



BGLAD Newsletter

October, 2000

Bisexuals, Gays, Lesbians and Allies At DuPont

Contact: BGLAD.BGLAD@usa.DuPont.com

See us at www.DuPontbglad.com

BETTY DEGENERES

LOVE OUR CHILDREN !!

By Deb Yates

When her actress daughter Ellen came out to her, Betty began a journey of understanding, acceptance, and advocacy for gay and lesbians. Betty spoke to an audience of 350 in the Crystal Ballroom at the DuPont Country Club and an estimated additional 300 people in other locations connected by audio conference.

Her message was powerful, even more so coming from a straight mother of a lesbian daughter. "I want to help the parents of gay children to just accept that there are differences -- we're not all alike. As long as our gay sons and daughters face discrimination and are excluded from the basic protection of our laws, I will urge all American families to come out for fairness. I am thrilled at this wonderful opportunity to talk with gay and straight DuPonters about the importance of coming out, because honesty truly is the best policy."

When Ellen came out to her 22 years ago, Betty admitted that the difficult part was "having to give up preconceived ideas of who my daughter would

(Continued on page 3)

Betty DeGeneres:	
LOVE OUR CHILDREN !!	p. 1, 3-4
Crashing the Barriers to Understanding	p.1-2
Management Reacts	p. 3
DuPont Fails to Offer Partner Benefits in 2000.p.5	
The Impact of Partner Benefits -- Real Lives ..	p. 6-8
Same-sex Benefits and DuPont - Fayetteville article.....	p. 9-10
Boy Scouts, United Way, and DuPont	P. 11-12
- A Member's View.....	p. 12-14
BGLAD MEMBER NEWS	
Civil Union in Vermont: Katie & Chris Tie The Knot.....	P. 15-17
Membership Update.....	p. 18-19

BARRIERS TO UNDERSTANDING

BGLAD members met privately with Betty DeGeneres on October 3rd to learn practical ways to help others and ourselves on the journey of understanding and acceptance of bisexual, gay, and lesbian people. What we taught and learned from Betty and each other:

- most people don't THINK about gay rights --
- (Continued on page 2)

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BARRIERS TO UNDERSTANDING

(Continued from page 1)

- they are on "auto pilot" and don't consciously think about sexual orientation diversity
- Fight the stereotypes by up close and personal contact: the most powerful argument for accepting gays is to replace the fantasized notions of gayness with the reality of children, friends, and family who deserve our love as much or more after they come out as before.
 - When we know a real gay person...when we talk with a real gay face -- then learning begins
 - It's funny how the word "hetero" makes one think of people and "homo" makes us think about sexual behavior. Dispel the myths that being gay is a choice. Shift the image from private bedroom behavior to family, love, child rearing, and the mostly hum-drum routine of everyday living
 - Be patient and persistent: be a witness -- a speaker of truth -- about your self and your beliefs. Let people see reality, not some idealized notion of gay life
 - Stand up against religious literalism -- the Bible should be seen as an inspirational story and historical record but not the justification to avoid reality. Leviticus would have been in just as much trouble as a gay man as he would have been if he shaved his beard! After all, God must have really screwed up to have made so many homosexuals -- or maybe there is no error: gay people come from natural families -- welcome

them! Women are no longer possessions; children are no longer offered as sacrifices in first world countries -- take the wonderful inspiration and precepts and leave the outdated ideas. Don't let people hide behind the fear of change

- Recognize that "coming out" is not just a gay person's challenge -- every parent, ally, advocate, and friend is faced with coming out just to be associated with their gay child or friend -- recognize it's hard for them too and help them decide how to come out
- Help the person coming out by (1) just be a friend -- no big announcements (2) support the non-gay person coming out with the same or better support you received when you came out (3) normalize life -- welcome the person and their world of friends, lovers, and detractors (4) don't change the rules -- out people aren't fundamentally different, so don't treat them differentially (*see related story in next month's News*)
- Stop hiding! People in the closet cannot be helped nor help others. Come out!
- Want to see the real story of someone coming out? Get a copy of "The Real Ellen Story", a TV documentary

