

NETWORK NEWS

Vol. 2, No. 4

The Newsletter of the Maine Rural Network

Winter 1999

Out in the Woods of Western Maine

by Naomi Falcone

In the winter of 1995, Madeleine and I bought our house in Standish. We had been gradually de-urbanizing our lives, having moved from San Francisco to Portland (Maine, of course) and then to Standish. Standish is a half hour due west of Portland and has about 9000 full-time residents.

We were nervous about moving to a totally unknown rural area, but fear of the unknown was a challenge and we have never let it stand in the way of our choices. Within a week of moving in, a few neighbors introduced themselves, one couple arrived with a bottle of champagne. We later found out that this was in spite of the fact that the husband had just gotten out of the hospital that day. Other neighbors made a point of coming over and introducing themselves, welcoming us to the neighborhood. Our reception far exceeded any of our expectations. We did notice that the neighbor across the road wore camouflage and liked to do a lot of target practice. But other than the guy with the obvious militia tendencies, we felt very

welcomed and happy with our choice of neighborhood.

This friendliness in fact reached beyond our neighborhood to the grocery store, the hardware store, the local vet, the gas station and just about everywhere else we went in Standish. We also discovered that there were approximately nine households of lesbians and gay men within a two mile stretch from where we lived. It wasn't until the fall of 1995 that the other shoe dropped and we got to see some of the underbelly of our town. The fall of 1995 was when Concerned Maine Families had gotten an initiative on the ballot proposing to limit the protected classes of people in the Maine Human Rights Act (Maine's anti-discrimination document) to those already covered by it. This was a thinly veiled attempt to exclude the gay community from any protection from discrimination.

As the time of the election approached, we would go into town and discover people from other towns, leafleting at our post office and the grocery store, using lies and distortion to convey that we were a danger to our neighbors. So,

we stood next to them passing out our own literature opposing the referendum and the hate mongering and pointing out that we were residents of Standish. It was then that we met some of the residents of Standish who believed it was an act of morality to hate us without knowing anything about us.

As it turned out, there have been very few people in Standish (or Maine) who have been willing to openly admit their bigotry. This is true even at highly charged election times when our right to exist has often debated for months on end. Taking into account the silence behind which some people hide their bigotry, we have found a substantial number of people living in rural Maine, who are accepting and often downright progressive. We are in truth surrounded by a sea of diversity of opinion. When the progressive and gay communities fail to recognize that rural communities are also where progressive and gay people live, than all of us who live here are stereotyped as reactionary and left to oppose the bigotry that does exist, alone.

Maine Rural Network Activities

Maine Rural Network

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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.

Publication Information

Network News is published quarterly in March, June, September and December. If you would like to contribute a calendar item or short article please send it to us by the 15th of the month prior to the quarterly publication date.

Maine Rural Network
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The following are several of the recent projects in which MRN social justice groups have been involved:

★ **Community Forums regarding reproductive freedom in Oxford County.** There were two Oxford County reproductive freedom community forums held this fall, both sponsored by Western Maine Rural Network. The first forum was co-sponsored by the Alder River Grange in East Bethel, and took place on the night of the hurricane. In spite of the weather, there were around fifteen people in attendance, a number of who had traveled great distances to get there. The speakers were well received and there was a lot of interest in the issues surrounding the anti-abortion measure on November's ballot. The second forum was co-sponsored by the Public Interest Forum, which meets monthly at the Norway Library. The forum was attended by about 20 people who took part in an informative discussion about the medical, legal and ethical issues concerning the anti-choice initiative. Thanks to Jim, Deborah, Claire and Rockie, for organizing these events.

★ **Safe School Project. Oxford Hills High School** has had a series of homophobic incidents in recent years and has become known as an unsafe school for gay students. As many educators have pointed out, students don't learn in an atmosphere where they constantly have to watch

their backs. Western Maine Rural Network, in collaboration with ACLA (AIDS Coalition of Lewiston/Auburn), are working on this project to bring together the staff, students, teachers, administration and community members to support a safe, open atmosphere for all students and to bring an end to the intolerance and discrimination in Oxford County schools.

★ **Hate Crimes Prevention Training.** At the recent Hate Crimes Prevention training, Steve Wessler spoke of many incidents of hate motivated harassment and violence that have taken place in Maine. He made the point that the perpetrators do not focus on only one group, but target one group after another that are made up of people who are perceived to be acceptable scapegoats by this culture.

This event was sponsored by the Greater Waterville Fairness Alliance (GWFA) and was attended by more than 50 community members from the Fairfield area. GWFA put a lot of work into promoting this event, visiting area schools and churches and publicizing the training in the media. Steve Wessler, the presenter was a big draw and helped to promote the training. If you would like to reach Steve, his phone number at the Center for the Study & Prevention of Hate Crimes is 780-4756. Special thanks to Connie, Ray, Winnie, Steve, Ray and Jay for all their hard work.

Community Bulletin Board

Sun. 12/5/99, 10:45 am - Meeting of Greater Waterville Fairness Alliance. Planning for next spring and fall community discussions on civil rights. U.U. Church, 84 Silver St., Waterville. FMI ☎ Winnie 453-2320.

Tues. 1/11/00, 6:30 pm - (snow date 1/13) - Western Maine Rural Network meets to discuss progress on Safe School Project at Oxford Hills HS. Meet at Deering Memorial United Methodist Church, So. Paris (across from Irving station). FMI ☎ Naomi at 642-2015 or e-mail nomad@watchic.net.

