Among the first to get their license were Lois Farnham and Holly Puterbaugh, who were plaintiffs in the lawsuit that led to the Legislature's enactment of the law.

UNIONS > 6

Town Meeting to be Resurrected

BY BARBARA DOZETOS

One of Vermont's oldest organizations for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people is asking for help from the community to coordinate a statewide meeting.

After a year's hiatus, the Vermont Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights will host the 2000 Conference/Town Meeting at the Vermont Technical College on October 21.

"We didn't do a town meeting last year, and people keep telling us how much they missed it," said VCLGR co-liason Virginia Renfrew. The 1998 meeting was held in Burlington on the campus of the University of Vermont. The small crowd attending disappointed the organizers, so they opted not to hold a 1999 event.

Paying close attention to the feedback the organization received from the 1998 conference, Renfrew said she was careful to check the community calendar before booking a date. The Randolph location is as central for the state as possible, so travel will be about equal for everyone.

In the past, the conference has been a day filled with

workshops, exhibits by community organizations, and a community forum known by most as the Queer Town Meeting. Renfrew anticipates basically the same set up for this year, but says those kinds of decisions will be made by the planning committee. The Gill Foundation OutGiving workshop slated for the same day will be one of the workshops offered at the conference. (See story on page 2 for more details.)

The VCLGR is looking for community members to serve on the planning committee and to help out on the day of the event.

Renfrew is asking for help from the members of the community in designing the structure and content of the event. The 1998 meeting drew very little advance input from other people. "A very few of us ended up doing most of the last one, and many people weren't happy with how it turned out," said Renfrew. "We really want lots of people involved in making this one happen," she said. She is particularly eager to have youth involvement.

"There couldn't be a better year for our community to have a town meeting," said Bill

Lippert, the executive director of the Samara Foundation of Vermont and a member of the Vermont House of Representatives.

While VCLGR acknowledges that the passage of the civil union legislation has energized the Vermont GLBTs, they don't intend to have the conference focus solely on that subject. "There are a lot of things people want to see covered," said Renfrew.

VCLGR membership has languished in recent years. The group hopes that the renewed energy they've seen in the community this spring will carry over to this event and further so that the organization can restructure and rebuild its membership. "I'm committed to sticking with this until a new group — the next generation — is ready to take over," said Renfrew.

The cost of this year's conference will be \$25.00 per person, although no one will be turned away for lack of funds. The first planning meeting will be held at the offices of Zatz and Renfrew in Montpelier at 7 pm on August 22. ▼

Outright Faces Attacks

BY DOUG EBELING

"I think you might find this one helpful," said Keith Elston as he directed a determined-looking college-aged woman to a book on coming out in a small lending library.

It was a typically busy afternoon in the crowded downtown Burlington offices of Outright Vermont, an agency set up to address the needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and queer young Vermonters. A short time later the phone rang. Elston, the organization's executive director, rushed to answer, and then spoke calmly and quietly to a teenager from central Vermont about the youth group's meetings and activities.

The youth group meets in the comfortable, sunny "XandO" room painted in bright colors, full of the smell of poster paint and markers. This room, used as a lounge and meeting space, is crammed full of furniture and is located just beyond a small work room containing a couple of older personal computers and lots of art supplies. Freshly made posters from recent gay pride events adorn the walls.

This resource for Vermont youth has recently been under attack as angry opponents of the civil union law target organizations serving the GLBT community in Vermont.

"They are offering information that homosexuality is acceptable and normal," Stephen Cable, president of an

anti-civil unions group called Who Would Have Thought, Inc, charged in an article in the *Rutland Herald* in July. "That hurts many, many people of the evidence shows that it's a destructive behavior."

David Ayer, a Barre School Board member, and Rep. Nancy Sheltra, R-Derby, have also been making angry noises about Outright in recent weeks.

The most frequent charges seem to be that Outright is trying to "recruit Vermont youth" and that Outright "asks people to come out," according to Ayer. Ayer and Cable say that they "sympathize" with the "plight of gays and lesbians" and do "not want to be perceived as intolerant." They are "concerned" and "have homosexual friends," both told the *Herald*.

Those charges are largely based on presentations the group makes around the state.

Outright offers two distinct and separate presentations. The first is described by Elston as "Safer Schools" and is focused on diversity issues, harassment response and prevention, and homophobia. This is the only set of programs presented at schools.

Elston stressed that the presentation is tailored to the age of the audience. A group of teachers and administrators, for instance, would hear a different presentation than would a group of eighth graders.

Safer Schools programs are only presented if Outright is

CONTROVERSY > 2



Photo: Max Stroud

Youth served by Outright Vermont participate in the annual Youth Pride march in May, as well as the Pride Vermont parade each June.