(At the time of Mrs. DeGeneres' talk, BGLAD had roughly 125 bisexual, gay and lesbian members, about 50% of which were out to the BGLAD network. If only 5% of DuPont's population is homosexual, then only 2.6% of the gay DuPont population is out even to each other! mbl)

MANAGEMENT REACTS

During Betty DeGeneres' visit, Tom Connelly, BGLAD's sponsor, and other members of senior management had lunch with BGLAD members and Betty.

"I thought the visit was very successful", said Tom Connelly. "The attendance was strong, despite not being at an office location. The talk itself was powerful, in that it gave a personal perspective as well as a general approach to gay issues from a non-gay point of view. The number of questions was indicative of DuPont interest in understanding gay issues and creating a better workplace for all."

Other quotes from the management team: "Betty's message was a very simple one -- we are all someone's son or daughter, and are deserving of unconditional love and respect. A very simple message -- yet so powerful and motivating. She was truly inspirational."

"The women I had lunch with have a very difficult road to hoe, given society only accepts half their life. The emotional damage this does impacts on all facets of life. We leaders in DuPont must aid in their mission for fair treatment as we lessen only a small amount of the burden.

"The presentation provided yet another opportunity for employees to increase their understanding of sexual orientation and to confirm DuPont's commitment to creating a respectful work environment that values diversity. I was impressed with the number of employees who attended the event in Wilmington. Many expressed their gratitude for being able to hear the touching and

inspirational message from Mrs. DeGeneres: a passionate human rights advocate and devoted parent."

DEGENERES: LOVE OUR CHILDREN !!

(Continued from Page 1)

grow up to be." This has resulted in Betty becoming a self-proclaimed "late blooming activist."

While Betty spent time talking about gay and lesbian issues, she reminded the audience of a quote by Toni Morrison: "When you know someone's race, what do you know about them? Nothing." She reminded the audience that the same is true about a person's sexual orientation.

Betty cited these statistics from a recent study to highlight that educator and enlightened are not synonymous words:

- 97% of teachers hear homophobic remarks and do nothing.
- 52% of teachers admit they would be uncomfortable working with a gay/lesbian colleague

Betty is the first non-gay spokesperson for the National Coming Out Project and is a regular columnist for PLANETOUT.COM. She continuously spreads the message of the importance of "...loving and accepting all our children and family members -- unconditionally." Betty highlighted a prescription for Coming Out:

- Remember what really matters: Unconditional love and acceptance for all family members

(continued on Page 4)

DEGENERES: LOVE OUR CHILDREN
(continued from page 3)

- Be Patient – We all need time to think, reflect and care
- Celebrate your coming out!

Betty fielded a number of questions from the audience and gave advice, such as:

- Advise for a “blooming activist”: Do whatever you can locally.
- About gay children: A parent can’t cause a child to be gay.

At the end of Betty’s talk, she graciously offered to do a book signing for her first Book, **Love, Ellen**. An excerpt from a poem in her book once again highlights the need to accept people for who they are:

To Ellen

A rosebud is perfection, but
To try to keep it so by tying it in place
With silken ribbons would destroy it.
And we would never know the full-blown
beauty of the mature rose.
It grows when it is time.

(Deb Yates, ed)



DuPont Fails to Offer Partner Benefits in 2001

The word began circulating earlier this year that DuPont was seriously considering providing partner healthcare benefits. We asked DuPont management about the rumors...here's what we learned.

HR management initiated a comprehensive study of the entire U. S. benefits package late last year to begin identifying items that DuPont might want to consider offering in the future. No commitment was made by management to adopt any of the items that might be proposed. A study team identified a number of changes that the Region could consider, including the adoption of domestic partner health care coverage for same-sex couples.

