

LGBT News

The LGBT Resource Center for the 7 Rivers Region, Inc.

May 2011

Rosanne's Ramblings

What a great month we have had at the Center! In April we participated in a statewide Break the Silence Rally in Madison on Friday, April 15; hosted an Open Office during the downtown Spring Fling; made new connections within our community; and continued to greet new folks at the Center as they work toward learning more, finding support, and/or utilizing our fabulous groups and resources. Additionally, our groups have participated in a spoken-word artist performance in recognition of Sexual Assault Awareness Month featuring sarwat rumi; we attended and had one performance at ATP's (Awareness Through Performance) Open Mic Night; and GALAXY invited UWL and WTC student groups to participate in the first ever Rainbow Scavenger Hunt. Of course, we ended April with our Magnificent Mischievous Magical Monkey Masquerade Ball.

Granted, we have fun and know how to celebrate diversity and rock out to an eclectic mix of individuality. It is difficult work and we do indeed have stellar support in our community from many individuals, businesses, and organizations which helps ease the intensity and difficulty of working for change. Thank you for helping make the Seven Rivers Region a good place, and for being part of the solution, not pollution, to the place many of us call home.

Last fall was an especially trying time, and we as a Center and LGBTQ and allied community experienced discrimination as a result of another's fear. Some of us unfortunately experienced firsthand the incident and countless others were impacted by the reaction within the community and larger Seven Rivers Region. Our committed board of directors worked to find a solution for an ugly reality and a mutual statement was issued signed by our board president and the Riverfest board president. This April, I was contacted by the current 2011 Riverfest Commodore Chair, Dawson Strutt, and as a result of that meeting, the following letter was issued on behalf of the Commodores.

To: Rosanne St. Sauver, Director of the La Crosse LGBT
From: Dawson Strutt, 2011 Riverfest Commodore Chair
RE: Communication!
Date: April 8, 2011

Rosanne,

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me this past week in regards to the current relationship between the La Crosse Riverfest Commodores and the La Crosse LGBT. Our discussion during this meeting certainly provided me with a greater awareness into the events of this past fall, as well as an insight into the current climate of the relationship between our two groups. As in any productive relationship, either personal or professional, communication is a key element. I am hopeful that this initial meeting will be another stepping stone of increased communication and support between our two community-minded service groups. We both certainly share in the pride of our Greater La Crosse Community and its people, as we both attempt to service different needs in our community by our activities, as each of our organizations attempt to complete its mission and purpose.

As a volunteer organization whose mission is to provide a service to our community in the form of a summer festival centered on the celebration of our nation's Independence, we, as Riverfest Commodores, realize the importance of image. In that regard, and with this raised awareness, we began an intensive revision of our bylaws as a Commodore Group these past several months. The statements below reflect this revision, as they are now part of our recently updated Commodore bylaws. This revision in our policies will give the Commodore organization a stronger avenue of response if, in the future, a Commodore does not represent the organization with the proper image as a community ambassador.

(Taken from page 3 of the Commodore "Blue Book") — The Commodore should maintain an image appropriate to the good, clean, family-oriented image emphasized by this festival. Discussions with any persons should always be positive and relate to the family attitude, safety and relaxed atmosphere of Riverfest. Comments or discussion with or about other festivals or organizations should always be positive and complimentary.

Please know that the La Crosse Riverfest Commodores respect the initiatives and mission of the La Crosse LGBT, and therefore I am hopeful that we can continue to foster a healthy growth in our relationship between our two service groups.

Sincerely,
Dawson Strutt,
2011 La Crosse Riverfest Commodore Chair

I appreciate the extension of goodwill and heartfelt commitment from the Commodores to move forward in a positive way. After the meeting with the Riverfest Board in October, I was unaware of any additional work that would be done to thoughtfully consider the incident and to ensure a plan of action that recognized the severity of the allegations and the impact on our community as a whole. To realize the work done by the Commodores to change their bylaws as a result of the incident helps provide a sense of accountability and a clear attempt at righting a wrong. I look forward to future opportunities for collaboration as both our groups work to promote a community that celebrates community and family in its many forms.

