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MLGPA News (February 2002)

Mark Sullivan

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MLGPA: State Broke Promise to People with AIDS- Again *Medicaid waiver funding MLGPA's top legislative priority*



Volunteers are the heart and soul of MLGPA's activities. Here a group stuffs envelopes for a recent fundraising mailing.

Two years ago Maine was to become the first state in the nation to launch a pioneering new program that included a federal waiver to pay for early medical care for about 300 people with HIV who were ineligible for Medicaid because of their incomes.

When he announced the waiver in February 2000, Governor King said "This is tremendous news. I want to compliment the Department of Human Services, which led the effort to secure the waiver."

He cited research which showed that it would be less expensive for the State to pay for preventive medicines to

control HIV early than to wait to pay for patients' full-blown AIDS treatments.

But MLGPA, along with several legislators and AIDS activists, contends that the King Administration and DHS broke their promise by not funding the state's

portion of the waiver. Without that funding, the program cannot be implemented, leaving people in need of medication and health care without assistance. In the meantime, several other states have received similar Medicaid waivers and have moved forward in implementing their programs.

"The sad thing about it is some people have died or deteriorated from terminal AIDS because we didn't get

this in place," said Francis Finnegan, the man who lead the effort for the new waiver before leaving his job as Medical chief at DHS.

The program is estimated to cost \$56 million over five years, one-third of which is to be paid for by the State. But with the King Administration's refusal to allocate the money or to secure another source of funding, the program has been dormant, awaiting implementation since the Governor's announcement in early 2000.

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SAVE THE DATE!!!!

for the
18th Annual

MLGPA Awards Banquet

**Saturday, March 30th
Holiday Inn by the Bay
Portland**

6:00 p.m.-midnight

**For volunteer opportunities
or inquiries, call:**

442-9513

sueandmaggi@clinic.net

Ask for Maggie

LGBT News Round-Up

Pediatricians Support Same-Sex Couples' Adoption

On 2/2, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) issued a policy statement supporting legal and legislative efforts to provide second parent or co-parent adoptions to same-sex couples. The widely-respected academy based its position on a review of scientific literature, which led it to conclude that such adoptions are in the best interests of children. Since the report's release, anti-gay organizations have gone on the offensive with misinformation about gays and lesbians in an effort to discredit the report and AAP.

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) is urging LGBT people to e-mail or write to the AAP in support of their scientific, unbiased position on adoption by same-sex couples. Write or e-mail the American Academy of Pediatrics at:

*American Academy of Pediatrics
141 Northwest Point Blvd
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007
Attn: Customer Service Center.
CSC@aap.org*

HRC also suggests writing to local newspapers and to state and federal elected officials in support of AAP and same sex couple adoption.

PA/VT Courts Bring Holiday Cheer

In a 12/26 order signed by all five justices, Vermont's Supreme Court unanimously rejected a challenge to the state's civil unions law, rejecting claims brought by taxpayers, legislators and town clerks. One claim questioned the VT civil unions law validity because 14 House members who supported it bet on the outcome of a preliminary House vote. In the other, town clerks had argued against the law's constitutionality because they claimed issuing civil union licenses to same sex couples forces them to violate their religious beliefs.

Meanwhile, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled 12/24 that a woman who helped raise a child

with her former lesbian partner can seek visitation rights with the child even though the couple has separated. While the 5-2 ruling does not grant visitation rights, her attorney said the court's decision was important because the court recognized her legal standing as a parent. The case involved two women who began an exclusive relationship in the late 1980s and had a child together in 1992. When they separated in 1997, a trial court granted the biological mother sole custody of the girl, granting her former partner visitation rights. However, the biological mother requested and received a stay pending appeal.

"Wooden Shoe" Know:

Dutch Gay Marriages a Hit

The Netherlands' Central Bureau of Statistics reports that Dutch civil servants have wed nearly 2,000 same-sex couples in the six months since gay marriage was legalized last year.

The law, which took effect 4/1/01 made the Netherlands the first country to grant gay couples the same rights as heterosexual couples, including the right to adopt children. As of 9/30/01, 2,100 men and 1,700 women had married someone of the same sex, a total of 1,900 marriages.

