

MLGPA News

Advocacy for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Communities since 1984

**SPECIAL PRIDE
EDITION**

June 2001

*"Take heart, all
those in the struggle
Our lives are where
it begins
So celebrate through
the hard times,
For we will win."*

-P.J. Hoffman

HARD WORK, VIGILANCE PAYS OFF IN AUGUSTA

Several major victories move LGBT movement forward

AUGUSTA - MLGPA has been wicked busy in the State House this session. Anti-gay forces from the Right, who expected us to be weakened and helpless after our loss last November, got a big surprise. This session, MLGPA not only blocked a number of anti-gay efforts, but helped enact several measures that will immediately benefit the LGBT community, while moving us closer to our ultimate goal of full equality.

ANTI-GAY MEASURES FAIL

In January, energized by their "victory" over Question 6, the Christian Civic League and the Christian Coalition launched their most ambitious anti-gay agenda in over two decades. But through the work of MLGPA advocates and allies, every

single one of their bills has since been killed or voted down, including:

- A ban on gay people from child adoptions and foster parenting
- A block of domestic partnership benefits for state employees;
- A repeal of all protected classes in the Maine Human Rights Act

MAJOR STEPS FORWARD

Hospital Visitation Rights

LD 1560, "An Act Authorizing Patients to Designate Visitors" sponsored by former MLGPA Board member, Rep Larry Bliss (D-S.Portland)

This bill guarantees gays and lesbians the same access to their partners and loved ones as heterosexuals by allowing individuals to define who members of the "immediate family" are for the purpose of hospital visitation.

Domestic Partnership Insurance

LD 1703, "An Act to Ensure Access to Health Care" sponsored by Rep. Ben Dudley (D-Portland)

This bill simply requires health insurers to sell health insurance policies with coverage for domestic partners to all Maine companies that ask for them. The policies are to be made available under the same terms and conditions as those already offered to spouses.

ANTI-GAY SEX EDUCATION BILL

The worst bill of the session was LD 1261, "An Act to Promote Abstinence in Sex Education," sponsored by Rep. MacDougall (R-Berwick) and Sen. McAlevey (R-York). This bill would have required schools to teach "abstinence only" and prohibited the distribution of condoms in sex education classes. The bill also contained a provision requiring all sex ed courses to have, "an emphasis, provided in a factual manner and from a public health perspective, that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public."

WITH HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS

MLGPA could not have accomplished much this session without the help and support of many, including: Republican and Democratic legislators and leadership; the Maine State Employees

Association, the AFL-CIO, the Maine Association of Non-profits; civic and business groups; health care advocates, as well as the HMO Council; the Maine Human Rights Commission; the DIRIGO Alliance, and the Choice Coalition. Most important were the many members and friends of MLGPA, who shared their stories, testified at hearings and lobbied their legislators.

Many thanks to all of you.

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Youth advocates and staff from OUTRIGHT, along with parents, teachers and public health officials testified against the bill. The argued that requiring schools to teach homophobia put LGBTQ students at greater risk for suicide, substance abuse, depression and disease. In partnership with the group Plain Truth For Maine Youth, MLGPA convinced the Education Committee to vote down the bill, 11 to 2, and the House later defeated the measure 101 to 40.

PRO-ACTIVE EFFORTS AND SUCCESS

While MLGPA was determined to defeat the barrage of hate-filled initiatives, leaders were equally determined to move forward with measures to improve the lives of Maine's LGBT citizens and secure our equal rights. This year, MLGPA introduced, monitored or supported new legislation to:

- Give gay couples the same hospital visitation rights as heterosexuals
- Require insurance companies to sell policies with domestic partnership benefits to all Maine companies that ask for them
- Fund a historic \$½ million for civil rights teams and to address anti-gay violence and harassment in Maine schools
- Fund a much needed \$¼ million increase in HIV prevention services
- Create a pilot project to fully implement the Maine Medical Marijuana Act of 1998

WORK IN PROGRESS

Nearly five years ago, MLGPA joined with OUTRIGHT, GLSEN, P-FLAG, the SpeakOUT Project and other youth advocates to form the

Safer Schools Coalition. The SSC explores ways to ensure that every student in Maine has safe and equal access to education. This year, the group has been working on policy recommendations for preventing bias-motivated harassment and violence in our schools. Rather than seek new legislation, the SCC has agreed to support and closely monitor existing programs like the civil rights teams and the Attorney General's hates crimes unit.

