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SafeZone Established at University of Maine

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Maine Perspective

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A sure sign of spring is the planting going on in the Clapp Greenhouses by organizers of the Black Bear Food Guild, the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project of the Sustainable Agriculture Program in the Department of Applied Ecology and Environmental Sciences. CSA coordinator Scott Howell began planting vegetable seeds of heirloom and locally adapted varieties in the hopes that vegetable seedlings will be ready for planting at the Rogers Farm as early as May. See related story, page 7

Photo by Tim Boyd

Safe Zone Project to be Established at UMaine



Promoting awareness and sensitivity to diversity, and advocating the rights of all Maine citizens to access their educational aspirations are the goals behind a Safe Zone Project being initiated this weekend at the University

of Maine. The Project will provide members of the University community with a visible means of indicating support for gays, lesbians and bisexuals with three-color stickers to demarcate "safe spaces" on campus that are free of prejudice or intolerance.

The Safe Zone Project, sponsored by the UMaine Gay Lesbian Bisexual Concerns Committee, will be introduced Sunday, April 2, to those members of the University community attending the concert performance of the Maine Gay Men's Chorus beginning at 4 p.m., in the Hutchins Concert Hall. Throughout the remainder of awareness-raising programming on campus, "Defending Our Community: Gay Lesbian Bisexual Community Pride Celebration at the University of Maine," members of the University community will be able to contact Committee members to talk about and request stickers designed to "contribute to the creation and maintenance of a safe campus climate for all people." Next week, an information table in the Union also will be staffed by

Committee members available to answer questions and provide stickers to those requesting them.

"We want to be certain this is a campus with a welcoming environment for all people," according to *continued on page 14*

Task Force on UMS Initiatives Reports

President Hutchinson's ad hoc Task Force on UMS Initiatives has completed its assessment of the implementation of the Education Network of Maine (ENM) and has forwarded its report to the UMS Board of Trustees.

Based on feedback provided at 12 "campus conversations" held since Feb. 27, the report was developed by a 10-member ad hoc committee

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As a service to the University community, costs of producing Maine Perspective are underwritten by University Printing Services.

Safe Zone *continued from page 1*

to Tina Passman, co-chair of the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Concerns Committee. "These will be visible signs to large numbers of the gay, lesbian and bisexual community members and their families who work at, attend and use facilities at the University that this a place where they belong. We also hope to empower those students, faculty staff and administrators with a passion for social justice to have a way of indicating that passion and support. The initiative also will encourage dialogue, discussion and coalition-building around all issues of oppression - a joining in partnership with people to build a just community."

Display of a Safe Zone sticker by any member of the University community indicates that one not only values the diversity of people but sees "lesbians, gays and bisexuals as an integral and valid part of that diversity," according to organizers. On a concrete level, the display of the sticker indicates one is comfortable with the issues and wants to demonstrate support that could take the form of conversations about gay rights or being there for an acquaintance who knows it is "safe" to "come out to you."

"Some people are very eager to show their support for gay, lesbian and bisexual persons and their rights to accessibility to jobs and education, and this sticker gives them the opportunity to do that. This is very much a process of choice. At the same time, it by no means indicates that persons who do not display the stickers are anti-civil rights or anti-gay, in the same way one can't assume people who display the sticker are gay, lesbian or bisexual. What it does do is provide people with an opportunity to publicly express their sentiments at a time when it is becoming increasingly dangerous to be openly gay, lesbian or bisexual," Passman says.

"What the stickers indicate is that, for any staff or faculty member, student, administrator or community person coming into that space who might be gay, lesbian or bisexual, or who have family members who are gay, lesbian or bisexual, they know that that environment is one in which they would be welcome to bring up that issue, not in terms of counseling but in terms of normalizing, everyday conversation. It would be a place for conversation in which people would not have to change pronouns or make up background information for family members or erase mention of a particular person from that conversation. It is not a place meant to provide physical safety. The place for people to go if they feel they are at physical risk is Public Safety; if they feel they are a victim of a hate crime, they contact the Attorney General's Office and the campus Office of Equal Opportunity."

Members of the University community need to be "very thoughtful" before displaying the sticker, Passman says. Considering whether or not to request a sticker could provide supervisors and support staff with an opportunity to really talk to one another about such issues. "One thing we want to avoid is a sticker being used in the name of political correctness," Passman says. "Being supportive of gay, lesbian and bisexual people is not a fad, just as anti-racism is not a fad. It is a serious commitment."