Sat. 1/29/00- "Building Effective G/L/B/T Organizations." The Equity Fund of the Maine Community Foundation will offer a day-long workshop in Waterville. Flyers will be mailed to the Equity Fund's mailing list by mid-December. To be sure you're on that list, or for more information, contact Meredith Jones at the Maine Community Foundation (667-9735), or the workshop's organizer, Marjorie Love (mgmtsvcs@gwi.net). See pg. 4.

Fri. 2/11/00, 7 pm - Linda Niemann "Too Racy for the Smithsonian: Railroad Voices." Niemann, who will speak about her 20 years' of sex & gender discrimination as a brakeman on the Southern Pacific Railroad, is author of On the Rails: a Woman's Journey (Cleis Press 1992) & Railroad Voices (Stanford University Press 1998). Amphitheater, USM Portland Campus Center. Free and open to the public. FMI 780-4955.

March 2-31/00 - photography by Annette Dragon "Act Up, Fight Back, Take Pictures: Ten Years of Queer Activism." Dragon, who in 1991 co-founded the alternative newspaper APEX, started photographing the demonstrations, street actions and condom crusades of the radical group ACT UP/Portland. Thus began a decade of chronicling the fight for queer rights in Maine. USM Portland Campus Center Area Art Gallery. **Opening reception: 5:30 pm Thurs. 3/2/00.** Free and open to the public. FMI 780-4955.

Thurs. 3/9/00, 7:30 pm - Bell Hooks at USM. FMI ☎ 780-4289.

Fri. 3/10/00 - National Day of Appreciation for Abortion Providers. FMI ☎ 780-1874.

Last week of March - Carole Joffe, author of Doctors of Conscience: The Struggle to Provide Abortion before and After Roe v. Wade and other books and articles about reproductive health and rights will be making several appearances in Maine during the last week of March. Dates and venues to be confirmed by mid-January. FMI ☎ 780-1874.

Fri. 3/31/00 - A Day for Women and Girls at King Middle School in Portland. FMI ☎ the YWCA.

Fri. 4/28/00 - 7pm. Joanne Meyerowitz "Sex, Gender and Sexuality: the Case of Christine Jorgenson." Meyerowitz is a social historian and contributor to the anthology Not June Cleaver. Amphitheater, USM Portland Campus Center. Free and open to the public. FMI 780-4955.



I believe that human dignity is the basic right of every person.
I want Maine Rural Network to bring that message to all parts of Maine.

Individual ☐ \$20 Household ☐ \$35 Activist ☐ \$50 Organizer ☐ \$100 Visionary ☐ \$250 ☐ \$_____

Name _____

Street _____

E-mail: _____

Phone: day _____ evening: _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Your contribution for our educational efforts is tax-deductible. Please make checks payable to MRN..

☐ I'd like to join a local social justice group. Please contact me.

Abortion Access: without it, there is no choice

Pro-Choice groups and individuals in Maine have much to be proud of. With the November 2nd defeat of the referendum to ban abortions, a majority of Mainers spoke up and declared that we trust Maine women with their own decisions about reproductive self-determination. This victory released a collective sigh of relief among supporters of reproductive health and rights around the whole country.

Although the pro-choice community was victorious in this most recent assault on the reproductive rights of Maine women, anti-choice advocates were successful in their efforts to dominate public discourse with a false issue that they created. Pro-choice Maine was forced to expend considerable resources to defeat the abortion ban, diverting our attention away from the very real issues related to the lack of access to abortion services in Maine.

Of the six New England states, Maine has the highest percentage of counties with no abortion provider, forcing many Maine women to drive great distances to access abortion services. And although a growing number of states are using state Medicaid funds to cover abortion services for poor women, Maine is not among them. While Maine is following the national trend towards fewer and earlier abortions, accessing abortion services in Maine past twelve weeks gestation is practically impossible, forcing women in need of these services to travel to Massachusetts or New York.

Now that the referendum to ban abortions has been defeated, the time has come to bring our attention back to the very real issue of inadequate access to abortion services in Maine. To this end, the Abortion Access Project and Pro-Choice Maine are working together to convene a seminar on Medical Abortion (a.k.a. RU

486/The French Abortion Pill). Our goal is to enhance access to abortion services both through the use of current technology and an expansion of the numbers and types of health care providers with training in abortion services. Pro-Choice Maine activists are also advancing efforts to expand Medicaid coverage for abortion services, a sensible endeavor that, in the eyes of many of us directly involved in abortion services in Maine, is long overdue. Other Pro-Choice Maine activities include expanding access to abortion services at regional hospitals, and holding a statewide conference next fall to explore the empowering and positive role of abortion in women's lives.

For more information on any of these projects, please contact Nancy A. Foss at 780-1874 or PO Box 6121, Falmouth, ME 04105.

HOLD THIS DATE!

*On Saturday, January 29th, the Equity Fund of the Maine Community Foundation will offer a day-long workshop in Waterville on **BUILDING EFFECTIVE G/L/B/T ORGANIZATIONS.***

Highlights: panelists talking candidly about their experiences in developing a variety of (types, sizes, and stages of) our organizations, and sharing what they learned along the way; workshops on topics key to the development of healthy organizations; plenty of opportunity for dialogue about issues of interest; and good food and comfortable surroundings.

Flyers will be mailed out to The Equity Fund's mailing list by mid-December. To be sure you're on that list, or for more information, contact Meredith Jones at the Maine Community Foundation (667-9735), or the workshop's organizer, Marjorie Love (mgmtsvcs@gwi.net).