"Pride marches and festival are about more than just a good time. They offer each of us the opportunity to make or renew a personal commitment to the struggle for LGBT equality"

Become a Legislative Advocate

Join MLGPA Today!

As a member of MLGPA you will enjoy several membership benefits:

- Our newsletter
- Legislative alerts and updates
- Invitations to our special events
- Opportunities to become an effective advocate
- PRIDE!

To become a member, call (207) 761-3732 or email MLGPA@javanet.com

MLGPA

MLGPA News is a bi-monthly publication for the members of MLGPA

Story ideas, comments, and questions are always welcome and can be directed to Rick Galena at (207) 761-3732; fax (207) 761-8484; or email MLGPA@javanet.com

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

PRIDE: A TIME TO REFLECT AND RENEW

Pride is an excellent time for us to take stock of who we are, what we've done and where we're going. I'm proud to report that MLGPA is strong and growing.

Despite another near miss at securing civil rights last November, we've accomplished a great deal in the last year:

- We polled legislative candidates for their views on LGBT issues, reviewed their voting records and made candidate endorsements
- We carried out a very effective legislative program, helping to pass important new laws and defeating some dangerous, anti-gay measures
- We began work on a permanent database of voters who support LGBT issues
- We held another fabulous and successful Great Pumpkin Ball

- We were active in the Safe Schools Coalition, seeking solutions to the problem of harassment and violence against minorities in our schools
- We received training in youth/adult collaboration from Portland Outright to improve our outreach efforts to LGBTQ youth
- We established a legislative alert program to inform and mobilize LGBT activists

Pride marches and festivals are about more than just a good time. They offer each of us the opportunity to make or renew a personal commitment to the struggle for LGBT equality.

Please stop for a moment and think seriously about what YOU can give to this movement.

Choose something to contribute and make a silent pledge to complete it in the next year.

Here are ways you can help MLGPA:

- Sign up for a new membership or renew an old one
- Become a part of our legislative action network
- Ask 10 friends to join MLGPA
- Volunteer to work in our office
- Join one of our committees
- Increase your financial support

Whatever way you can, get involved. Stand up. Share your strength. Be counted.

Towards justice and equality,
David Garrity
President

MLGPA HONORS COMMUNITY LEADERS

On Saturday, March 24th, MLGPA marked its seventeenth year of education and legislative advocacy on behalf of Maine's LGBT community with its annual gala awards banquet.

The event, co-sponsored by the Maine Diversity Alliance, MLGPA's educational wing, celebrates individuals and organizations that have made significant contributions to social justice and equal rights for Maine's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community.

This year's 200+ guests were joined by many of Maine's most important elected officials. Congressmen Tom Allen and John Baldacci, Attorney General Steven Rowe, State Treasurer Dale McCormick, former Senate Majority Leader Chellie Pingree, Senate President Michael Michaud and Speaker of the House Michael Saxl were just some of those to address the audience. Each spoke of the great strides that have been made for LGBT equality over the past two decades and

vowed to continue work on issues important to the community.

MLGPA honored some well known figures this year, all of whom were long overdue for recognition:

The **Great Pioneer Award**, for an achievement that embodies bold new vision or represents a courageous breakthrough in our struggle for equality, went to **Michael Rossetti**, who began 15 years ago with a few lonely marchers on Congress Street in Portland and almost single-handedly developed it into an entire week of events that we now call Southern Maine Pride.

The **Cameran Duncan Award**, for extraordinary accomplishment, commitment and service within the HIV/AIDS community, went to **Ron King**, recently retired director of the Down East AIDS Network for his many years of dedicated service and leadership in HIV prevention education and care services.

The **F.E. Pentlarge Award**, for exceptional work that upholds and promotes the family within our community, went to **Lois Galgay Reckitt**, one of Maine's earliest civil rights activists, for her many years of work to end domestic violence, and for educating and addressing the problem in LGBT families as well.