Belief,
Rosanne



Operation Shine

The LGBT Resource Center for the Seven Rivers Region will be hosting an awareness event and rally on Saturday, May 14th. Please join us as we contribute to the nationwide effort to shine the spotlight on homeless youth. We will be holding our “SHINE with whatever you got!” event Saturday, May 14, 2011, from 2:00-4:00 p.m.


Join us at Riverside Park by the fountain for a brief program. Then we will walk in unison to the Resource Center. At the Center and along Pearl Street, we will stand with signs to help raise awareness regarding homeless youth. Bring signs and friends; together we can help create change!

Operation Shine Spotlights Homeless Youth in America

Under bridges across our state, in doorways, in abandoned buildings, makeshift camps and squats, homeless youth try to find a safe place to sleep at night. For hundreds of homeless youth in Salt Lake City, safety does not come easy and sometimes not at all.

Operation Shine America (OSA) -- a national advocacy, education, and outreach organization celebrating the courage and authenticity of homeless youth in America -- is sponsoring National SHINE Night May 14, 2011 with rallies across America. The theme of the national event is, “SHINE with whatever you got!”

In over 25 cities nationwide, there will be events that spotlight homeless youth - 42% of whom are LGBTQ. We are glad to be part of this effort to raise awareness and help inspire people to get involved and address the issue of homeless youth across America.



LGBT Rights: Marriage, child custody and divorce by Christina Mae Olson, CFP® *(Only in our dreams...maybe in our lifetime)*

Partners in Gay and Lesbian relationships are “legal strangers” to one another. This sounds cold and impersonal but it is very true. There are few jurisdictions in our country where even limited rights as LGBT couples or families are protected. While several countries across the globe provide full legal marriage equality (Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain and Sweden), this is not true for the USA. Do not be complacent and do not ignore the fact that the law does not recognize or protect your rights as a couple. Plus, if your relationship ends, your individual rights may not be recognized! Even your rights as a parent may be in jeopardy.

The courts are now being asked to rule on our “status” as couples and as parents. Challenges are pending in all states where marriage is now legal (New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa and Vermont). My partner and I got married in Iowa but thanks to DOMA and Wisconsin’s state statues (and constitutional ban) our marriage is not recognized here. Constitutional amendments prohibiting same sex-marriage are proposed in many states (including Minnesota and Indiana). Same-sex couples cannot marry in California pending the legal challenge against Prop. 8. We have a Domestic Partner registry in Wisconsin that extends very limited “rights” to gay and lesbian DP’s. Even this pathetic attempt to extend equal rights to Wisconsin’s LGBT community is under siege. As the political pendulum swings to the right - the neo-conservatives are taking up the fight against LGBT equality issues. We are front and center in their “social agenda.”

Gay and Lesbian parents have particular reason to be concerned. Couples have quietly and legally adopted children in Wisconsin for years. Two parent adoptions are common in families where neither parent is the biological parent. The courts have even allowed non-biological parents to adopt the (biological) child of his/her same-sex partner. Wisconsin courts have recently considered the legality of Lesbian parental rights in a particular case: *Dustardy v. Bethany*. Both women in this dissolved relationship are legal parents to their child (one is the biological mother and one is the adoptive mother). The courts first granted parental rights to the non-biological mother after the baby was born - later ruled this was done in error - but refused to “un-do” the error. These women could not agree on child custody issues when they separated and asked the courts to rule on which, if not both women, had parental rights to their child. Here’s a great discussion on this case:

<http://beyondstraightandgaymarriage.blogspot.com/2011/01/wisconsin-court-leaves-stand-parentage.html>

The law is not on our side. Here’s a quote from the case:

Wisconsin’s artificial insemination statute creates a presumption that a husband whose wife is artificially inseminated with semen donated by another man is the “natural father” of the child. WIS. STAT. § 891.40(1). For obvious reasons, a same-sex partner of the child’s biological mother can never receive the presumption of parenthood under § 891.40(1). The presumption operates only in favor of a male, as evidenced by the statute’s use of the words “husband” and “father.” Further, same-

sex couples can never satisfy the marital relationship described by the statute. See WIS. CONST. art. XIII, § 13 (“Only a marriage between one man and one woman shall be valid or recognized as a marriage in this state.”).