In subsequent management reviews, there was a lot of discussion, and decisions have not yet been made on a significant number of the items included on the list. Senior management previously indicated that any decision on domestic partner benefits be made within the context of all changes needed to the total package. Specific action was taken on the routine changes in time for the benefit opening period this fall.

The proposal to offer domestic partner benefits was not controversial and was not a major cost item.

What happens next? The U. S. region has the option to take action on some of the proposals near term and it is reasonable to expect the entire package of changes to be taken up for discussion early next year. BISC plans to contact the head of the U. S. region and encourage leadership on domestic partner benefits. (mbl)

The Impact of Partner Benefits -- Real Lives

By A BGLAD Ally

I have just reviewed the details of the 2001 Benefits program and I feel driven to comment on what ISN'T in there.

I'm an advocate for BGLAD and a pretty outspoken one at that. I'd like to share with you a couple recent e-mails / discussions in an attempt to explain why I am so disheartened by the 2001 Benefits program update.

Approximately one year ago, a person within my group came out to me (and then six months ago, to her workgroup). In part, her decision was driven by knowing that I'd be supportive, but also because circumstances had changed in her personal life which were making her rethink her continuing employment with DuPont. Let's call her Gwen (not her real name).

Gwen has over 25 years of service with the company and her father was a DuPont executive. She lives, eats and breathes DuPont and to me, she is a shining example of what being a DuPonter is all about; she is an outstanding and committed professional, and a caring individual (both within and outside the workplace). What had brought her to the point of reconsidering her options as she approached her 50th birthday was that she was now in a committed long-term relationship with a partner and yet she could not provide that partner (and two of the three children they raise together) with any medical benefits, etc. as DuPont does not provide Domestic Partner Health Benefits.

I spent a lot of time talking with Gwen (this wasn't just about what felt right in my heart - from a business perspective, Gwen is a key asset to my group and I wasn't about to let my 'talent' walk out of the door without a fight) and talking with many other people about our policy on Domestic Partner Health Benefits and trying to assess if and when we'd "see the light" and live up to our "demonstrated history of providing competitive benefits". What I heard back was that while it was yet to be confirmed, that it appeared likely that such a benefit would be included in the 2001 Benefit program update. Based on that information, Gwen made a decision to turn down a higher paid position outside, to turn down benefits for her family, because she had faith in DuPont "doing the right thing" and for the fact she loves and believes in this company.

As a BGLAD advocate (and member of the design team for the event), I was proud of how Betty DeGeneres' talk was received last week. Imagine how I felt later that same day when I got the following note from Gwen. When I spoke to her the following day, she told me that she'd been unable to tell her partner yet and that she was dreading having to do so, to have to listen as her partner said "I told you so".

(Continued on Page 7)

BGLAD Newsletter October, 2000

The Impact of Partner Benefits -- Real Lives
(Continued from Page 6)

Subject: Re: Follow up...

It was wonderful to see you today. I wish you could have stayed for the afternoon. Betty was a delight and lunch was great. Unfortunately, the day ended on a less than happy note as word filtered through the group that the DP benefits issue was rejected by the review committee and will not be offered to employees. It is very hard to explain to children at the dinner table why DuPont would pay to have Ellen's mom come to spend a day in Wilmington-- but continue to just consider 2 out of the 5 of us as a "family" when it comes to benefits. Some days it just seems it will always, always be uphill.

Thanks for your continued support, boss. Gwen

I'd also like to share another experience with you. I lead a diversity team (CREW) - the Creating a Respectful Environment in the Workplace for the Global Supplies and Logistics/Consulting Solutions lines of business within the GSB. Yesterday, we had the first of a series of "brown bag" lunch-time seminars where we try and look at CREW related issues from different perspectives. This one was called "The Other Side Of The Story" and here is an excerpt from the note that went out to the two groups within the GSB.

"What we would like to do is to invite you to join us on Monday, October 9th to hear "the other side of the story" from some of your friends/co-workers who will share with us their own personal experiences on coming to terms with their own sexuality, their decision to "come out" and how that has impacted their lives and their relationships with their families, friends and co-workers.