This year's **Community Service Awards**, for outstanding direct service to the LGBT community, went to:

Deborah Shields, for a long and full career of HIV/AIDS service as well as an unwavering dedication to LGBT equality, queer youth and civil liberties.

Michael Mayo, for his longtime political activism in support of LGBT civil rights, and for encouraging others to follow his example through the organization he helped to found, Mid-Coast for Human Rights.

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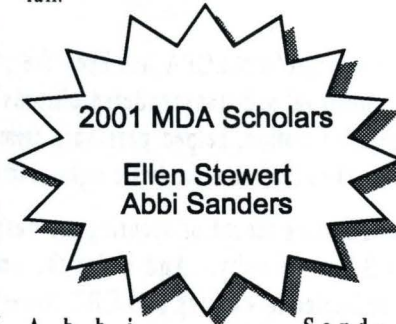
MDA ANNOUNCES 2001 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Each year the Maine Diversity Alliance awards two scholarships to college-bound high school seniors as a part of its educational and leadership development efforts. The recipients are chosen based on their written essays addressing the question of remedying discrimination in our society.

This year's award-winning essays were submitted by Ellen Stewart and Abigail Sanders. Each received a \$500 scholarship to help them continue their education at a college or university of their choice. Both were chosen from among the eighty-one essays that were submitted this year.

Ellen Stewart is a 2001 graduate of Freeport High School. Ellen "came out" as a sophomore and took on the role of educator and leader for queer youth. She cited

as one of her accomplishments being the only completely "out" student in her entire school. Ellen will be attending College of the Atlantic in the fall.



Abbi Sanders is a 2001 graduate of Maranacook Community School. At Maranacook, Abbi served as an important organizer in the Diversity Leadership Institute, a student-driven organization that educates youth on a variety of diversity issues. Patricia Stanton, Dean of Students at Mara-

nacook, describes Abbi as the "young person most passionate and effective in engaging other young people in confronting and discussing issues of equity and justice." This fall Abbi will be attending Brandeis University.

Congratulations to Ellen and Abbi! Thank you for your excellent essays and brave activism.

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Anyone interested in making a tax-deductible contribution to MDA's scholarship fund may send a check payable to:

**Maine Diversity Alliance
Scholarship Fund
PO Box 1951
Portland, ME 04104**

MCCL PLANNING NEW ANTI-GAY REFERENDUM

It's true. Michael Heath and the Maine Christian Civic League (MCCL) will soon be collecting signatures for a new anti-gay ballot measure against domestic partnerships and health insurance benefits. Their proposal, while targeted at gays and lesbians, would dramatically impact straight couples too.

There have been three major successes this year in recognizing and extending benefits to domestic partners:

- Maine became the 8th state in the country to offer domestic partner health benefits to all state employees beginning July 1, 2001
- The City of Portland enacted a Domestic Partnership Registry which recognizes both gay couples and unmarried straight couples
- As of January 1, 2002, all health insurers and HMOs in Maine will be required to sell policies with domestic partner benefits to any Maine businesses that ask for them

Christian Civil League hopes to put "domestic partnerships" on November 2002 ballot

MCCL's new initiative, if passed, would repeal all three of these provisions, and much more. It would prohibit any state, county or municipal government entity from ever spending money, offering benefits, or recognizing ANY relationship other than marriage.

Maine already has a law limiting marriage to a man and a woman, but MCCL's initiative includes "civil unions" and "domestic partnerships".

Although this initiative could be devastating to unmarried couples-gay or straight-it would have other equally serious consequences. It would overturn collective bargaining agreements negotiated in good faith between the State, University of Maine, the City of Portland and their respective employees.

It would undermine efforts by Maine's small businesses and local government's to recruit and retain qualified employees. And it would impede our efforts to offer health insurance to all Mainers.

For these reasons, businesses, labor unions and health care advocates are already organizing to oppose this measure. Leaders of past LGBT referendum organizations like Maine Won't Discriminate and the Maine Coalition for Equal Rights, along with groups like Maine SpeakOUT Project and MLGPA, have already met informally to share information and are committed to seeking a unified LGBT community effort to defeat this hate-filled initiative.

Stay tuned for future developments.