Couples split up and go their separate ways for many reasons. It happens to gay people just like it happens to straight people. Straight people have the “benefit” of divorce court and all sorts of legal protections to help them manage their separation. Lesbian and Gay couples do not have such protections. A good way to address this issue is to discuss it while you are still happily in love. This discussion won’t bring on a divorce. It will strengthen your relationship (and could have the added benefit of helping you in case you ever split up).

I am working with a lesbian couple who have decided to “divorce.” They want to be fair and amicable in the process. They have accumulated 25 years of assets (pension, IRA’s, bank accounts and investments). They have sizable debt. They have to consider what is best for their minor children. They have two houses, pets and all sorts of other things to work through. One woman worked and supported the other while she went to graduate school. One woman has a sizable pension that accrued to her during the 25 year relationship. Does her ex-partner have any right to ½ of that pension? There is no *easy* way to make this divorce fair to both women. They did not pay careful enough attention to these details during their partnership. They didn’t title their property in such a way that would protect both of them if/when they ever separated. They didn’t have a “co-habitation agreement” or “partnership agreement.” They didn’t keep track of who spent how much money on various joint purchases. These steps might have helped them work through the division of their lives.

Wills, trusts and beneficiary designations protect one another in death. Powers of attorney protect one another in case of disability or incapacity. What can you do to protect yourself in case of the breakup of your partnership/family? Think of your union like a business. **Put your intentions in writing.** Put it in writing, early on, that you both intend for both of you to be equal and 100% parents of your children, FOREVER! Title your jointly owned property! Don’t assume that you will get half of the house in a divorce that was never titled in your name! JTWR0S (joint tenants with rights of survivorship) generally addresses property rights in case of death but strongly implies, while living, that you intended to be equal and 100% owners of your house.

Meet with a lawyer early on in your partnership. Draw up a **co-habitation agreement** and/or a **partnership agreement** that addresses all of these issues. How are you going to divide your assets if you ever split up? Who gets the couch? Who gets the dog? Agree, in writing, that your IRA is yours and my pension is mine. Update your agreement every time an unequal event occurs (disparate incomes or one in college while the other pays the bills). For example, if one pays more on the mortgage - then she’ll get more of the equity when the house sells. How will you manage joint custody of your children? **PUT IT IN WRITING!** If you ever do split up and have to go to court these documents will help you. There isn’t a lot of legal standing to a so-called “partnership agreement” but it will certainly help. Precedents have been set in the courts for dividing the lives of Lesbian and Gay couples and families. Written agreements have gone a long way to inform these legal decisions. Courts often treat same-sex divorce cases the same way they treat dissolving a business partnership. The law doesn’t do a very good job of protecting us. We need to protect ourselves. Please take the time to talk about this with your partner. You both need to come to an agreement about these things. Get a lawyer to help you and put it in writing.

Maybe Lesbian and Gay relationships and families will have full legal standing and full equality one day. Until that day comes, you have to protect yourself!

Chris Olson is a licensed financial planner with a fee-only practice. You can reach her at CMoney@centurytel.net or (608) 525-9818.



First Brat Barn of the 2011 Season

Friday, May 6, Festival Foods in Crossing Meadows, Onalaska, WI.

Many wonderful Center volunteers will be there from 10:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m. to meet your brat, burger, and hot dog needs. Please come out and support our first barn and help us raise funds to support the work of the Center.



Please Vote for our Pepsi Refresh Project Every Day in May!

Help the Seven Rivers Region LGBT Resource Center obtain a Pepsi grant. The grant will help fund the following event at La Crosse Pride this summer:

Rock Out for Pride and Equality!

-Specifically, this idea will help show that love of good music doesn't have to be "group" specific.

-This idea is unique and innovative because our LGBT community can reach out to our region-at-large with music!

-This idea is it's meant to help people embrace similarities, not differences!