Passman says the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Concerns Committee is aware that the Safe Zone Project "could create discomfort for a number of people who, for personal reasons, need to remain closeted or could feel threatened. We are sensitive to the fact that some may have religious difficulties with a project like this," she says. "Those difficulties or discomforts accompany a pluralistic society. We must be sensitive to the issues, but not so much that it silences individuals. The purpose of education is to learn how to negotiate some of these dynamic tensions that exist in the latter part of the 20th century in the United States."

UMaine is following the lead of other major higher education institutions like the University of Kansas and University of Rhode Island where similar Safe Zone Projects have been

SAFE ZONE FACT SHEET

What is the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Concerns Committee?

The GLBCC is a standing committee composed of interested faculty, staff and students from the University of Maine community. Its primary mission is to provide resources, support, affirmation and social contact for lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

What is the Safe Zone Project?

The Safe Zone Project provides lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and heterosexual allies with a visible means of indicating support for the lgb community. The Safe Zone stickers are essentially a visual cue, indicating that the space demarcated is a "safe space" for lesbians, gays and bisexuals to be themselves. When placed on office doors, dorm room doors or other public spaces, these stickers contribute to the creation and maintenance of a safe campus for all people.

What do the symbols on the Safe Zone sticker represent?

Three notable symbols are employed in the sticker design. The most obvious one, perhaps, is the outline of the state of Maine, upon which are placed two triangles of different colors. These triangles have considerable historical significance. During World War II, the Nazis arrested and persecuted homosexuals as well as Jews, Gypsies and other groups deemed undesirable. Just as Jews were forced to wear the Star of David, so too were homosexual men forced to don the pink triangle. The Nazis assigned the black triangle to lesbians. Both gays and bisexuals have adopted these symbols in remembrance of those men and women.

I'm not gay; can I display a Safe Zone sticker?

Everyone is encouraged to consider a Safe Zone sticker, gay and non-gay alike.

What does it mean to me if I display a Safe Zone sticker?

It means that you value the diversity of people and see lesbians, gays and bisexuals as an integral and valid part of that diversity. On a more concrete level, displaying this sticker means that you are comfortable with this issue, and want to demonstrate your support. You may find that your sticker precipitates a conversation about gay rights with an acquaintance, elicits feedback from your friends, or even prompts someone in your life to come out to you.

What would be an inappropriate use of the Safe Zone sticker?

It's understandable if you aren't comfortable with the subject of homosexuality and bisexuality; society has yet to fully embrace the lesbian, gay and bisexual members. If you are genuinely uncomfortable, we ask that you not display the Safe Zone sticker. For the Safe Zone sticker to have meaning, those folks displaying the sticker must feel comfortable with its underlying philosophy. PLEASE DO NOT MISREPRESENT YOUR FEELINGS WITH THIS STICKER. If you have negative feelings towards gays, lesbians and bisexuals, we ask that you respect the rights of others to have a different opinion.

Where can I get more information?

Contact the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Concerns Committee, c/o Honors Center, University of Maine, Orono, ME 04469.

established. It was on a visit to the University of Rhode Island where UMaine graduate student Bob Coffey first saw such a project in action. At the University of Vermont, where Coffey received his bachelor's degree, there was a "safe space" campaign on campus primarily for the benefit of students.

"I was involved with a similar program at the University of Vermont," says Coffey, co-chair of the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Concerns Committee. "When I visited the University of Rhode Island last spring, I found that they had instituted a Safe Zone program as well. As a visitor to the campus, I was struck by the number stickers on office doors and windows, on people's desks. I came away feeling very positive about URI, and about the sense of inclusiveness it had engendered through its program. I'm enthusiastic about the launching of our Safe Zone Program at the University of Maine. I think that folks who chose to display Safe Zone stickers will be sending a strong message *continued next page*

that we are a supportive and affirming community for all people.

"In light of the upcoming referendum (Section 4552-A: An Act to Limit Protected Classes Under Maine Law) on civil rights for Maine's lesbian and gay citizens, I think that the institution of this program is a timely one," Coffey says. "Studies indicate that the level of anti-gay violence and harassment rises in communities where intense debates over gay and lesbian rights take place. I would hope that Maine will prove to be the exception to the rule, but given the nature of the rhetoric that is being disseminated by the proponents of this referendum, I'm afraid we may witness some of the fallout from this on our campus. Now more than ever, it's important to have those individuals who feel strongly about the inherent rights and dignity due all people to step forward and make themselves seen and heard."