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IN BRIEF

MLGPA AWARDED GRANT FROM HRC

In February, MLGPA was the proud recipient of a \$4000 grant from the Human Rights Campaign. The grant will be used to bolster MLGPA's grassroots organization and advocacy programs and aid in the development of the first-ever statewide "pro-gay" voter file.

MLGPA .com?

The MLGPA Board of Directors have announced plans for a new interactive web site. The site will serve as a tool for MLGPA's grassroots advocacy, communications and fundraising programs. The site, which should be up later this Fall, is expected to feature news releases, legislative updates, an interactive action center, and issue summaries, along with volunteer and job postings and membership information.

ALL POLITICS ARE LOCAL

In the wake of last November's referendum defeat, several Maine communities are moving forward with local civil rights ordinances. Campaigns are underway in the towns of Brunswick, Waterville and Bangor. If successful, these communities will join others like Portland, Long Island, Bar Harbor, South Portland, Falmouth, Orono, Brooksville and Sorrento in extending civil rights protections to gays and lesbians.

Maine Lesbian Gay Political Alliance

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**Join our Action Alert
Network!!
Email MLGP@javanet.com**

*Advocacy for the
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual
and Transgendered
Communities since 1984*

THE VOICE OF EQUALITY AND JUSTICE IN MAINE

Since 1984, the non-profit MLGPA has been the political and legislative voice for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered citizens in Maine. We've fought to secure civil rights legislation, helped pass hate crimes protection laws, promote equality, and to worked to ensure the basic rights and freedoms of all Mainers.

We have an outstanding record of securing the passage of legislation that benefits Maine's LGBT community. And we're the only membership organization with a lobbyist dedicated to working on LGBT issues in the Legislature.

To continue our success, we need your support.

ADD YOUR VOICE. SHARE YOUR STRENGTH.

JOIN MLGPA TODAY!

A NEW VOICE AND VISION AT MLGPA

MLGPA

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Executive Director

Board of Directors

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Vice-President

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Marti Hagglund
Scott Hawkins
Robin Lambert
Jane Lincoln
Kevin Rubenstein
Cindy Stewart
Mark Sullivan
Charles Veilleux
Lynn Walkiewicz

There's a new face at MLGPA—that of Rick Galena, the organization's new executive director. In February, the Board of Directors picked Rick for the job as part of a renewed commitment to strengthening the organization's outreach, communications and legislative advocacy programs, and re-building the organization's financial strength after last November's referendum.

"I am honored to have been selected as the first-ever executive director of MLGPA," Rick said, "and I have long admired its work on behalf of the LGBT community. I am especially proud to be joining the staff at this pivotal moment when MLGPA is taking a renewed and inclusive approach to our fight for equal rights is so important."

"What our movement needs now is MLGPA's strong and progressive leadership. I'm delighted that Rick Galena has enthusiastically accepted the challenge," said David Garrity, MLGPA President. "Rick represents the best of the LGBT community: a proven record of grass-

roots organizing, a strong commitment to progressive political work, and a demonstrated history of building organizational financial strength."

"MLGPA and the LGBT community are fortunate to have someone like Rick Galena to step into a leadership role at this time," said Vice President Maggie Allen. "Rick brings an amazing level of experience, vision and commitment to progressive change. Rick embodies the best we have to offer. I'm looking forward to working with him."

Rick is an energetic, dynamic leader and brings several strengths to the job, including fundraising, grassroots organizing and legislative advocacy.

Rick says he is excited about the opportunity to work with MLGPA members to achieve the following goals:

1. To reach out and strengthen MLGPA's ties with other advocacy organizations
2. To grow MLGPA's membership and build a strong team of activists

3. To further MLGPA's legislative agenda
4. To keep the fight for LGBT equality moving forward

Rick's background makes him well suited for the job. As a student, he worked as a legislative intern with the governor's HIV Advisory Committee. He also worked for the state Bureau of Health and interned with the Maine AIDS Alliance.

Before he graduated in 1998, Rick did grassroots organizing for the Maine Choice Coalition. More recently, he worked for the state Democratic Party as director of the House Democratic Campaign Committee.

Rick grew up in Pennsylvania and moved to Maine in 1993. He holds a B.A. in Human Ecology, with a concentration in public policy and law, from College of the Atlantic. He and his partner, Bill Kinnane, live in Portland.