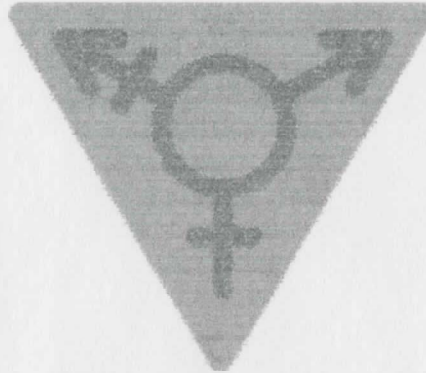


Family Affairs Newsletter

"The Thinking Cap"

Responses to August 1, 2005 Question



Question #1:

I have heard some people argue that the GLBTI population in Maine is really not a community. Define "community", and tell us why you think the GLBTI population in Maine is or is not a community.

Answers:

The word "community" means to me, supporting one another in all ways possible and to feel safe.

However, from my experience, there is only a handful of GLBTQ people who do just that while the rest focus on the bar scene for there is no other life around them, too many clicks, not willing to step to the plate when times get rough!

There is just a handful of people who will step forward and will do it many times but it's the same ones! The message that I see is, "how many notches in the bed post can I get and how fast I can get there!"

There is other things in life besides "sex". There are serious concerns about health, income, worldly events, education, children and domestic partner abuse, taxes, etc that should be being focused on and then stepping up to the plate and do something about it. I know that some people feel that one person can not make a difference but that is not true! It starts with that one person and more need to join in the make it happen!

I hate the bickering that goes on amongst our selves and the jealousy of who has more, getting more (of anything), who's dating whom, etc. and while all this is going on, the world is passing us by plus the religious rights are getting laws passed and a strong hold in the government all under our noses because we are too busy bickering with ourselves!!!

Yes, you will find some groups that are trying to do good unto others and they are far and few between and I search for these groups to keep a positive attitude on life.

There needs to be more social groups gathering for fun things to do such as bowling, movie nights, helping out in the community (our neighbors), block parties to include the whole community (all our neighbors), but just as soon as someone comes up with an idea, there is another person to put it down. This needs to stop and needs to begin now!

D.W.

I wouldn't go so far as to say that there is no GLBTI community in Maine but I would say that it is different from gay communities in highly populated places. For instance, gay pride parade in Boston features most of the community marching, and in Portland, most of the community was watching the little parade. Boston's parade has people still leaving

Copley Square when the lead marchers are already in Boston Common. It's just that we are a small community and we lack the safety of numbers, and as you move north and east of Portland, the numbers get very small. In addition, in cities, it is possible for gay people to socialize only with other gay people. Here, I find that my circle of friends is quite diverse. Most of them are straight professionals my age from various backgrounds, and not necessarily people with whom I work. In Maine, gay professionals who are highly educated may not fear being "out" at work, however, a gay paper mill worker in a town of 7,000 may have much to fear from being "out."

B.S.

Community is a group of people living together, providing support, even just living parallel lives rather than being enmeshed in the lives of all those around them. A community embraces wide differences.. and in utopia of course these differences are accepted without judgement.

My immediate GLBT community is a secure network of people who support me in many ways. I also have been asked to support others who are struggling with a GLBT issue (housing/work/family)... and occasionally I do not even know the person well. This is true community.... when we don't have to live in one another's "face" in order to give support willingly.

I feel sometimes that my personal GLBT community is too small... what wonderful people there are in the world that I haven't met yet!! But I do think that the Maine GLBT population is a true community... encompassing smaller communities within each locale, and yet providing a broad base of resources and support for all.

J.C.

My vote: Yes, we are a loosely connected community, but we are not the best of friends that some would like us to be. Personally, I think that's okay, as long as we are willing to support one another when it's really important. Important does not equal spending \$30 to attend a drag ball or feeling obligated to join in a parade full of naked people and sponsored by a lube company; important does equal times of tragedy, struggle, and triumph.

