

Community Pride Reporter

FREE

The newspaper for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community of Maine and New Hampshire.

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From Both Sides Now

Transsexual Sarah Luiz Says a Sex Change Isn't Enough

by Suzanne Pyle, Editor
NH Bureau

Sarah Luiz is a 5' 10 metallic blonde bombshell and she knows it. Relaxed in her cozy Dover, New Hampshire apartment, Sarah reveals a sexy smile as she recalls being Jeff.

Jeff grew up feeling like a misfit. He was ridiculed at school because he didn't act like the other boys, and burdened at home with a mother who was diagnosed with cancer and a sister who suffered from epilepsy. A victim of abuse, physically and sexually, Jeff had few moments of real happiness growing up. One of those moments was when his mother taught him how to dance. They would do the 'twist' together and Jeff would feel hopeful again.

Still, it only got harder for Jeff by the time he reached high school. He looked effeminate, and despised sports or getting it on with the girls. Instead, he ran around with some gay friends and found he could do the twist only in the gay clubs.

Trying so hard to fit in, and terribly convinced he never could, Jeff believed deep in his heart he was nothing more than a wimp. At age 18, he was convinced that he was trapped in the



Sarah Luiz with talk show host, Sally Jesse Raphael. Sarah's appeared many times.

wrong body and pleaded with his parents to have a sex change. They hoped he was going through a phase and told him to wait till he was 21. Jeff did wait, and three years later began the long process of undergoing a sex change.

Now, five years after the operation, Sarah has emerged and she is stunning. Sometimes a blonde, sometimes a brunette, Sarah uses makeup and fashion more effectively than one of Calvin Klein's supermodels. No longer a wimp,

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Fund raising organization founded in L/A

"Positively Alive!" to raise funds for those living with HIV/AIDS

by: Winnie Weir, Publishing Editor

"Positively Alive!" is a non-profit agency founded by Kevin and Raymond Gagnon of Lewiston/Auburn. Its purpose, according to the Gagnon's, is to host fund raising events which will directly benefit people in our community living with HIV and AIDS. The organization is committed to assisting members of the Lewiston/Auburn community in obtaining the financial resources necessary to maintain their quality of life. Their hope is to also increase the communities awareness and response to the increasing numbers of community members who are affected by HIV/AIDS.

Raymond Gagnon recently wrote to me about "Positively Alive!" asking for assistance in getting the word out. His words tell the story eloquently:

"I'll give you a brief history of why my husband and I decided to create Positively Alive. Both Kevin and I were diagnosed as HIV positive in November 1994. We spent the first year frightened and confused. During that year we found very little emotional or financial support in our community. Many people in our community refuse to acknowledge the presence of HIV and AIDS in Lewiston/Auburn.

As we watched our friends and

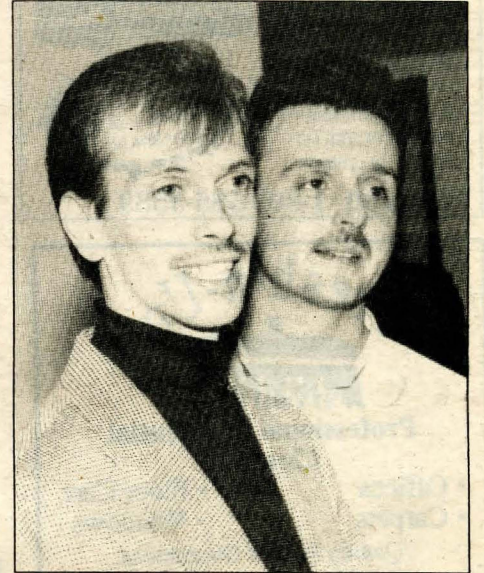


Photo by Tom Antonik

Keven (left) & Raymond Gagnon, co-founders of PA, at MLGPA Banquet.

