



Serving the LGBT Community in Southwest Michigan

OUT & abOUT

Newsletter

May 2013

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Open to LGBTQ and friends and allies. Come with a dish, meet and hang out with your peers,

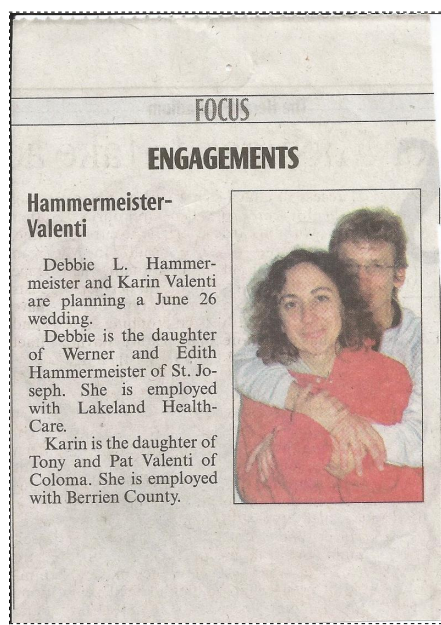
Couple announces engagement in Herald-Palladium

By **MacKenzie Carlock** and **Claire Postelli**

Karin Valenti and Deb L. Hammermeister became the first same-sex couple to announce their engagement in the local newspaper, The Herald-Palladium, on April 21.

"We weren't sure if we wanted to do it just based on how it would affect our family, so we did have concern, but we went ahead and did it anyway," Valenti said.

Although they were unsure, the feedback has been mostly positive. Valenti and Hammermeister said they hope to pave the way for other couples to feel comfortable in declaring their love just like anyone else would.



In order to do this, Valenti has requested that The Herald-Palladium change/update their forms to encompass same-sex couples. "I have not heard a response yet, but if they do, it'll make it so more and more people want to do this," she said.

Valenti's advice to others on declaring their engagement in the local newspaper is to "just go ahead and do it even if you're afraid because you may get some negative reactions ... the positive will always outweigh the negative," Valenti said.

Valenti and Hammermeister plan to get married June 26 in Canandaigua, New York.

Whirlpool Pride 2013

A great opportunity to celebrate Pride and visit Chicago. Whirlpool Pride 2013 will be held Saturday, June 29 from 1-5 p.m. (CDT) at 325 N. Salle St. in Chicago. For only \$40, enjoy food, have fun in the city, meet new people and celebrate in the company of friends. To buy tickets, click on flyer at right. All proceeds benefit the OutCenter.



hear news of the OutCenter's work in 2013, and share your ideas with Mary Jo Schnell and Brian Savage.



Sunday, May 19
 5:30 p.m.
 The OutCenter
 132 Water Street
 Benton Harbor, MI



Next ALIVE Youth Group Meeting:

Saturday, June 15
 2-4 p.m.
 The Phoenix
 124 Water Street
 Benton Harbor, MI

ALIVE Youth on Facebook!



Anti-bullying workshop

Join in a workshop to cultivate respect in schools

where you live.
 Thursday, June 27
 5:30-7 p.m.
 600 W Main Street
 Benton Harbor

info@outcenter.org
 269.925.8330

Foundation Support



Yvonne Sifred of Equality Michigan

As part of Equality Michigan, Yvonne Sifred works every day toward increasing outreach to the GLBT community across the state. One of her current goals is to update her referral list of lawyers.

Sifred is the director of the Victim Services Department for Equality Michigan, a statewide anti-violence advocacy program organization for the GLBT community. Her job includes crisis intervention, referrals for mental health and social services resources, advocacy for individuals who have been the victims of hate crimes or discrimination and acting as a liaison between various agencies.

One of her main projects at the moment is updating and improving the list of lawyer referrals across the state. Individuals across the state of Michigan can contact Equality Michigan if they have a valid case and be put in touch with someone who may be able to help them.

"If someone in Saginaw, Traverse City, Benton Harbor need help, we fill in the blank," Sifred said. "They can call here."

Expanding that list would mean helping training attorneys and helping them become GLBT certified. Sifred said she hopes for assistance from the State Bar of Michigan and that compiling such a list takes a lot of collaboration from different groups and people.

Equality Michigan has a strong presence in Southeast Michigan, but Sifred said strengthening its role in other parts of the state is vital. Sifred said there is a possibility she may travel across the state during the summer to meet with various communities.

"I want to hear the most relevant issues for each area and identify needs so we can effect change," Sifred said.

Another one of Sifred's main projects is in law enforcement training. She is working toward setting up training throughout the state.

"Some (law enforcement) are good," Sifred said. "Some are less friendly and they need help."

Although her work varies from day to day, Sifred said that discrimination is what she deals with the most, particularly in housing or employment. While Equality Michigan can connect people with an attorney or counseling services, Sifred said what really needs to change is the law.

"That's why Equality Michigan can be so effective," Sifred said. "On the front end, we get people through traumatizing events. On the back end, we work to change legislature so the protection is there."

For people who want to help Equality Michigan's mission, Sifred said attorneys in conservative areas are particularly useful. For individuals who aren't attorneys, she said rallying allies is one of the most important things that can be done.

Board training



From left: Fred Gibby, Rich Hensel, Sven Erickson, Brian Savage, Margo Runkle, Rick Andrich, John Krsul

The Board received nonprofit training and orientation from John Krsul on April 27. John is a well-known attorney in Michigan's nonprofit sector, and assisted the OutCenter with a complete governance assessment. The session was hosted by First Congregational United Church of Christ in Coloma -- the first open and affirming mainline church in Southwest Michigan and first to hire an openly gay minister.

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