

MAINE SPEAKOUT COMMUNIQUE

Vol. 1, No. 2



April/May 1996

1996 Speaking Invitations

Our invitations to speak keep growing. Here are our scheduled engagements for this year (so far!).

January 8, The Goddesses, Caribou, 7pm;
Speakers: Sheila Everett

January 9, Houlton Lions Club; Speakers: Deb Madore and Terry White

January 9, Bath Rotary Club, West Bath, 1-1:30pm;
Speakers: Marlene Barter and Diane Gilman

January 16, Houlton Lions Club, 7pm; Speakers: Deb Madore and Terry White

January 19, AARP Hallowell, 1-2pm; Speakers: Debbie Matson and Carl Duplissis

January 24, Standish Lions Club, 6:45pm;
Speakers: Court Creamer and Madeleine Winter

January 26, Visiting Nurse Association, So. Portland, 1-2pm; Speakers: Sue Comyns and Mike Klaus

January 30, Kittery Rotary, 7:25-8:30am; Speakers: Sandy Armentrout and Bob Wuerthner

February 12, Lioness Club, Gardiner, 6:30pm;
Speakers: Madeleine Winter and Naomi Falcone

February 13, Tuesday Forum, Bangor; Speakers: Judy Harrison and Todd Greenquist

February 14, Central Maine Mgt., Waterville, 6pm;
Speakers: Ernie Guimond and Judy Harrison

February 20, Kittery Lions Club, 6:30pm; Speakers: Kevin Flynn and Bob Wuerthner

February 20, Portside Rotary, Kennebunk;
Speakers: Richard Barnes

February 21, Bar Harbor Senior Citizens, 12:30pm;
Speakers: Peter Rees and Rick Galeana

February 27, Scarborough Rotary, 7am; Speakers: Jim Estes and Kathy Wilson

March 11, Waterville Rotary Club, 11:55am-1:15pm;
Speakers: Paul Harrison and Bill Gordon

March 13, Ellsworth Kiwanis, 11:45am; Speakers: Peter Rees and Rick Galeana

March 14, Casco Bay Sunrise Rotary, Portland, 7:15am; Speakers: Elliott Cherry and Tom Cathcart

March 14, Scarborough Kiwanis, noon; Speakers: Mike Klaus and Stacy Parady

March 21, Kennebunk Rotary, 7:15pm; Speakers: Sandy Armentrout and Bob Wuerthner

March 21, Sanford/Springvale Rotary; Speakers: Medora Van Denburgh and Bob Philbrook

April 2, Freeport Community Education Program, 7-8pm; Speakers: Paula Clearwater and Kathy Wilson

April 2, UU Church, Norway, 6:30pm; Speakers: Madeleine Winter and Mike Bendzela

April 8, Pittsfield Kiwanis, Pittsfield, 6:15pm;
Speakers: Janet May and Paul Harrison

April 17, USM Diversity Day, Portland, 5pm;
Speakers: Mike Bendzela and Madeleine Winter

April 19, Westbrook Kiwanis, Westbrook, 6pm;
Speakers: Kathy Wilson and Paula Clearwater

May 15, Scarborough High School, Scarborough;
Speakers: Chris Milliken

May 20, Business and Professional Women of Waterville, Fleet Bank, Waterville, 6:30pm;
Speakers: Bill Gordon and Judy Harrison

May 22, Standish Kiwanis Club, 6:30pm; Speakers: Madeleine Winter and Mike Bendzela



What's Happening Out There?

We're asking speakers to write short summaries of their speaking experiences. Reading about your experiences is helpful to both those who have spoken and those who are considering doing it. Please send your contributions to Madeleine Winter, 51 Shore Rd., Standish, ME 04084. Deadline for the next issue of the newsletter is June 10.

Portland Kiwanis, December...