community members grow ill and die in secrecy, we decided to "go public" with our diagnosis in the hopes of bringing a face to HIV in Lewiston/Auburn. Overall the experience has been a liberating one. We've managed to eliminate the fear of the unknown in some areas of our community. Kevin began to organize a fund raising event to benefit the AIDS Coalition of Lewiston/Auburn and during that planning process he and I

See ALIVE!, pg. 18

Candace Gingrich & Human Rights Campaign on a recent whirlwind weekend in Maine

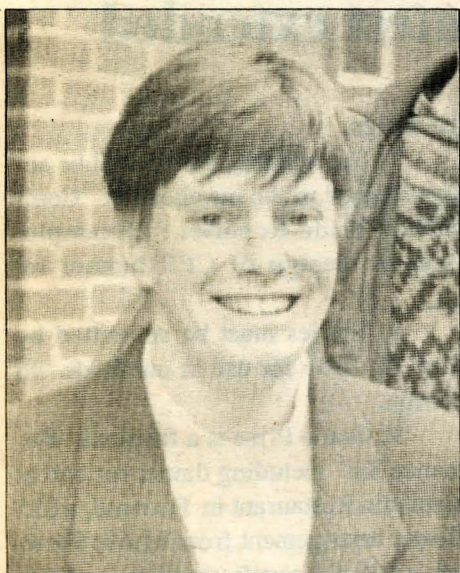


Photo by Chris Milliken
Candace Gingrich in Portland on recent Human Rights Campaign fund drive.

by Chris Milliken

Candace Gingrich (yes, Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich' sister who happens to be a lesbian) and other representatives of the Human Rights Campaign took Maine by storm the weekend of March 22-24. In its effort to add

to its membership base in Maine, HRC and Gingrich covered a chunk of Maine from Orono to Hallowell, Waterville, Augusta, Portland and maybe one or two other places. I caught up with Ms. Gingrich at a Portland coffee spot for a brief interview.

CPR: How has throwing yourself into the political arena changed your life?

CG: It's changed my life immensely, from doing computer work during the day and loading UPS trucks at night to traveling around the country meeting the people who have been in the trenches for so long and the next generation of people for the trenches. Even in my non-activist mode I thought I was on top of things, that I knew what was going on [politically]. I found a whole new world that I didn't know existed.

CPR: You have an incredibly tight schedule here in Maine. Do you always travel like this?

CG: I usually travel two to three or five days at a time. Then I get to go

See GRINRICH, pg. 18

Gay & Lesbian Phonenumber now toll-free

HIV/AIDS prevention education becomes part of expanded service

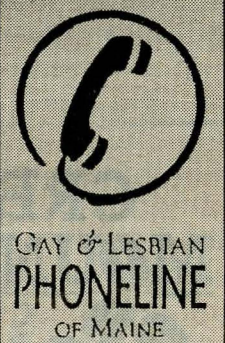
Caribou, ME - Northern Lambda Nord, Inc. has expanded their peer support and informational phonenumber services. This enhancement of service is possible due to a grant from the Maine Bureau of Health/Office on AIDS through the primary and preventive health services provider, "Health 1st," a division of the Aroostook County Action Program. The money is to improve HIV-prevention education for young men in Aroostook County who are at high risk for contracting HIV and AIDS.

Health 1st, whose services include anonymous HIV-testing and community education, has provided training to volunteers who staff the Gay & Lesbian Phonenumber of Maine, which, before April 1, 1996, had been staffed only two hours each week. Staffing has increased three-fold to six hours weekly: Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm. Phonenumber volunteers received educational information and training about HIV and AIDS as well as specific prevention information to convey to call-

ers. The Phonenumber has also added a toll-free number (800-468-2088) which enables statewide access without the barrier of long distance charges. For the last 14 years, the Phonenumber has had only a local Caribou exchange (498-2088).

Northern Lambda Nord is a 16-year-old organization serving the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered community in Aroostook County and neighboring New Brunswick towns and is the oldest group of its kind in the state. The Gay & Lesbian Phonenumber of Maine was set up in 1982 with the financial help of Fredericton (New Brunswick) Lesbians and Gays, and it remains the only service of its kind in Maine.