As we said in the previous note, the intent is for these seminars to be both informal and interactive. Our intent is to "create a respectful environment" where we can come together, share together and learn together. As Betty said in closing her speech, she's waiting for the time when we can get past labels and recognize each other as human beings. One way for us to work towards that is to continue to be open to learning, both about others and about ourselves."

At the meeting I facilitated downtown, the 12 people who attended listened as one of their GSB co-workers shared his story with us. His long-term partner of 28 years had died 3 years ago after a series of health problems culminated in a stroke. His belief (whether right or wrong) is that if
(Continued on Page 8)

BGLAD Newsletter October, 2000

The Impact of Partner Benefits -- Real Lives
(Continued from Page 7)

DuPont had provided Domestic Partner Health Benefits, his partner would have had access to better health care (he'd had to continue to work through his ill-health to continue to get access to inferior health care) and so might still be alive today.

I think that what really prompts me to sit down and write this note is that we seem to be pushing an increasingly important issue "under the carpet" while we collectively "bury our heads in the sand". I believe that talking about DuPont's "demonstrated history of providing competitive benefits" will stick in a lot of people's throats on this issue (and not just members of BGLAD) as the facts do not support that statement.

It is common knowledge that a study was undertaken to ascertain the impact (both financial and otherwise) of DuPont providing Domestic Partner Health Benefits (DPHB) and now we see that the decision was taken not to include them. Whatever the reason for that decision, the facts speak for themselves when it comes recognizing DPHB's as a competitive benefit that we're not providing. If you visit the Human Rights Campaign web site (the organization for which Betty DeGeneres is currently "coming out" spokesperson), you'll see that they maintain a list of Fortune 500 companies that do provide such benefits to their employees and their families (in the broadest, most inclusive sense of the word). I've just done a quick summary and as of August 200, here are the results:

6 of the Fortune 10 (60%) provide Domestic Partner Health Benefits

11 of the Fortune 20 (55%) provide Domestic Partner Health Benefits

24 of the Fortune 50 (48%) provide Domestic Partner Health Benefits

I really do believe that this is one nettle that we need to take hold of firmly. People will ask for an explanation and I believe that they should get one. While ever we continue to push this issue under the carpet, we are reinforcing the perception that it is OK to discriminate against people on the grounds of sexual orientation; people will see the words in our policy on the subject as "empty and worthless" (a comment that I have heard on multiple occasions). If there are good reasons why we aren't extending DPHB's at this time, I believe that they need to be shared. I also believe that those of us in the "front line" (in positions where we need to explain the policy) need talking points to enable us to do that. Robert

(This note was sent to senior DuPont leadership. mbl)

Same-sex Benefits (at DuPont) Addressed

By J. Kyle Foster Staff writer -- 10/1/2000 (Fayetteville News & Observer)

A new study says the number of employers offering same-sex health benefits for their gay employees is up 25 percent over last year. A fifth of the Fortune 500 companies offer such benefits, according to the study. Coca-Cola, Monsanto, Time Warner, Walt Disney and Motorola are companies with such policies that have plants, offices or stores in the Cape Fear region.

The study, released last week by a Washington-based gay-rights organization, found that 3,572 companies, colleges, states and local governments offered or have announced they would offer health insurance covering their employees' domestic partners. A year ago, that figure was 2,856. The Census Bureau counted 6.9 million workplaces in the country in 1998.

“Domestic-partner benefits are increasingly becoming a standard business practice in corporate America,” said Kim I. Mills, education director of the Human Rights Campaign. **“Employers have discovered that these benefits help attract and keep the best workers, a critical consideration in the current tight job market.”**

Monsanto, which has a plant on Cedar Creek Road in Cumberland County, has had partner benefits since 1997.

Time Warner, which supplies cable service to Fayetteville, has had partner benefits since 1994.

