

NETWORK NEWS

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May 1998

Calendar

Sun. 5/31 - MRN Organizing Committee meeting in Gardiner, 4-6pm. FMI and location ☎ 642-2015.

Thurs. 6/25 - Matlovich Society. Marcy Westerling, founder of the Oregon Rural Organizing Project kicks off her visit to Maine with a talk: Rural Organizing, Why We Do It. Join us for a fun and informative evening. 7:30pm, Holiday Inn by the Bay, 88 Spring St., Portland.

Fri. 6/26 - Lewiston, training session to provide strategies to establish local Maine groups. Presenter: Marcy Westerling of OROP. Bates College, Chase Lounge, 56 Campus Ave., Lewiston 6:30-9:30pm. RSVP or FMI ☎ 642-2015.

Sat. 6/27 - Presque Isle, training session to provide strategies to establish local Maine groups. Presenter: Marcy Westerling of the Oregon Rural Organizing Project. UM/PI, 105 Folsom, Presque Isle. 4-7pm. RSVP or FMI ☎ 642-2015.

Sun. 6/28 - Ellsworth, training session to provide strategies to establish local Maine groups. Presenter: Marcy Westerling of the Oregon Rural Organizing Project. UU Church, 111 Court St., top of Bridge Hill, Ellsworth. 2-5pm. RSVP or FMI ☎ 642-2015.

September - Common Ground Fair, Unity. MRN will offer a presentation and will staff a table with MLGPA. FMI and/or to volunteer for table staffing ☎ 642-2015.

Come March with Us!

MRN will have a contingent in both Portland and Bangor Pride parades

Maine Rural Network

Welcome to the first issue of *Network News*, the newsletter of the Maine Rural Network. MRN was born out of a desire to organize lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender people and allies throughout Maine.

MRN is based on the model of the Oregon Rural Organizing Project, which has been successfully organizing rural Oregon for the last six years.

The February 10th election swept away all doubt about where the need for education and organization lies in Maine. Rural areas are recognized both locally and nationally as places with the most need for education about homophobia. Our mission is to help create ways for people to find each other, create safe environments in order to organize locally. MRN is committed to the decentralization and autonomy of each group, while creating a network to link the LGBT community across Maine. MRN is committed to promoting the visibility of LGBT people in Maine while at the same time broadening our political base by working in coalition with others for social justice.



photo by Madeleine Winter

Marcy Westerling (r) who will lead workshops in Maine in June, talks with OROP Caucus Participants

Brief History of the Oregon Rural Organizing Project

The Oregon Rural Organizing Project came out of the campaign fighting Ballot Measure 9, an anti-gay ballot measure brought by the Oregon Citizens' Alliance (OCA) (*their* Concerned Maine Families) faced by the Oregon community in 1992. The campaign to curtail the rights of gay people, which was particularly violent, was successfully defeated by the LGBT and allies community of Oregon.

From this beginning, OROP has developed sixty human dignity groups throughout Oregon's thirty-six counties. Oregon is also home to some extremely virulent right wing groups, but OROP has not only thrived but has successfully helped establish rural organizing projects in four other states. MRN is based upon the principles of OROP, with adaptations for the needs of Maine communities.

Maine Rural Network

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Erica Rand, Androscoggin
Madeleine Winter, Cumberland

The Organizing Committee is open to anyone interested in helping shape a rural, grassroots network working for social justice

Mission Statement

The mission of the Maine Rural Network is to promote visibility and security for lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender people living in rural Maine, and to work for social, educational and economic justice for all Maine people. The Maine Rural Network seeks to accomplish this by empowering individuals living in rural Maine to organize, establish and support autonomous groups locally and to create a network statewide.

Maine Rural Network
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Report from the OROP Caucus

Madeleine and Naomi just returned from the Oregon Rural Organizing Project Annual Caucus held on May 2. It was a day-long event that consisted of reports from numerous human dignity groups, as well as workshops, keynote speeches and awards.

The workshops focused on strategies for countering the right, such as: Wedge Issues and the Greening of Hate; and Mainstreaming of Hate: the OCA and Initiatives in 1998. There were also workshops focusing on classism and racism, such as Poverty and Welfare Reform and Causa '98: New Challenges to Immigrant Rights. In addition, there were workshops for youth that ran throughout the day.

When it was announced that we had come all the way from Maine to attend the caucus, people responded with a great deal of interest and were excited that we are using them as a model for the Maine Rural Network. They have done much to help us get established and we had many discussions with people involved in different parts of OROP. We came back with heaps of information and a better knowledge of the inner workings of their organization.

To continue their support of the Maine Rural Network, Marcy Westerling, one of the founders of the Oregon project, will come to Maine and offer workshop-trainings that will help establish the initial MRN groups. See the *Calendar* section on the front page for further information.



photo by Madeleine Winter
Eric Ward (r) of the Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment leads workshop entitled "Mainstreaming of Hate: the OCA and Initiatives in 1998"

Thank you!

MRN thanks MLGPA for their interest and active support. Their willingness to introduce others to MRN has helped give us the visibility we need in order to effectively organize as we become established.

Donations are Welcome

Fiscal sponsorship has now made it possible for MRN to accept tax-deductible donations. Help support grassroots organizing in Maine. Checks can be made out to Maine Rural Network, 51 Shore Rd., Standish, ME 04084.