Check it out and vote at: <http://www.refresheverything.com/pridefest2011>

You can vote EVERY day in May! PLEASE invite your friends!

If you prefer, you can vote via text messaging by texting your vote. Send 105719 to Pepsi (73774). Standard text message rates apply.

Thanks for your help and please vote every day in May!



Office Needs

A marching drummer

Diners for the Progressive Dinner on May 21

Ream of Paper

Toilet Paper

Lovers of brats, burgers, and hot dogs to support GALAXY's Brat Barn, Saturday, May 21, 10-6:00 p.m. at the Festival Foods on Copeland Avenue

proceeds will benefit youth leadership opportunities this summer



Upcoming Events

Check the Center's [calendar](#) for more information about upcoming and monthly events.

Progressive Dinner, Saturday, May 21!

Come enjoy a fun night of dining, meeting new people, seeing beautiful homes, and helping create a memorable evening with other fantabulous folks. The evening starts at 4:00 p.m.

For tickets please contact the Center:

By phone: 608-784-0452

By email: r.st.sauver@7riverslgbt.org

GNO

Friday, May 27th, please join Travis Enberg, your host with the most, for a fun evening. Meet at the Center (303 Pearl). We will start at 6:00 p.m. and end at 8:00 p.m. All male identified people age 18+ are welcome.

Out and About

Thursday, May 12, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m. We will go to Buffalo Wild Wings. Meet at the Center at 5:30 and we will arrive at the restaurant around 6. Bring your trivia smarts and we can break off into teams and play trivia.



Ongoing Center Activities

Weekly Activities

Coffee & Conversation

When: Every Wednesday, 1-2 p.m.

Where: 7 Rivers LGBT Resource Center, 303 Pearl Street, La Crosse
Ages 18+. Folks looking to find community, connection, and support. No conversation is too big or too small; join us for an afternoon get together. You will be glad you did!

GALAXY, a group for youth ages 13-20

When: Every Tuesday 4-6 p.m. and every Saturday 2-4 p.m.

Where: 7 Rivers LGBT Resource Center, 303 Pearl Street, La Crosse

LGBTQ Parents Group

When: Not currently meeting. Call the Center to restart this group.

Where: 7 Rivers LGBT Resource Center, 303 Pearl Street, La Crosse

Drop-in Group

When: Every Thursday 6-8 p.m.

Where: 7 Rivers LGBT Resource Center, 303 Pearl Street, La Crosse

Bi-weekly Activities

GLENDAA/AA Group

When: First and third Friday at 7 p.m.

Where: 7 Rivers LGBT Resource Center, 303 Pearl Street, La Crosse

Just as Glenda was Dorothy's support in OZ this group is the equivalent for LGBT people struggling with drug & alcohol addictions and issues. If you are looking for support and a safe place to be yourself as you deal with your drug & alcohol issues- please join us. For more information please contact Aaron at 608-788-1508.

Monthly Activities

PGLAG

For more information call the Seven Rivers LGBT Resource Center at 608-784-0452, or Lori at 608-790-5052.

L.I.F.E.

When: First Monday, 6 p.m.

Where: 7 Rivers LGBT Resource Center, 303 Pearl Street, La Crosse
Ages 18+. Work with others to become stewards of change.

Gender Queer/Transgender Gathering

When: First Wednesday 7-8 p.m.

Where: 7 Rivers LGBT Resource Center, 303 Pearl Street, La Crosse

Do you identify as gender queer? How about Transgender? Do you ever feel like you don't fit in because of your gender identity or expression? Then come to a monthly discussion group at the 7 Rivers LGBT Resource Center.

Genderqueer - A gender variant person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders. This person may want to challenge gender stereotypes and the gender binary system.

Transgender - A person who lives as a member of a gender other than that expected based on anatomical sex.

GNO (Guy's Night Out)

GNO will meet the fourth Friday of every month at the Center from 6-8 p.m. All male identified persons are welcome.



In Closing

Thanks for reading! If you have any comments or anything you'd like to add to an upcoming newsletter, please e-mail us at:

7riverslgbtnewsletter@gmail.com.