Coca-Cola, which has a bottling plant on Tom Starling Road, announced in June that it would add partner benefits.

Cumberland County's largest employer, the Kelly-Springfield Tire Co., does not have a nondiscrimination policy that includes sexual orientation, nor does it offer partner benefits through its parent company, Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co., according to the Human Rights Campaign.

DuPont, which has two operations just over the Cumberland County line in Bladen County, has a nondiscrimination policy, but it does not offer same-sex health benefits. The company has an employee group that works with the company, but it also has been lobbying for same-sex benefits. The group, known as BGLAD or Bisexuals, Gays, Lesbians and Allies at DuPont, was established in 1991, according to the group's Web site at www.dupontbglad.com.

Wayne Ivey, who works with Fayetteville Area Gay Pride, said he was surprised to learn that Fayetteville was represented by so many companies with domestic-partner policies. “With the gay issues, Fayetteville is probably one of the last” to take action or make changes, Ivey said. “That’s not been going too well. It’s kind of like we don’t want to talk about that.”

(Continued on Page 10)

(Continued from Page 9)

Lack of benefits

Susan Lees and her partner, Robin Burrs, have been together seven years. Each considers the other her spouse, but the companies they work for don't recognize that through their benefits, although they do have nondiscrimination policies that include sexual orientation, Lees said.

Lees works at Unilever in Raeford. Burrs works at one of the Eaton Corp.'s Cutler-Hammer plants in Fayetteville. "Robin had a hysterectomy some time back, and I couldn't take paid time off for that. I had to take vacation or sick time or not get paid," Lees said. "I was out a week."

That kind of exclusion is a form of discrimination, she said, because had the pair been a heterosexual couple, Lees could have taken paid time off to be with her spouse.

But Lees said Unilever has been supportive of her otherwise. When she had a problem with a co-worker who "outed" her at the plant, the company helped her resolve the issue. The co-worker looked in her personal property and then told people about her sexual relationship, Lees said. She said she was concerned about being outed, worried that she would lose friends or even her job. When neither happened, Lees said, she was glad but angry with the co-worker for getting into her property. She reported the incident to her supervisors.

"They were 100 percent behind me," she said. "Each chain of command supported me at each step." It hasn't been an issue since then, Lees said. The company line is that the

sexual orientation of its employees is irrelevant to their jobs, she said. "Informally, they back us," she said. "Formally, they don't."

But, Lees said, no one has banded together to ask the company to give them a benefits package. "They're not a local company," she said. After hearing about DuPont's employee support network, Lees said the thought of such a group had never occurred to her, but it sounded like a good idea. "I wonder if we need one, locally, nationally, globally," she said.

Long road ahead

Ivey and Lees agree that getting partner benefits as a standard at all companies is going to take a lot of work. Ivey said he believes one person at each company will have to step up, but Lees said it is going to take an entire community.

"In my opinion it's going to take one person that's going to be put in a situation to speak out," Ivey said. He said the company for which he works, which he didn't want to name, conducts surveys. He always writes in the comment box that he wants same-sex benefits. So far, nothing has come of it, he said, but he keeps trying. "They know who wrote it," he said. "It's never commented on; it's never discussed." Lees said she thinks "it will come from all the way around" for Fayetteville.

Community leaders will have to say that is what they want. Employees will have to ask for the benefits. Companies will have to be cooperative. And residents will have to show their acceptance and tolerance, she said. (The Associated Press contributed to this report)

DUPONT, BOY SCOUTS, AND THE UNITED WAY: An Update

Scouts keep funds for now
United Way's new policy begins in '01

By MIKE CHALMERS
Staff reporter
06/27/2000

The region's Boy Scout council will be able to bar gay leaders but not gay Scouts without jeopardizing nearly \$400,000 annually from the United Way of Delaware under a policy revised Tuesday.

But any changes to the Scouts' funding won't happen until the end of 2001, the United Way's board of directors decided.

"We split the difference between the leadership and the way services are being provided," said board Chairman Keith Willard.