In December Nina Mollicone and I "spokeout" at a Portland Kiwanis Club luncheon and our worst fears came true. All of the questions and comments were hostile (I don't want you near my kids... all the homosexuals I know are pedophiles... homosexuality wrecks lives and destroys marriages... I'm what you'd call a homophobe and you're just trying to change my mind... etc.). It was frightening but also mobilizing. On the basis of my Speakout training I was able to validate each person's feelings and relate my personal experiences and perspectives without arguing. Caring for my attackers' feelings, however, left me vulnerable to depression. I left the event feeling unheard, angry, and unable to focus on anything positive. The vague sense that I had done a good job seemed a sour irrelevancy. I dreamed of gathering all of the hateful people in one spot and dropping a bomb. Returning home and needing support, I immediately called an experienced Speakout board member and learned an invaluable lesson. We, the speakers, are not the show and our words are not miniature tests. The dynamic interplay of actions and words between everyone in the room is a process, not an event. With this understanding I have removed the pressure from myself. I have since practiced throwing difficult issues back to the audience respectfully and it works.

Regardless of the insight I was exposed to just after the Kiwanis function, I remained depressed for a week. Nina and I had no time to talk directly after the luncheon and for some reason - perhaps I was afraid Nina was unhappy with the way I handled things - I didn't check in with her for many weeks. That was a mistake. I cheated myself out of valuable processing when I needed it most. I am grateful for the support meeting Speakout organized, for it got Nina and I connected again. I am also grateful that I experienced a "Speakout from Hell" and want to thank all the people behind the Project for providing this opportunity for growth. It is their support which has permitted me

to feel safe enough to shut the closet door behind me. I am now eager to step forward as a proud gay man for the world to see; and I am now able to accept the inspiration from the quiet, lone man at Kiwanis who, in passing on the way out, nervously lowered his eyes and whispered, "Thank you."

Elliott Cherry



UU Church, Norway, April 2...

My first Speakout engagement April 2 in Norway proved to be the kind of experience I had hoped for, given that I hadn't yet spoken since my training in March. My speaking partner Madeleine Winter and I met with the board of the Norway U.U. church, with Madeleine's partner Naomi observing. By all accounts it went well. My favorite moment: I had just turned Pat Buchanan's words on their head ("Homosexuals are hell-bent on Satanism and suicide" became "My partner and I are hell-bent on getting next winters firewood cut") and a rather animated older man asked, "Since you're so busy this time of year, when do you get to practice Satanism and suicide?" It was that kind of group, wise, witty, and supportive. My only regret is that I didn't try to draw the quiet ones; there has to be a way of making sure those who might disagree feel safe expressing themselves. I hope to return to Norway in the future to speak with the whole congregation. Many thanks to Nancy Wood for setting up this engagement and for taking us to the Chef's Table, an all-you-can-eat kind of place I highly recommend.

Michael Bendzela



Hancock County, Spring...

This spring we have had two speaking engagements in Hancock County, in advance of our official training session. A young gay man, Rick, shared the speaking with me on both occasions. An old straight man and a young gay



one seems a good combination. We spoke to a senior citizens group of about 60 people, and to a Kiwanis group of about a dozen.

Though a little scary at first, both occasions turned out to give us nothing to be scared of. The audiences were polite, but also responded to urging not to hold back whatever they wanted to ask us. So we dealt with things such as "Why do they have to flaunt it?" and "Can't you people choose to be gay or not? The genuine interest shown by audience members was obvious, and Rick and I both enjoyed the process and were ready for more.

It feels good to be able to discuss these issues freely without the pressure of a political campaign and the necessity of "staying on message."

Peter Rees



Portland Kiwanis, December...

In December, my speaking partner, Elliott Cherry, and I had the privilege of addressing the Portland Kiwanis Club, an event henceforth known as the "speakout from hell." Picture, if you will, an audience that asks all the questions that hit your triggers. Only physical threat could have felt more hostile. Though difficult and painful, I consider this my most successful speaking engagement. In the face of open hostility, I managed to keep smiling (most of the time), acknowledge the questioner, maintain a pleasant tone, and speak from my experience. I left the engagement feeling exuberant - the process worked! While I admit to hoping for more receptive audiences in the future, I feel very fortunate to have faced this incredible challenge. With my nonconfrontational speaking skills, I am confident that I can handle virtually any situation in the future.