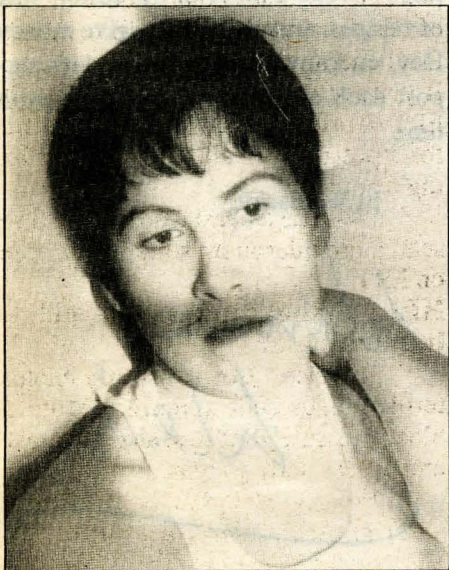
Susan Deschene, Director of
See PHONELINE, pg. 18



BOTH SIDES, from pg. 1

Sarah's life has changed dramatically, but is she a real woman? Living for years uncertain as a man, being a woman has been just as difficult, and now she says the sex change operation didn't solve anything.

That is a disheartening insight for someone who had to fight one of the largest bureaucratic insurer's in the country, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, to pay for the \$11,000.00 operation after they appeared to cover the surgery. The Blues of Massachusetts had paid for all the preliminary treatments such as the heavy doses of estrogen pills and psycho-



"We have to allow people the grace and dignity to be themselves..." Sarah Luiz

therapy and then turned around and refused to pay for the operation.

Caught half man and half woman, Sarah had felt it really was true when people referred to the she-man as a freak. And there was reason for alarm, as the longer the operation was postponed, the more dangerous it was to continue taking the hormones. After begging with the medical provider in tears and being flatly refused once more, she took the sex change snafu story to the media. And the media did their job and changed Sarah's life forever.

Sprawled across the top of a Boston Herald in May of 1989, the caption read, "N.H. Man Fighting for Life as a Woman". The article recounted the plight Sarah faced being caught halfway through a process that wasn't supposed to fail. She is quoted, "I have no choice at all. Straight men want woman, and gay men want men. I'm stuck in between." A Blue Cross/Blue Shield spokesman, Clark Walter, had reportedly acknowledged that the insurer had paid for some of Sarah's treatments incorrectly because of ambiguous information on the claim forms they received from Sarah.

In another Boston Herald article in May of 1989, a picture of Sarah was displayed across the front page showing her protest in front of the Blue Cross headquarters in Boston along with several others. She was smiling and holding a

sign that read, "Human Rights!"

Thinking back on it today, Sarah's eyes widen, "I had to show that insurance company that I'm not some piece of trash!" she says. They knew what they were doing, and their coverage book never said the surgery wasn't covered, according to Sarah.

"I have always been a flamboyant, outgoing type and I wasn't meant to hide all my life," Sarah says in a silky voice. She wasn't afraid of Blue Cross nor the media. And she wasn't introverted, despite all the shame she felt growing up. Sarah had a story to tell and for once in her life, she started to understand what dignity was all about. So she contacted one talk show after another until someone agreed to hear her story.

Shortly after the Blue Cross refusal, although only halfway toward a full sex change, Sarah shared her story on the Sally Jesse Raphael show. The audience was intrigued with her and she was asked back a dozen times. Other shows decided they wanted her too. Sarah suddenly had an audience with Joan Rivers, Larry King, Charles Perez, Maury Povich, and Howard Stern. If this wasn't enough to give her celebrity status, the newspapers and magazines covered her campaign, such as Esquire and the London Sun.

Although she never did get Blue Cross to pay for the surgery, she went ahead with the operation with the assis-

tance of an anonymous benefactor who had watched her on T.V.