The board changed its funding policy in response to the U.S. Supreme Court's June ruling that the Boy Scouts can legally ban homosexuals from leadership positions.

The board voted with little discussion and by secret ballot to add sexual orientation to the nondiscrimination clause of its funding policy. The policy already includes race, religion, age and other factors.

The vote -- 14 in favor, three opposed and three abstentions -- pleased some and angered others who attended the board meeting.



Lisa Johnson of Bellevue said the decision was a "good first step. There's still a long way to go."

The Wilmington region's Boy Scout council will be able to bar gay leaders but not gay Scouts without jeopardizing nearly \$400,000 annually from the United Way of Delaware under a policy revised Tuesday. But any changes to the Scouts' funding won't happen until the end of 2001, the United Way's board of directors decided. "We split the difference between the leadership and the way services are being provided," said board Chairman Keith Willard.

The board changed its funding policy in response to the U.S. Supreme Court's June ruling that the Boy Scouts can legally ban homosexuals from leadership positions. The board voted with little discussion and by secret ballot to add sexual orientation to the nondiscrimination clause of its funding policy. The policy already includes race, religion, age and other factors.

The vote -- 14 in favor, three opposed and three abstentions -- pleased some and angered others who attended the board meeting. "They have exceeded my expectations," said Mark E. Myers of Wilmington, who was a Boy Scout when he was a teen-ager. "I'm excited that they took the leadership to make the change." Joseph Tomeo of Bear was displeased. "I'm disappointed that the United Way of Delaware mis-aligned the Boy Scouts with discrimination," he said. "The Supreme Court ruled they didn't discriminate [illegally], and that's the law of the land."

At stake in the United Way's vote are hundreds of thousands of dollars for the Del-Mar-Va Council of the Boy Scouts, which covers about 25,000 Scouts throughout the Delmarva Peninsula. "We value our relationship with the United Way very much, and we don't want to say anything to jeopardize that," Eric Magendantz, finance and marketing director for the council, said. The council's programs got about \$390,000 from the United Way of Delaware's CommunityCare fund this year. The fund is a pool of donations doled out based on the community's needs. The council also got about \$102,000 from United Way donors who wanted (Continued on Page 12)

Boy Scouts

(Continued from Page 11)

their money to go directly to the Scouts. The council gets about a quarter of its budget through the United Way.

The policy revised Tuesday would affect only the CommunityCare money, not donor designations, said United Way President Charles W. Anderson. Even if the revised policy keeps the United Way from giving CommunityCare to the Boy Scouts, donors would still be able to designate their contributions to the council, officials said.

The policy takes effect Jan. 1, but organizations will have until Dec. 31, 2001, to comply, said board Chairman Keith Willard. That means the Boy Scouts will not be affected in the United Way's current \$29 million fund-raising campaign, Willard said. The revision would kick in after next year's campaign when volunteers dole out CommunityCare money. Organizations joining the United Way after Jan. 1 will have to comply with the policy immediately, Willard said.

The United Way's previous funding policy barred member agencies from discriminating in providing services, appointing staffers, hiring workers and naming board members. The revised policy covers only discrimination in providing services.

By MIKE CHALMERS - News Journal Staff reporter 09/27/2000

A BGLAD Member's View

Yesterday's United Way policy change left me torn. The policy change is certainly a step in the right direction - and I do recognize UW of DE for doing it. The two areas of the policy that I find disconcerting are the sections concerning the leadership of the organization as well as the timing of the policy change.

The policy makes it clear that this impacts the delivery of services and not the selection of the organization's leadership. During the discussion, Keith Willard reminded the room that UW does not fund a particular agency, but rather the programs the agencies bring forward. I don't know how BSA describes or brings forth its programs for funding - but to me this type of language leaves open the door for a great deal of creativity on the part of any agency in how they word and present a particular program. It is a giant loophole. The proof or disproof of this is still to be seen - but I think the potential is very real.