I think we also need to differentiate between "community" and "family" or "circle of friends". Communities are larger groupings of people who happen to have one or two similar characteristics (typically geography). This does not mean that all members share the same morals, values, and political views.

When most of us were newly out, we thought that we needed to like everyone that is GLBTI, and it was a hard pill to swallow when we realized that there are some "in the community" that we'd rather throw out. I think most of us eventually learn that it's much healthier to choose real friends based on similarities of values rather than sexual orientation or gender status.

B.P.

For me, community simply means a group of people who share some common characteristic(s). I think there are at least two types of communities: unintentional communities and intentional communities. Unintentional communities are those into which you are born or otherwise have no control over whether or not you are a member. Intentional communities are those that you choose to participate in. Some unintentional communities would be: native-born American citizens, red heads, people with cancer. Some intentional communities would be a model railroad club, Red Sox fans, daily joggers.

Within any unintentional community there can be a number of intentional (or sub) communities. Thus, within the overall unintentional GLBTI community we have (for example) the intentional gay-men-into-B&D-community, the-lesbian-women-over-40-community, the-bisexuals-who-happen-to-be-in-same-sex-relationships-community, the female-to-male-trans community, etc. etc. etc. And each of those intentional communities could have other intentional (sub-sub) communities within them.

So, I think we definitely have an overall GLBTI community (we can't help that...it's how we were born); but we also have a plethora of factional, intentional communities. All of that is to be expected. Diversity is, after all, a natural part of life.

Unfortunately, it seems that too many folks can't see the forest for the trees. They put so much of their time and attention on their own little intentional communities that they lose sight of the fact those intentional communities can only

successfully exist "because of" the larger unintentional community. When/if we allow the larger unintentional community to be attacked or diminished, then we set the stage for the diminishment and destruction of our smaller intentional communities.

J.V.

I would say that "community" is a gathered group of people with more similarities than dissimilarities. In that regard, the GLBTI population of Maine is not a community; our queerness alone is not enough to make us a community. I rarely see many of us together, and I'm sure that it has much to do with wanting or needing to be closeted. Also, it's difficult in a rural, sprawling state such as Maine to have a sense of community. Granted, some of us have similar interests and goals, but many others don't share them.

C.C.

Concerning the status of queer community(s) in Maine, I hate to say yes or no. (Although this is a very valid question!) I think that we need to focus on understanding how we can improve access to queer communities (if we think that there are preexisting queer communities in Maine) or how we can construct communities (if we decide that they're not already there).

I think that GLBTI people in Maine would benefit from forging links with nonGLBTI people. I recently submitted a letter to the editor to the Bangor Daily Times about the repeal (of the antidiscrimination law) on the ballot in November and when I was called to verify that I had written this letter, I was asked if I wrote a letter about "human rights." The person calling me couldn't say the word "gay" and this seems like a big problem facing GLBTI people in Maine.

Communities to me, should be visible. If we are forced too far underground, how are we going to manage to network with each other? I doubt that any of us want to be ghettoized as GLBTI people, and so it seems that we must come together as GLBTI people in the open air somehow. This might not be realistic I know. I moved here from Asheville, NC, a town with a large trans communities and the largest lesbian population per capita in the South. I'm accustomed to queer visibility even though I tend to be invisible because I'm such a girl.

The FAN newsletter provides a place to network and is extremely helpful, but it took me ten months to find it! I am not at all placing blame; I am so grateful for this resource, but this experience does seem to indicate that there is a community access problem for queer Mainers.

We need to let Maine know that we're here. This will help queer Mainers who feel isolated to find new friends, and, hopefully, it will allow those who are unaware that there are queer people around them to at least acknowledge this for a moment or two.

I also vote for a big, queer intergenerational party. Judging from the ads on FAN, there are so many groups (men's groups or lesbian groups or bears for example) that limit access. I'm not saying that I should have access to every event, but I would like to note that we have divided ourselves into factions that don't seem to have much space to mingle or mix.

M.F.