And We Get Eldercare in the Sunshine State

Officials in Broward County, Florida announced on 1/3/02 that they will open the state's first day center specializing in care for gay and lesbian elders as early as this summer. A \$200k federal grant will help to start the center, one of the nation's first, at the Sunshine Cathedral in Ft. Lauderdale. Chads won't be the only things dimpled and hanging in the city better known for Spring Break and other frolicsome activities!

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MLGPA News is the bi-monthly publication for MLGPA members. Story ideas, comments, and questions are always welcome and can be directed to:

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How About David and Jonathan in the Bible?

The **Gay People's Chronicle** reports that school officials in Tipp City, Ohio, north of Dayton recently removed about 140 books from a local junior high school following complaints from some parents about "inappropriate subject matter and language." Among the books is *Baby Be-Bop*, a gay-themed novel by Francesca Lia Block, and another series by the same author about a young woman and her gay friend, Dirk. School officials said the books contain adult language and explicit sexual activity. The furor started at a 10/25/01 school board meeting after a teacher told students to pick one book from the American Library Association's "100 Most Challenged Books of 1999-2000" and debate whether or not the book should be censored.

MLGPA to Honor Joel Abromson

LGBT Rights Champion & MLGPA Friend

BY ROBIN LAMBERT

Maine's LGBT community lost a great friend and a leader for equal rights in January, when State Senator Joel Abromson died after a long battle with liver cancer.

Joel, as all of us called him, was a tireless supporter of equal rights for our community and the prime sponsor of the bill to outlaw discrimination based on sexual orientation both times the bill passed and was signed by the Governor.

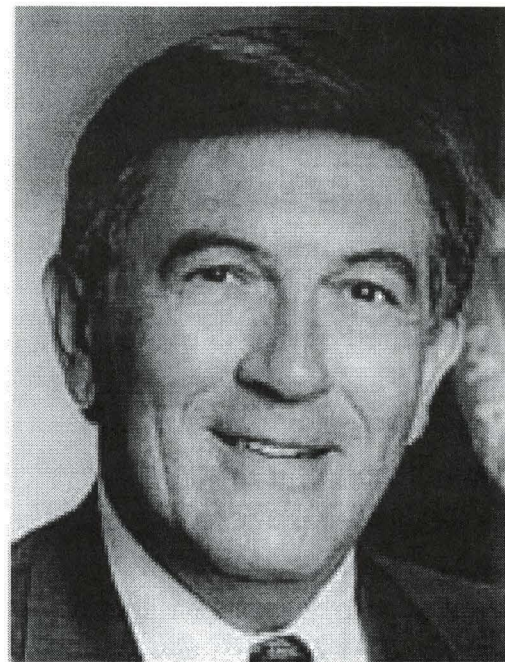
Joel always understood the evil of discrimination, growing up as a Jew in Lewiston. But it was not until he and his wife Linda (another great supporter of our rights, who as a Portland City Councilor, helped pass the Portland Equal Rights Ordinance in 1992) visited one of the Nazi concentration camps where so many of their relatives were murdered. When Joel noticed the pink triangles on the walls of the concentration camp alongside the yellow Stars of David, he

realized the connection and it all clicked for him. From that point on, Joel fought tirelessly for human rights, not just the LGBT community but for everyone. Oh, and by the way, Joel was a Republican!

Throughout his over 7 years in the Maine Senate, Joel cajoled, lobbied and consequently changed the minds of many of his fellow GOP House and Senate colleagues. In fact, on the final vote in the Maine Senate, over 3/4 of the Republican members supported equal rights.

On a personal note, I was a very good friend of both Joel and Linda. I volunteered on each of Joel's campaigns. What an honor it was to work with such an ethical, intelligent and gentle person. So it is with much sadness that I write this article.

Joel's loss is a terrible tragedy. But what will not be lost are his many accomplishments and all the hearts and minds that he helped change as



Joel Abromson
1938-2002

he fought so hard for our equal rights. What a legacy, indeed.

I am so pleased that MLGPA will honor Joel at our Annual Awards Banquet on Saturday, March 30th at the Holiday Inn by the Bay. I hope you will join us for this very special night.

So, Joel, good bye dear, great friend. You are sorely missed, but you will never be forgotten.

Join our Action Alert Network
e-mail: MLGPA@javanet.com

Help MLGPA's efforts to pass legislation on behalf of Maine's LGBT community and to defeat the efforts of the Maine Christian Civic League and its allies to limit our rights. By joining our Action Alert Network, you will receive notices of important pending legislative actions and what you can do to help. Sign up today!