From a DuPont perspective, we are still faced with the same fundamental question, is this revised policy consistent with our values? Would DuPont do business with a company which did not discriminate to whom they sold their products (delivery of service) but which would not allow
(Continued on Page 13)

Boy Scouts: A Member's View
(Continued from Page 12)

their leaders to be women, or black, or gay....etc.? The United Way's policy is improved but is it any more consistent with our core values?

The element of the policy effective date and the impact on funding is also confusing. In essence, they are grand-fathering all current agencies. If they can demonstrate non-discrimination - they will sign on by 1/1/01...so there will be no financial impact felt by any one in the distribution of funds in the year 2001. If agencies need additional time to come into compliance, they have until 12/31/01 to do so. I believe I heard in the meeting (this is the point which needs clarification and clear communication) that the pledges received during the campaign to be held in Fall 2001 would also be delivered in 2002 to those organizations who did not come into compliance by 12/31/01 because those funding decisions were made prior to the deadline. If that is the case, an organization that does nothing and does not come into compliance of the policy will not feel any financial impact until 2003. The discussion of pledge year, funding year, fund delivery year, and policy dates was not clear - and could lead to various interpretations - making this clear is important.

From a DuPont perspective - this timing should be of issue, as it should impact the Corporate Contribution. The response to employees who communicated their displeasure with the UW and BSA asked that employees continue in their generous giving - but could opt to deselect the BSA from their gifts. At a minimum - DuPont should do what it's suggesting to its own employees. This could be nothing more than a statement, since even a de-selection of the BSA from the Corporate Contribution may actually have no financial impact on the Scouts -- it at least shows some consistency.

I would be remiss if I didn't recognize that there was some good conversation among Board members, a recognition that the United Way needs to see and change as society does. There were a number of people very clear on their support of an inclusive non-discrimination policy, a board member suggested that the issue of organization leadership should also be addressed at some point, and some sentiments that the board didn't go far enough. I think the board is slowly going in the right direction.

Finally, I know that DuPont and The News Journal has a colorful history, but I was surprised at the speed at which DuPont responded to the 9/24/00 article. A letter to the editor from Stacey and a Bulk Mail to all employees within 24 hours seems to be a response that is needed when DuPont is being portrayed in a very negative light and in a light completely contrary to the truth. Personally, I didn't think this required this level of a reaction and it communicated a message that DuPont doesn't want to get involved, we're just "one of many voices." This level of a reaction based on the United Way's anticipated action compels DuPont to now respond with its views and actions now that the United Way has acted. DuPont can not be silent.

(Continued on Page 14)

BGLAD Newsletter October, 2000

Boy Scouts: A Member's View
(Continued from Page 13)

DuPont is left with the same questions it had before yesterday's meeting. Is the policy of the United Way of DE consistent with our core values? The answer is no - DuPont does not make the distinction between leadership and services; valuing people is valuing people. We are also faced with the questions of what to do immediately - which includes appropriate communication to employees as well as the Corporate Contribution and what do we do in the future with UW of DE, other United Way agencies, and direct support from DuPont to BSA in contributions, services, or facilities. Tim

BGLAD MEMBER NEWS

Civil Unions in Vermont: DuPonter and Partner Tie The Knot !

By Katie Replogle

In December, 1999, the Vermont Supreme Court ruled that the state of Vermont was constitutionally required to provide protections to same-sex couples equivalent to those provided to heterosexual, married couples. In April of this year, the state legislature passed a bill creating civil unions for same-sex couples. The new law took effect on July 1, 2000.

My partner Chris and I had been kept up to date on the legislative debates by our friend Alice, a retired widow who had moved to Vermont, a few years ago. We had talked about getting a civil union but had not made firm plans. In mid-August, as the summer was waning and we had not yet taken a vacation, we finally decided to do it. We called Alice and told her we were coming to visit. To minimize the number of dates we would have to remember in the future, we decided to get our civil union on August 29 to coincide with our sixteenth anniversary.