The University of Maine has long since gone on record as a place of tolerance and acceptance, while concurrently equal opportunity and affirmative action statements statewide in the University of Maine System support diversity, Passman says. With rising awareness regarding diversity and the importance of access to education through such mandates as the federal Americans with Disabilities Act, the Safe Zone Project has become a "natural extension of a process that has been going on for quite some time."

"The University of Maine has come of age in the area of diversity and pluralism," Passman says. "We have strong and consistent leadership at UMaine in terms of social justice and the building of an ethical community. People at UMaine are of extreme good will. I have heard people here express tremendous distress, sensitivity and insight as to how it must be to be a gay, lesbian or bisexual person or to have family members who are. That's one reason we think the time is right for this project."

Gays, lesbians and bisexuals represent 10 percent to 15 percent of any given community, according to Passman. That percentage is often higher in university communities that tend to be welcoming to those who have been marginalized. "Universities have characteristically taken the lead in the fight against social injustice and intolerance," she notes. "Universities like ours also have faculty with national leadership in research and advocacy in the areas of social justice, which gay, lesbian and bisexual members of the community would find more welcoming for them."

Yet as efforts to promote and celebrate diversity grow in state and nation, there has been an inevitable backlash - a parallel development that also has to do with social evolution and change. There is increasingly polarization of segments of the community triggered by such factors as state legislation, Passman says. She points to California's Proposition 187 that was aimed at reducing the number of undocumented aliens, but which inevitably resulted in an escalation of intolerance in that state.

"With the rising tides of intolerance and homophobic attitudes in the state and nationwide, we are most concerned about the characterizing of gay, lesbian and bisexual persons with reprehensible stereotypes. It's a civil rights issue, and has to do with supporting people's awareness," Passman says. "By looking at a segment of any population that is oppressed, one can begin to understand the oppression of others, whether members of the Franco-American, African-American, Native American or disabled communities. People need to be aware of the invisible oppression of anti-gay, lesbian and bisexual statements and behaviors in the same way they should be sensitive to making remarks putting down another's religion or invisible disability. Just as handicapped accessibility is important, and just as racism or sexism are not OK anywhere on campus, homophobic responses or demeaning words are not OK. All taken together, they create a climate of exclusion." ▲



For the third consecutive year, the University of Maine's Peer Tutors attended and presented at the New England Writing Centers Association Conference, held March 4 at Rivier College, Nashua, N.H. This year's conference brought tutors, professors and administrators from regional high schools, colleges and universities to discuss: "Writing Center Pedagogy: A Movable Feast." Bonnie Sunstein of the University of Iowa gave the keynote address, combining her portfolio research with her work in writing centers to look at liminal spaces and the writing process. Three UMaine graduate students (Nicole Zando, Chris Mackowski and Doug Julien) and four undergraduates (Tom Levasseur, Bethany Round, Brandi Sammons and Phil Tate) presented a workshop that investigated situations in which collaboration breaks down and suggested alternative solutions. This conference provides UMaine tutors with an excellent opportunity to build regional networks. On April 22, the UMaine tutors will travel to Colby College for a Maine writing centers mini-conference. Anyone interested in learning more about the Writing Center or becoming a tutor is encouraged to contact Mary Bartosenski, Writing Center director, x3829. Pictured above are conference participants, back row, left to right, Chris Mackowski, Beth Round, Tom Levasseur and Phil Tate; front row, left to right, Mary Bartosenski, Nicole Zando and Brandi Sammons. Not pictured is Doug Julien.

Photo by Tim Boyd

OUTSTANDING EMPLOYEE AWARDS FOR CLASSIFIED EMPLOYEES

The Office of Human Resources is soliciting names of an individual or group of outstanding classified employees for the Employee Recognition awards they sponsor each year. In these difficult times, it is extremely important to recognize employees' exceptional service to the University. Please take the time to utilize this opportunity by nominating one or more individual employees or a group of outstanding classified employees in your unit.

There are three awards of \$1,000, comparable to achievement awards for other staff.

Nominations are solicited for three awards for exceptional and meritorious achievement. Each finalist or group of finalists will be honored and presented with the \$1,000 award at the Employee Recognition Banquet in May.

Winners of previous awards: 1993 - Margaret Comeau, Judy Round, Ethel Hill; 1994 - Barbara Deshane, Wayne Hesseline, Phyllis Thibodeau.

The criteria for the awards and a nomination form are attached for your convenience. Questions about the process should be addressed to Brenda Willette, or Eileen Murphy, Human Resources; x1640.