MLGPA calls for expansion of Family Life Education in Maine Schools

Advocates claim programs, "affirm the health, safety and dignity of all Maine students"

BY RICK GALENA

MLGPA has joined with the Family Planning Association of Maine, Maine Medical Association and Planned Parenthood to ask the Maine Legislature to do more to help schools promote the health and well-being of Maine youth. The coalition, formed early last year, is backing legislation submitted by State Representative Elaine Fuller (D-Manchester) calling for an additional \$750,000 annually to expand what is known as Family Life Education (FLE) in Maine schools.

FLE encompasses many topics one would expect, like abstinence, contraception, puberty and sexually-transmitted disease (STD) prevention. But it is also broader, including skills development for healthy relationships, effective communication, self-esteem and self-respect. These skills are essential to all healthy relationships, sexual or not.

FLE is not just about preventing teen pregnancy and STDs. Many aspects of the program address the specific needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth. According to Dottie Melanson, a registered nurse and chair of MLGPA's Legislative Committee, FLE programs are also about combating the homophobia and stigma

many gay youth face in the classroom.

"Lack of information, misinformation and homophobia are common in school-based sexuality education," Melanson said. "Some educators either choose or are required to teach that homosexuality is unacceptable. Many assume that all students are heterosexual and teach risk-reduction in terms of heterosexual contact only or teach abstinence-until-marriage—concepts frequently of little relevance to gay youth. Failing to provide risk reduction education for gay youth implies that they are non-existent and denies them instruction on how to manage their sexual identity and lives positively and responsibly. Family Life Education programs are different, they offer gay youth unbiased and medically accurate information about puberty, anatomy and physiology, HIV/AIDS and other topics through affirming and inclusive language and without judgmental or moralistic messages."

Research suggests that homophobia and heterosexism greatly contribute to higher rates of suicide, violence, victimization, risk behavior for HIV infection and substance abuse among LGBT youth as compared to their heterosexual

peers. A recent study found that 52 percent of gay youth in Maine reported seriously thinking about attempting suicide in the last 12 months. Thirty percent reported making a suicide plan and 16 percent reported at least one attempt.

"In the limited number of schools that include FLE as part of their overall health curriculum, these programs are often the first or only time young gay students hear affirming messages about their sexual orientation or get accurate, unbiased information about human sexuality, gender identity and reproductive health," Melanson said. "FLE classes offer gay youth an opportunity to talk and hear about human sexuality, to develop positive relationships and aspirations, and to receive affirmation and support which builds positive self-esteem and self-worth."

FLE is currently offered in approximately 14 percent of Maine schools. The legislation proposed by Rep. Fuller would provide the funding necessary to expand the programs into nearly half of Maine schools.

"This is a significant and vitally important effort," said MLGPA President Maggie Allen. "As we continue to work on making schools safe,

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MLGPA Awards Banquet Set for March 30th

Reservations now being accepted

Maine's LGBT community has labored over the years to make a difference in our state. Whether through lobbying in Augusta, speaking out or educating local community organizations on our issues, LGBT people are working hard to make Maine a better place to live. The MLGPA Awards Banquet is our way to celebrate individuals and organizations who have made significant contributions to social justice and equal rights for Maine's LGBT community.

Please join us in "celebration" at the **2002 MLGPA Awards Banquet**. The banquet will be held **Saturday, March 30th at the Holiday Inn by the Bay**. The evening will start with a Social Hour at 6:00 PM followed by dinner and awards. The awards ceremony will recognize this year's recipients for their positive efforts in our community. We will also have a special presentation in honor of the late Senator Joel Abromson for his support and commitment to the Maine's LGBT community.

Ticket and reservation information will be in the mail soon. To make a reservation for the Awards Banquet, call Penny Rich at (207)773-7393.

Below are descriptions of

the awards with some of the exceptional past recipients.

GREAT PIONEER

AWARD for achievement that embodies bold new vision or courageous break through in our struggle for equality.

Recipients include: *Governor Angus King, Dale McCormick, Mabel Wadsworth Women's Health Center and Jean Vermette.*

LARRY CONNOLLY

AWARD- for outstanding service by a Maine public official. Named in memory of one of the first sponsors of our anti-discrimination bill.

