



The OUTbox

An OUTniagara publication

Fall 2006 Edition – November 1, 2006

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Dear Friends and “Family”,

On behalf of the board of OUTniagara, I am pleased to introduce the first edition of *The OUTbox*. Since the formation of OUTniagara many months ago at a community meeting in the cold of winter, we have come a long way. OUTniagara has since endeavored to build a stronger community in Niagara.

Early on, we launched a website (www.outniagara.ca), issued weekly events listings and hosted various events; more recently, we have organized meetings of the various organizations in the region.

The goal of this newsletter is no different from that of OUTniagara. *The OUTbox* will facilitate our efforts to better communicate with our partners and their members, share our stories and celebrate and inform our “family”.

The OUTbox will be published quarterly and it will be a community publication. As such, I encourage everyone from the sexual- and gender-diverse community of Niagara to make submissions to the newsletter (articles, poetry, artwork, photos, editorials, letters to the editor, and so on). Our newsletter will only be as good as we make it!

The deadline for the next submission will be January 15, 2007. Please e-mail your items to outbox@outniagara.ca. Upcoming events will not be listed in *The OUTbox*. However, future events will continue to be sent electronically. Please e-mail them to events@outniagara.ca.

With that, please enjoy the first edition of *The OUTbox*.

Sincerely,

Brian Scriver
Vice-Chair
OUTniagara Community Trust Corporation



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Community Links

Visit <http://www.outniagara.ca> and click on "Community" to link up on the internet to the following websites:

Partner Organizations

The Imperial Court of St. Catharines & The Greater Niagara Region

PFLAG St. Catharines

Niagara Pride Support Services, Inc.

Transgender Niagara

CAW Local 199 LGBT Committee

Brock Pride

Team Niagara

TransParent Canada

AIDS Niagara

External Partner Organizations

Gay West

Other Organizations

The Unitarian Congregation of Niagara

Hey YMCA people! What about the rest of the village?

As a usually happy member of the YMCA of Niagara, I was disappointed to see its latest campaign this fall hanging in banner-form at the bottom of the main staircase of the Walker Family branch in St. Catharines. In promoting that the YMCA is a place for families to belong, it has chosen an image that is exclusionary and stereotypes families as white, heterosexual and married.

The photo on the banner is that of a blonde, young, heterosexual couple, with a blonde child. A wedding ring is prominently displayed on the man's left ring finger. Of course, there is nothing wrong with blonde, young, heterosexual, married couples with children. I am sure that there are a few to be found in our region. What is irksome and ultimately tiresome though, is that this is the one and only image to be found representing families on display at the YMCA today.

Once again, we need to point out to organizations such as the YMCA that campaigns and images such as these are insensitive to the reality of the diversity of families today. More importantly, limited images such as these are exclusionary and promote a stereotype that obstructs many people in our society from accepting differences and diversity.

What is wrong with this banner is that there is not one image of a family of colour hanging next to it, or a family representing gay men or a lesbian couple. What about a racially mixed family? Families do not have to include children, nor do they have to be young. And finally, why the prominent display of a wedding band? Is a government-sanctioned marriage contract the determining factor that dictates whether a group of people is a family, or not?

It is time that the YMCA and other organizations that claim to have the best interest of families at heart, open their eyes and see that we are all members of families and that we come in all sizes, shapes, ages and colours of the rainbow.

Martha Hunt
St. Catharines, ON

Responses to this and future editorials are invited.



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Team Niagara shines at the 1st World Outgames, Montreal 2006

By Martha Hunt,
Team Niagara Captain

A small but spunky team of 12 from Niagara journeyed to Montreal at the end of July 2006 to participate with 12,000 other LGBTQ athletes from 110 countries in the 1st World Outgames. Our team members competed in swimming, karate, squash, mountain biking, golf, tennis and cross country running and brought home three gold (tennis, squash and karate), one silver (karate) and one bronze (golf) – not too shabby!

Some of our athletes also participated in the three-day human rights conference that took place before the Games began. Those who attended found it to be empowering and inspiring.

