

NETWORK NEWS



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“What a Long, Strange Trip It’s Been”

With the second loss of civil rights legislation in Maine since 1998, the gay community has to come to grips with Maine’s liberal referendum process. The people’s veto and the ease with which anyone may add any issue to the ballot insure that Maine will not protect minority rights from the whims of the majority.

This means that the education of Maine voters about civil rights protections is even more essential to the gay community’s need for a basic level of protection.

Though we lost the referendum this year, there are signs of hope. Over the last five years we who live in rural western Maine have been watching the vote totals of the opposition declining. In the small towns such as Lovell, what would have been a margin of several hundred votes against a pro-gay initiative this election was narrowed to a four vote margin.

In Denmark, the majority voted in support of civil rights by a two vote margin. Even the towns that had larger margins of opposition had much less support than there was in 1995. The towns that voted yes or came close to support-

ing protections for Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) people, there are often people in those towns who have actively engaged their neighbors on the question of civil rights and made it clear to the people they knew that they do live with people who need civil rights protections. Western Maine is also where Maine Rural Network has been the most active.

The question of the need for civil rights protections is at the crux of the whole question. Polling shows that most people in Maine do not believe in discrimination against LGBT people. On the other hand, most people believe that there is no discrimination against sexual minorities in Maine and if there were, the current laws would remedy the situation. So it seems pretty clear that we need to get out there and talk about our experiences with discrimination and make a compelling case for people to care about this issue.

In rural Maine people are the most isolated and the least likely to know that they know anyone who is a sexual minority. If we do engage rural Maine in this discussion, there will be

a fair amount of impact because of the size of the community and a lack of competition for their attention.

One approach I have heard about is going to bean suppers and engaging people there in a dialogue about discrimination based on sexual orientation. This idea is terrific because we don’t have to rely on people showing up at an event and they are exactly the kind of audience we want to reach.

There are plenty of ideas about what we can do to engage people, but the bottom line is will our community commit to this work? If we are interested in change, with or without legislation, education is the only way to change how Maine thinks about civil rights for gay people. I hope this time people in the LGBT and allied community will be willing to start again and make a commitment to changing the minds of the people of Maine about civil rights.



A big thank you . . .

to Jim Lowe, Nina Mollicone and Rockie Graham for organizing
the forum in Bethel, jointly sponsored by MRN, Yes on 6 and
hosted by the Alder River Grange.

We thank Fritz Von Ulmer and Brian Grennan for producing the
Denmark forum sponsored by MRN and Yes on 6.

We also thank Paul Alpert and Dave Fisher for organizing a forum
at the Lovell Library.

Finally, we thank Susan Farnsworth, David Garrity, Marvin Ellison
and Graham DeCoster for leading the discussions at the forums.



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December 1, 2000

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Dear Maine Rural Network Members and Supporters,

This year the Portland Press Herald and Maine Public Television both reflected an important shift in perception in their coverage of the effort to obtain civil rights for lesbian/gay people in Maine. They focused on what gay people were doing in rural areas to support the Question 6 – the referendum on civil rights protections in Maine. This is a shift in the media's perception of the gay community as an urban-based population, as portrayed in previous media coverage, to an emphasis this year on the large number of rural gay people in Maine.

Maine Rural Network has been working to increase our visibility in rural Maine and challenge the silence around gay issues that exists in many rural communities. We consider the recognition that a rural lesbian/gay community exists to be a direct result of the work we are doing. Though we lost the vote on Question 6, our mission has always been to educate people and MRN will continue to challenge long held stereotypes about who lives in rural Maine. Small towns in western Maine are beginning to reflect these challenges, so that the vote in opposition to civil rights protections has been shrinking (see newsletter cover article for more information).

This year Maine Rural Network presented or took part in the following projects:

- MRN members organized five forums on civil rights and Question 6 in small western Maine communities. Each forum was well publicized with press releases, flyers, mailings and on public access cable, which all contributed to visibility of lesbian/gay issues in each region where the forums were held.
- Western Maine Rural Network (WMRN) actively supported a safe school project at Oxford Hills High School, in which

- MRN is collaborating with the Aids Coalition of Lewiston/Auburn. WMRN collected endorsements from the community where Oxford Hills High School is located, which will enable the school administration to support the project knowing that they have the backing of their community.
- MRN was a co-sponsor, with the Maine Rural Workers' Coalition, of a living wage rally in Augusta, demanding that minimum wage be increased to a more viable wage for impoverished families in Maine.
- MRN continues to serve as a resource for people who want to make contact with lesbian/gay people living in rural Maine. Several times a month, we receive requests for contacts in rural Maine by people who are moving to an unfamiliar community. We are also asked for contacts throughout the state by other progressive organizations and by the media.
- MRN also serves as a resource for people who are interested in educating others about hate crimes and discrimination in rural Maine. Through workshops, panel discussions and the use of our library of video and audio tapes, we are able to help to increase awareness of these issues.

As 2001 approaches, it is clear that we need more outreach to educate everyone in Maine. We are fully capable of reaching most of the population of Maine with our message of the need for civil rights protections and that we are everywhere. Often the way homophobia is expressed is by the assumption that lesbian/gay people are from somewhere else. It is beginning to be understood in Maine that we are very much a part of the community. With your contribution of time and money to the Maine Rural Network, we will be able to continue to erode the stereotypes that make still discrimination possible.