Recipients include: *Gerald Talbot, Gerald Conley Jr., Tom Andrews, Susan Farnsworth and Joel Abromson.*

CAMERON DUNCAN

AWARD- for extraordinary accomplishment, commitment and service within the AIDS community. Named after Cameron Duncan, who openly shared his life and gave AIDS a face for the people of Maine.

Past recipients include: *Frannie Peabody, Myles Rightmire, Peter Haffenreffer, Tom Antonik, and Nancy Bullett.*

F.E. PENTLARGE

AWARD- for exceptional work that upholds and

promotes families within our community. Frances E. "Effie" Pentlarge founded PFLAG in Maine and never stopped working for equal rights. Recipients include: *Sally & Eugene Debor, Mare & Laurie Wallace, Peter Rees, Susan Comyns and Effie herself.*

MEDIA AWARD- for exceptional print or broadcast reporting and commentary on LGBT and civil rights issues. Presented in the past to *Bill Nemitz, Maine Public Radio, Maine Times and Tony Giampetruzzi.*

COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD- for those who provide outstanding direct service to the community. Past recipients include *Paula Stockholm, Karen Geraghty, Laura Fortman, Jim Neal & Roger Mayo, Lin Gould, Northern Lambda Nord, Mary Harney, Rev. Fred Lipp, Mitzi Lichtman and Betsy Sweet.*

YOUTH IN LEADERSHIP AWARD- for a youth leader (24 years of age or younger) in recognition of their contributions to the broader LGBT community. Presented to the *Gay/Straight Alliance of Mt. Desert High School and Ellen Stewert.*

MLGPA to Host Screening of *Trembling before G-d*

Maine Jewish Film Festival offering examines the "struggles of gay and lesbian Orthodox Jews"

On Sunday, March 10th, MLGPA will join GLBTQARP at USM, Outright, GLSEN and PFLAG, in conjunction with the Maine Jewish Film Festival to host a screening of *Trembling before G-d*, director Sandi Simcha DuBowski's potent, painful look at the struggles of gay and lesbian Orthodox Jews to reconcile their deeply felt faith with the sexuality that faith forbids. Interviews with Jews from Brooklyn to Jerusalem merge into a multi-layered testament to tradition and survival.

Time Out magazine calls this film a "smart, uncommonly objective documentary," while the **Village Voice** says it is

"above all a work of reverence."



Following the film, Rabbi Alice Dubinsky of Congregation Bet Ha'am in South Portland will be lead a discussion with Howard Solomon, a professor at Tufts University who teaches the history of homophobia and anti-Semitism. A reception, sponsored by Videoport and

the Maine Speak Out Project, will follow at the Maine Speak Out Project offices.

For more information about the film, visit the *Trembling before G-d* website:

<http://www.tremblingbeforeg-d.com/>

The Maine Jewish Film Festival runs March 9-14 at The Movies and at the Portland Museum of Art. Also of interest to the gay/lesbian community is Return of Sarah's Daughters, Thursday, March 14 at 5:30 p.m. For information, call 831-7495 or visit www.mjff.org. To order tickets, call 831-7495 or visit The Movies on Exchange Street, 10 Exchange Street, Portland.

Family Life Education

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supportive learning environments for all students, the expansion of FLE programs into half of Maine schools is a tremendous step forward, and will ultimately help make all students safer, happier and healthier."

The proposed legislation, which was overwhelmingly approved by the Health and Human Services Committee, now heads to the full House and Senate for consideration before being sent to the Governor King who has indicated he would sign it.

Membership Survey

(continued from page 7)

Educating and organizing the community for lobbying and political action. **Maintaining an interactive website with news** was fourth and **Working to find and elect LGBT candidates for public office** and **Developing a state wide list of voters who support the LGBT community** were tied for fifth place.

Comments were made in certain replies that were interesting it that it was suggested that along with working to find and elect LGPA candidates for public office that support for supportive candidates be included.

The third questionnaire topic concerned personal experience with discrimination and hate crimes and what individuals have experienced. The overwhelming reply was that many members had experienced verbal abuse, been harassed or threatened. Many reported having been called "faggot" and other hateful names.