Nina Mollicone



Standish Lions, Standish, January 28...

On a cold January evening, my co-speaker, Court Creamer and I arrived at the Standish Lions meeting place where we were greeted by 18 men wearing baseball caps, plaid work shirts and holding beer cans. I figured that this would be a difficult group to reach. However, when the meeting was finally called to order (once the

President had located the gavel which had been hidden by "the boys") we found an attentive and interested audience. I was, however, sure that there would be no questions afterward - that we would just tell our stories, be faced with a stony silence and go home. I was certainly wrong about that! No sooner had we finished speaking when 15 hands went up and the questions came hot and heavy for about 20 minutes. The final question came from a young man with a beer can - "What do you want from us?", spoken in a friendly tone. When we explained that we were just there to make ourselves known to our community and were interested in educating people about the reality of gay and lesbian lives, he was pleased. I was happy to be somewhere just to speak, without wanting anything except understanding. It's easy to go somewhere and expect to be stereotyped, but it's pretty weird to realize that you've done the same to them. We were happy with the results of the engagement and left the meeting feeling pretty good... and then we noticed that our car was surrounded by heavy duty pickup trucks, keeping us from leaving. I went in to explain the problem, disrupting the meeting when about five Lions came running out to move their vehicles and we could leave, unscathed.

Madeleine Winter



UM/Presque Isle, November 30...

Ethnicity and Multicultural Class. Approximately 30 non-traditional students.

Kim Ann Perkins (professor) showed about 10 minutes of a gay educational video and then turned the remaining 1¼ hours over to Dick Harrison and me. This class had many questions, some a bit too personal, but we got through them honestly. The greatest moment for me was when a man of about 55 made the comment that heterosexuals needed to accept that prejudice and discrimination are a reality within the homosexual community. A young woman stated that she now understood what the phrase "learn to think gray" meant (not black and white). Dick and I walked to our cars feeling, that for today, we had made a difference.

Sheila Everett





Speakout County Committees Forming

Speakout is in the process of decentralizing; going from an organization that was run by one full time and two part time people to a statewide (eventually), broadbased educational project. The project has flourished and Speakout is establishing itself as a long-term organization. Presently, committees are forming in Androscoggin, Aroostook, Cumberland, Hancock, Knox, Penobscot and York Counties. We hope to have committees in every county by the end of 1996.



Coordinator's Update

Just a brief note: we're still going, we're growing, and we need your help! If your having trouble finding words to motivate others to join MSOP as speakers, committee members or as donors, you might explain that we consider our face-to-face dialogues as preventive medicine. Oregon is now going though its fourth statewide, anti-gay referendum, a senseless expense of money, emotion and energy. If we in MSOP do our job, we hope that similar pro-discrimination efforts will not be able to get off the ground (again) in Maine.

And, if you're hearing echoes of accusations that gays and lesbians or any other minority are seeking "special rights," you could point to the last paragraph in the MSOP brochure under the section "Why Speak Out" which says: *Because many of us have experienced exclusion or ridicule because of who we are - Catholic, French Canadian, Jews, economically disadvantaged, African American, etc. - and we want to emphasize our common humanity, not our superficial differences.*

Fundraising

Thanks to Elliott Cherry for offering to organize a benefit chamber music concert for MSOP in Portland. Thanks to his co-musicians for donating their time and talent and to newly-trained speakers Kathy and Chuck Rimmel for agreeing to host the concert in their home. It happens on Friday, May 10

at 7:30pm and tickets are \$20. Co-hosts are Ann and Charlie Harriman, Anita Jones, and Mare and Laurie Wallace. FMI ☎ 773-8623.

We need MSOP participants to pull together events to publicize our project and to raise funds to help support it. Our budget in 1996 is \$81,000 and so far we've raised \$24,000.