The Outgames team in Montreal (110 employees and 5,000 volunteers) did an outstanding job delivering a smooth and professionally run week-long event. All the venues were excellent and with a free metro-pass to all registered participants, we were able to get around to see many of the events, including dragon-boating, ball-room dancing, country and western dancing, body-building and track and field. Unique to the Outgames were competitions in “Bear” and “Leather”. Wow!

The opening and closing ceremonies were outstanding with some big names coming to help us celebrate. Performers such as k.d. lang, Cirque du soleil, Martha Walsh and Debra Cox helped to launch the Games and Liza Minnelli helped us to wrap it all up.

As well as the athletic competitions, Montreal put on nightly entertainment in Square Viger. The Village, along Ste. Catherine St. was closed to traffic, to allow all of us to amble along, eat, drink and “sight-see”. Ooh – la- la!

Okay Niagara! The next Outgames takes place in Calgary in April 2007. This is a North American event with eight sports – running, squash, bowling, curling, hockey, badminton, swimming and volleyball. But these Games are not just for jocks! Like Montreal, there will be a human rights conference before the sporting events begin. These Games are also reaching out especially to queer youth and special arrangements are being made to encourage our young people to participate. Interested? Get in touch with Martha Hunt at 905-684-0635.



Team Niagara, from left to right: Devon Zhiang, Tom Balint, Nicholas Bake, Barb Shopland, Diane Dumais, Lisa Banks and Martha Hunt. Missing from the photo are James Ma, Russ Evans, Cathy Van Ingen, Rachel Corbett and Robin Whitty



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Geographical research at Brock University: *Understanding trans men's experiences*

By Professor Catherine Nash,
Department of Geography,
Faculty of Social Sciences

As a geographer, I am interested in how people experience the everyday spaces they live and move through — the spaces of the home, work, the street, recreation and social life. Who we are as people, how we act and how we understand ourselves and others is very much affected by the places we experience. We learn how to act as men and women, gays and straights, and as people seen or understood as belonging to different racial, ethnic, religious or class groups. When we mix in spaces that are seen as belonging to certain groups, such as middle class suburbs or an urban 'Chinatown', we come to understand the social and cultural expectations that structure how people see themselves. As well, we learn how to act, behave and conduct ourselves, as members of a certain social group through our attendance in particular places such as religious and educational institutions, cultural events and social functions.

For groups seen as operating outside of 'normal' expectations, having places to meet with others, feel safe and develop a community is very important to one's personal sense of dignity, self-worth and value. For gays and lesbians, for example, living in urban centres such as Toronto, the struggle to establish bars and taverns, bathhouses and community centres was an important part in the development of community and political and social solidarity. For many gays and lesbians, Toronto's gay 'village' is a real and imagined space that operates as a source of strength and support.

In recent years, new forms of sexual and gendered identities and practices have emerged, challenging older versions of an essential or fix gay and lesbian identities. Captured in the term 'queer', a number of new gendered and sexualized identities vie for the ability to be visible in a number of places including long-standing gay and lesbian spaces. For many, these new identities challenge long-standing ideas about gender, sexuality and the physical solidity of biological bodies. Trans men, for example, often find little comfort in lesbian, gay male or other queer spaces, despite the notions that the queer or LGBTQ community are represented as tolerant or respecting of diversity.

I am interested in exploring the experiences of trans men in a variety of different spaces, including mainly heterosexual spaces, lesbian-only spaces, gay male spaces, queer spaces and other space seen as 'trans-positive.' If you would be willing to participate in a 1-2 hour interview (anonymous or otherwise), please contact me at Brock University, 905-688-5550, ext. 3238, or by e-mail at catherine.nash@brocku.ca



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AIDS Walk tally down from last year

Corporate sponsorship increased again this year for the annual Niagara's Walk for Life for AIDS, but the number of walkers and the sponsorship money raised by the walkers was down around \$3,000 on last year's total. Just under \$14,000 has been raised to date, with some money continuing to trickle in.