**The Maine Jewish Film Festival
in association with
MLGPA, GLBTQARP at
USM, Outright, GLSEN and PFLAG**



presents:

Trembling Before G-d
Sunday, March 10 at 8:00 p.m.
The Movies on Exchange Street

MDA Scholarship Campaign Underway

Help support graduates who speak up for LGBT Rights

BY SUSAN SPARACO

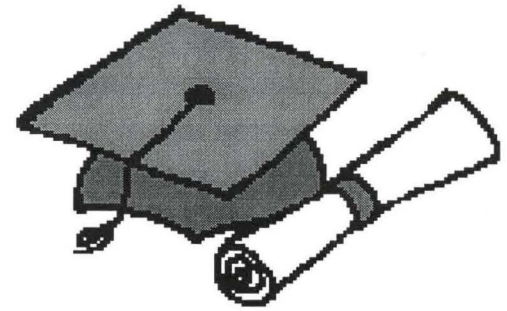
The Maine Diversity Alliance (soon-to-be officially renamed the MLGPA Foundation) will again this year award scholarships to two high school seniors.

Applicants for the scholarship are asked to submit an essay addressing how they can combat discrimination in our society. We receive dozens of student essays each year, many of which bear witness to the existence of harassment and discrimination in our schools. The good news is that there are students who speak out when confronted with such conduct. Our scholarship program provides a forum for those students to share their personal stories of crisis and courage and allows us a means to recognize at least some of them.

Our scholarships are typically presented to the

recipients at their high school's graduation or awards ceremony. At least one representative from the MDA attends the ceremony to present the award and to personally meet and congratulate the recipient. Consequently, the simple awarding of the scholarship at the student's public assembly provides an important opportunity for recognition for both the student and our organization within a particular community.

That is where you come in. As always, we need your help in sustaining the program. Our goal is to increase the amount of our two scholarships from \$750 each to \$1000 each. Given the high cost of post-secondary education, these are modest amounts, indeed, but still more than the amounts given by many other local service organizations. That is as it should be.



Our scholarship recognizes courage where it may, otherwise, go unrecognized. Please help us recognize these young champions of civil rights in a very tangible way. Please contribute to the by sending a donation to:

MDA Scholarship Fund

P.O. Box 1951

Portland ME 04104

Please indicate on the check or otherwise that the donation is for scholarships. Also, stay tuned for an important announcement about the scholarship program at the MLGPA/MDA banquet on March 30th at the Holiday Inn by the Bay in Portland.

Results of MLGPA Membership Survey

BY CHUCK VEILLEAUX

MLGPA/MDA received 37 replies to our recent Member Survey. The survey requested that members rate the items listed on a scale of 1-5, "1" being most important and "5" being least important. This basis was used for the most part throughout the survey.

Question 1. What issues should MLGPA and MDA be addressing?

The overwhelming response was **Discrimination**, which received 28 replies, putting it in first place. **Domestic Partnership Benefits** was second, followed by **Hate Crimes**, **LGBT Youth** and **Safer Schools**, in that order. However, if **Domestic Partnership Benefits** and **Domestic Partner Registry** were considered as basically the same issue, it would take first place as most important.

Other issues considered moderately important were **Civil Rights**, **Family/Adoption**, **HIV/AIDS**, and **Civil Unions/Marriage**.

Question 2. What activities should MLGPA/MDA be undertaking?

Members replied to the question as follows: First place was given to **Monitoring state legislation**. **Lobbying** was second, followed by

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MLGPA: State Broke Promise to People with AIDS- Again

(continued from page 1)

“For over two years people living with HIV/AIDS in Maine have patiently waited,” said MLGPA Executive Director Rick Galena. “Many have had to choose between their jobs, their homes, feeding themselves or taking their medication- all the while, they wait. It’s time for the waiting to end. It’s time for Governor King and the Department of Human Services to honor their promise to fund the HIV/AIDS Medicaid waiver program.”

MLGPA has joined activists

and clients of the Eastern Maine AIDS Network in Bangor to pressure the King Administration to implement the program. In early January, activists organized a “lobby day” to educate members of the Legislature about the waiver and urge legislative leaders to fund the \$2 million per year necessary to begin the program.

“Securing the funding to implement the Medicaid waiver is MLGPA’s highest priority this legislative session,” said Galena. “This program is

essential to ensuring that people living with HIV/AIDS in Maine receive the medication and health care they need to be healthy, productive citizens.”

Last year the number of people living in Maine with AIDS was 998, up from 932 the year before, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta. The State Bureau of Health estimates that over 1200 people are living in Maine are HIV positive.



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