Recent Grants

\$2,500 from Maine Community Foundation
\$1,500 from Haymarket People's Fund
\$ 700 from Unitarian Church, Kennebunk

Membership

We now have 76 dues-paying members or donors around the state. Thanks to the Aroostook County Action Program and Northern Lambda Nord for being our first two non-profit members at \$50 a year. Why not ask your church, synagogue or civic organization to join MSOP as well?

Thanks to Charlotte Renner, Maine Public Radio, for doing her recent story on MSOP and to Paula Clearwater for letting Charlotte tape her on her first MSOP gig.

Special thanks to Louise Tate for much time and effective effort in coordinating our trainings statewide.

Jonathan



CLASSIFIED

I'm working on a project to collect stories and experiences from Speakout participants, both the stories they tell and what brought them to Speakout initially. Only first names will be used as credits or you may remain anonymous. This project will hopefully become a fund-raiser for Maine Speakout. For more information or to submit a story, please contact Clark Phinney, c/o Speakout Stories, POB 417, Bucksport, ME 04416



Spring Training, Anyone?

Please spread the word about these trainings and encourage your friends to go. There is a \$10 registration fee (no one turned away for lack of funds). The trainings are free for Speakout members. Please telephone the contact people listed below to register:

Knox County - Sunday, April 13, 9am-5pm, 1st Universalist Church, 345 Broadway, Rockland.
Contact Lucy Bower: 236-4734

Kennebec County - Date TBD, Northern Lights Church, 456 Riverside, Augusta.
Contact Rev. Bill Gordon: 453-9750

Cumberland County - Friday, April 19, 6:30-9pm; Saturday, April 20, 9am-3pm, YWCA, Portland (both sessions required).
Contact Naomi Falcone: 642-2015

Aroostook County - Wednesday, May 8, Presque Isle - follow-up training, and Saturday, May 18, Presque Isle
Contact Deb Madore: 768-3056 or 1-800-432-7881 (Health 1st Administration - ask for Deb)

Androscoggin County - Saturday, April 27, 9-5pm, Grace Lutheran Church, Summer and Park Streets, Auburn Contact Esther Turner: 783-6964

York County - Saturday, May 11, 9am-5pm,
Contact Sue Gesing: 985-6388 or Bob Wuerthner: 985-6846

Hancock County - Saturday, May 11, 9-5pm, UU Church, Ellsworth. Contact Nan Miller: 244-7145

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Upcoming meetings/events...

Cumberland County Speakout Committee meeting Weds., 4/17, 7pm, YWCA, Portland. All Cumberland Co. Speakout participants are welcome to attend. FMI ☎ 879-0480.

Cumberland County Venues Subcommittee meeting, Tues., 4/23, 7p Frances St., Portland. FMI ☎ 773-0362.

York County Committee meeting 5/6, 5pm, 1st Parish Unitarian Church, Main St., Kennebunk. FMI ☎ 985-3700.

PFLAG - Support, Education and Advocacy meets on second Tues. of each month (next meeting 5/14), Woodfords Church, 7-9pm. FMI ☎ 774-3441.

Love and the Law: Legal Consideration in Same Sex Relationships, a seminar sponsored by Maine Lesbian and Gay Law Association, Sat. 5/4, 9am-12 noon at University of Maine Law School, 246 Deering Ave., Portland. FMI ☎ 773-0362.

THE FABULOUS SPEAKOUT CROSSWORD PUZZLE...



ACROSS

- 1. Short; concise
- 3. Fable
- 5. Convince
- 8. Cite
- 10. Expropriate
- 11. Identify with
- 12. Satchel; seize
- 14. Takes a position (*pl.*)
- 17. Opposite of enemy
- 18. Autumnal agricultural exhibit
- 19. Join; eye contact

DOWN

- 2. Fright
- 4. Orates
- 6. Begins
- 7. Overjoyed
- 8. Lesbian/Gay (*slang*)
- 9. Not in the closet
- 13. Co-speaking unit
- 15. Pitch (*musical*)
- 16. Place to store money

answers in next issue