"You know, I had the operation to fit in with society," Sarah says. She discovered after her long struggle to become a woman that it really didn't change how she felt inside. "I could have remained a man practicing a gay life-style, but I wanted to fit in," Sarah laments. "I admire men like Michael Jackson and others because they don't conform to the norm. I believe in a very big way, I sold out."

Is there any way a transsexual can undo what's been done? Sarah didn't concern herself with undoing and instead busied herself with a new life-style as a female, and a year ago married a man several years younger. Her new husband, Matt, was comfortable enough with her sex change, but had to adjust to Sarah's star-studded schedule of appearing on talk shows, giving lectures to the Women's Studies and Diversity programs at UNH, meeting for magazine interviews, and hunting down scores of other opportunities to speak out.

Sarah, who has just finished writing a book called, *Transcending Illusions*, continues to share her story and wisdom on the Sally Jesse Raphael show. She just turned thirty last October, and speaks words of wisdom based on years of being misunderstood.

"We have to allow people the grace and dignity to be themselves, and to let them learn from their mistakes." ΔΔ

CULLITON, from pg. 6

eral Court. "But winning an award like this helps keep me going, as has GLSTN's tremendous support over the past very difficult year."

Culliton noted the outpouring of support she has received from people, both gay and straight, in New Hampshire and beyond, as critical. "I never knew how many folks there were out there who agreed with me on these issues," she said. "I hope the organizing that my case helped prompt will continue and lead to lasting changes in our schools." She concluded, "As someone who grew up in a rural area, I think this work is

especially important in places like New Hampshire."

Culliton will receive her award at the Sixth Annual Northeastern Regional Conference's opening session. The oldest of the GLSTN regional conferences, the Northeastern Conference is expected to draw over 600 individuals of all ages, sexual orientations, and occupations, including students who will participate in a special "youth track" organized by Project 10 East, Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School's Gay-Straight Alliance. It is the largest single gathering in the United States devoted to addressing homophobia in schools.

Highlights of the day will include

the first New England showing of clips from "It's Elementary," the new documentary on homophobia in elementary schools made by Academy Award-winning director Debra Chasnoff and Helen Cohen, as well as over thirty individual workshops. The conference will begin at 8:30 a.m., with Culliton receiving her award at the 9:00 a.m. plenary session. For more information on the conference, call Patty Smith at 617-661-2411.

With over thirty chapters, and a membership of over three thousand teachers, parents, and concerned citizens, The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Teachers Network (GLSTN) is the largest national organization working to insure that schools are places where all people are respected and valued, regardless of sexual orientation. ΔΔ

NEED TO GET AWAY?

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- ◆ Escape to Newport - May 4-5
- ◆ Quilters Tour - May 9
- ◆ Ottawa Tulip Festival - May 16-19
- ◆ I Love New York - May 25-27
(Memorial weekend)
- ◆ Geraldo Show Tour - June 6-7
- ◆ Amish Country Tour - June 19-23
- ◆ Montreal Jazz Festival - June 28-30



For more information or to be put on our mailing list, please call:

879-1844 1-800-797-9850

Students & host families sought for student exchange program

The American International Youth Student Exchange Program is a non-profit high school foreign exchange program in the United States, Europe and other parts of the world. AIYSEP believes a greater international understanding is accomplished among people and countries through cultural and home stay programs. It offers qualified students a chance to spend a summer, semester or school year with a host family in America or abroad.

At present, American host families are being sought for 25 students from high schools in Europe and other foreign countries for the coming school year. Students will arrive in the US in late August attend the local school and return home in late June the next year. The students, all fluent in English, have

been screened by their school counselors in the home country and will receive medical insurance and spending money.

American families with small children are welcome to participate in the program. All families hosting a student for the year can deduct \$50 a month for income tax purposes.

Community/Pride Reporter learned from AIYSEP that when we ran this announcement the last time they were looking for families, our community responded and hosted several students. They hope to have a significant response this year. For more information or to apply, call 1-800-347-7575. This is the international headquarters located in Tiburon, California. ΔΔ

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