Sincerely,



Naomi Winterfalcon
Coordinator
Maine Rural Network

NW/mw

Community Bulletin Board

Sat. 12/2- 5:00 PM, SOLO* will meet for a potluck. The doors open at 5 pm, dinner at 6 pm, at the Durham Quaker Meeting House. For more information, contact footloos@gwi.net

*Single Older Lesbians Organization

Wed. 12/5 – 3-5 pm, Safe Schools meeting for Oxford Hills High School Advisory Board. Unitarian Universalist Church, Main Street, Norway.

Sat. 1/13 - Statewide Safe School Meeting. FMI and Location call Sage Hayes at 828-6560.

Wed. 12/13—Western Maine Rural Network and Oxford County Meeting entitled "Where Do We Go From Here?: Next Steps for Civil Rights in Maine." Time and location TBA. Call Naomi 642-2015 FMI.

Wed. 12/13 – 6 pm. Washington County potluck. Yes, we are still searching for a catchy name! This is a monthly event for lesbians and gay men, anyone in the LGBTQ community, in Washington County and beyond. This is a social event, to bring together people from far-flung towns, to meet others who are "Out in the woods." Each month, we've had new faces and we hope to see even more people each month. Please call 255-5989 FMI and directions.

Thurs. 12/14- 6:30 pm, Aroostook County - Northern Lambda Nord's monthly meeting, the 2nd Thursday each month at the GLBT Community Services Center of Northern Maine, 658 South Main Street, Caribou, (across the street from the Nylander Museum) 498-2088 or 800-468-2088. All interested persons are invited to attend.

Wed. 12/27- 7-9 pm Brunswick PFLAG chapter meets in the Pilgrim House of First Parish Church, 9 Cleaveland St., Brunswick. Contacts: 725-6390 (Sidney), 725-9895 (Harriet), or email Margaret-marg@ime.net.

Thu. 1/11/01- 6:30 pm Aroostook County - Northern Lambda Nord's monthly meeting, the 2nd Thursday each month at the GLBT Community Services Center of Northern Maine, 658 South Main Street, Caribou, (across the street from the Nylander Museum) 498-2088 or 800-468-2088. All interested persons are invited to attend.

Sat. 2/3- 5 pm SOLO* will meet for a potluck. Doors open at 5 pm and dinner is at 6 pm. Come to the Durham Quaker Meeting House. For more information, contact footloos@gwi.net

*Single Older Lesbians Organization

Fri., Sat, Sun. 2/2-2/4 - Haymarket training on racism. People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. FMI call Edie Richardson at 384-3254.

Thu. 2/8 - 6:30 pm, Aroostook County - Northern Lambda Nord's monthly meeting, the 2nd Thursday each month at the GLBT Community Services Center of Northern Maine, 658 South Main Street, Caribou, (across the street from the Nylander Museum) 498-2088 or 800-468-2088. All interested persons are invited to attend.

Heart Circles support/discussion group for gay/bisexual/questioning men of all ages meets in Norway on the first Wednesday of the month 6:30-8 pm; Lewiston 3rd Wednesday of the month 6:30-8 pm. FMI or directions call Sean 786-4697 (collect if you can't afford the toll calls) or acla@gwi.net.



MRN was asked to provide contacts in rural Maine, for the Maine Watch Show on Question 6. The show aired on Public Television on October 27th 2000.

I want to thank you very much for providing me with the chance to be interviewed for the MPBN show on civil rights. I have had many people come up to me and tell me they saw me on TV. So far, this has been a good thing. It also got a dialogue going between my co-workers and me after one of them just happened to see the show and came back to work and talked about it. The ultimate outcome of that talk was that another co-worker came out to them about her lesbian daughter's experiences with being harassed because of her lesbianism. This consequently changed the mind of at least one person who had been unsure of their position before the discussion.

Nina Mollicone

MRN Receives Donor Advised Haymarket Grant

We would like to thank the anonymous donor who contributed \$1000 to MRN in August, with a donor advised grant through the Haymarket Peoples' Fund. Haymarket can be reached at 42 Seaverns Avenue, Boston, MA 02130.

Telephone: (617) 522-7676
E-mail: haymarket@igc.apc.org

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The next forum was on October 7th at the Denmark Arts Center. There was a good discussion about why it was necessary to vote on Question 6 since it had become a law earlier this year. Fritz Von Ulmer and Brian Grennan were instrumental in making this forum happen. Susan Farnsworth was very good at engaging people on the question of civil rights and explaining the legislative part of the issue.

On October 12th the Public Interest Forum in Norway invited MRN to their monthly discussion group so that we could provide information to them about Question 6. David Garrity led the discussion and clarified many of the fine points of the agreement with the Catholic Church and explained how the legislative process worked.

On October 27th a forum was held at the Lovell Library. Marvin Ellison led the discussion on Question 6. Because of the presence of a member of the opposition, a more in depth conversation about discrimination could be held.

On November 1st the final forum on Question 6 was held at the Steep Falls Library. Graham DeCoster led a lively discussion.