Even though he said the total is a bit disappointing, Ed Eldred, Resource Development and Communications Co-ordinator at AIDS Niagara, added it is still the agency's largest single fundraiser and friend raiser of the year.

"The Walk Committee, the board, volunteers and staff will get together soon to review what went wrong and what went right," he said.

September is a very busy month with one or two walks or other fundraising events each weekend, as well as the Niagara Wine Festival.

"Great support was shown by the business community and that is crucial to any event," said Eldred.

Transgender Niagara: New and improved

By Christine Martin,
Founder, Transgender Niagara

We've been working hard during the last few months in developing our organizational structure, ratifying bylaws, and redefining missions and objectives.

We are pleased to announce the initiative of a "gender-diverse drop-in centre." The first session will be held in St. Catharines, with plans to hold future sessions in other locations in the Niagara Region. The proposed start date for this service is mid-November 2006.

For information about this event as it becomes available, please see www.outniagara.ca



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LGBT parade float a labour of love

By Brian Delaney
CAW Local 199,
LGBT Committee

The idea of having an nities we live in, and that we care about all of the issues facing unionized and non-union working people.

With only about two weeks before the parade, I started to e-mail people and pushed for a commitment.

Christine Martin of Niagara Pride Support Services (NPSS) and Transgender Niagara responded in a big way.

She wanted to get a flatbed truck for a float! I quickly learned that Christine is a very determined and focused individual who is willing to work very hard to get things done.

In my mind, our LGBT contingent would have been a success if we had five people waving our Pride flags enthusiastically! Christine rented a flatbed truck and bought some decorations and I scrounged around the house for odds and ends and “Voila!” we had a float! Well, sort of.

It was rainy, nasty weather leading up to the parade and we still had to decorate the float. So there we were, Christine, my neighbor Linda, my friend Tomee and I working into the night to put the float together in the rain.



In the end, we had about 15 LGBT people and allies, some walking and handing out LGBT pamphlets. Banners from AIDS Niagara, OUTniagara, Transgender Niagara, PFLAG St. Catharines, NPSS, and flags from CAW Local 199, CAW Pride and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF) were proudly on display.

The parade was a real success. We had some puzzled looks as people read the banners and we had a lot of cheers and applause! I don't know of one bad or homophobic act or comment, which pleasantly surprised me!



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I was really happy that OUTniagara and the partner groups came together to help make the event a success. It was very difficult for a lot of people and the partner groups to get involved at the last minute.

Because we raised our profile, the people in Niagara are hopefully now asking what our organizations do for our community.

I believe OUTniagara and the partner groups are going to have a good future by working together and staying organized and united. Our visibility in parades and other public events is crucial for LGBT people in Niagara to be fully accepted.

Classifieds

For sale: High-back antique pine bench, \$150; antique tool carrier, \$50. Please call 905-685-3692.

For sale: Used a half-dozen times, Sony car CD/MP3 player. \$200 OBO. Please call 905-380-2858.

Have something to sell or trade? E-mail outbox@outniagara.ca and we will include your request in the next newsletter

TransParent Expands Parent Base and Name

On the recommendation of PFLAG Canada, the St. Catharines chapter of PFLAG endorsed in October the renaming of TransParent to TransParent Canada.

Leading in part to this decision was the wide response to a *Globe and Mail* column on August 22 about the influence of the Toronto Pride Parade on the formation of TransParent, a support network for the parents of trans children.

Joan Wiley, author of the essay and founder of TransParent Canada, reported that within days, she had received responses from parents and trans people from Nova Scotia, Amherstburg, Waterloo, London, Ont., Yellowknife, Calgary, Vancouver, Idaho and Ireland. *Globe and Mail* editors kindly forwarded inquiries they received from parents.

The name change was also due in part to a newsletter distributed by PFLAG U.S.A., which also carries the name TransParent. It is hoped that renaming the Niagara-based organization will clear up any possible confusion.

To read the *Globe and Mail* column, please visit <http://www.pflagcanada.ca/pdfs/stories-parents.pdf>