In spite of friends' warnings that we would not be able to pull this off without advance planning, all we did was ask Alice to get the names of local Justices of the Peace.

We arrived in Vermont at about 1 PM on the 29th. We located the town hall and the town clerk's office. We filled out the paperwork for the license and paid the \$20 fee, plus \$7 to get a copy mailed to us at home. Then we drove to Alice's house and chatted with her for a while. At about 3 o'clock, we agreed it was time to get down to business.

Alice had the names and phone numbers of about half a dozen JP's in a nearby town. The first one was not available until after 5 PM, so we called the second. I introduced myself and said we were looking for someone who could certify a civil union. He

(Continued on Page 15)

BGLAD MEMBER NEWS

(Continued from Page 15)

said he could do that, so I asked, "Can you do it this afternoon?" He laughed and said, "Well, I guess I can." "Great!" I said. "We'll be there in half an hour."

Alice drove us to the JP's house. She wasn't going to come inside with us, but we insisted. After all, she was our only guest, as well as matron of honor, bridesmaid, surrogate mother of the brides, photographer, etc.

Chris and I had not prepared vows, of course, so the JP used a ceremony from a pamphlet provided by the State. It was similar to a standard marriage ceremony, with slightly modified language: "I take you, Chris, to be a party to our civil union..."

When it came time to exchange rings, I surprised Chris by pulling out the rings we had unceremoniously exchanged sixteen years earlier. We had gotten out of the habit of wearing them after about a year, and I had had to dig through our dresser drawers to find them.

The ceremony took about five minutes. When it was over, the JP gave each of us a kiss. Ours had been his first civil union, and he seemed to be quite tickled about it. Alice took pictures, and then took us out to dinner.

Like us, most of the couples who have gotten civil unions are from out of state. According to the Vermont Health Department, over 600 of the 809 civil unions registered since July 1 involved non-Vermonters. Couples have come from 43 states, Washington, D.C., Canada, and seven other foreign countries. The median age of civil union partners is 40, vs. 31 for heterosexuals registering for marriage licenses. Although no statistics are kept on how long couples have been together, town clerks report hearing of many long-term relationships, including one couple who got a license on their 43rd anniversary!

Civil unions are still a controversial issue in the Vermont political scene, however. Several Republican legislators who voted for civil unions lost their seats in the primary last month. A Democrat who voted against civil unions also lost in the primary. Before the primary election, we heard a debate between Ruth Dwyer, now the Republican candidate for governor, and one of the other Republican candidates. She accused him of not having opposed civil unions strongly enough!

Dwyer faces incumbent Howard Dean, who signed the civil union bill into law, in the November general election. If she wins, it will be interesting to see what, if anything, she does to try to rescind the law. To bar gay unions, the state constitution would have to be amended, or the current state Supreme Court judges would have to be replaced with ones who would interpret the existing constitution differently. Even without these changes, the civil union law could be

(Continued on Page 17)

BGLAD Newsletter October, 2000

BGLAD MEMBER NEWS

(Continued from Page 16)

rescinded by the legislature, but they would still be under mandate from the court to create some kind of marriage equivalent for same-sex couples. The Supreme Court did not assign a deadline to the mandate, however, so the legislature could drag its feet indefinitely. (I was surprised that the legislature acted so quickly on civil unions.)

Because neither the federal government nor the government of any other state recognizes civil unions, our civil union has no legal status in our home state. We have not attempted to get recognition from either the state or DuPont. Some gay leaders are advising against mounting any legal challenges until the current ruckus has died down. For now, we're sitting tight and waiting to see what happens next.

Websites of interest:

For general information on civil unions:

<http://www.marriageequality.com/civilunion.html>

<http://www.gayweddingguide.com/vt-law.html>

For the text of the Vermont law:

<http://www.leg.state.vt.us/docs/2000/bills/passed/h-847.htm>

Also, on the HRC web page (www.hrc.org), there's info under Issues/Marriage.

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

10/23/00

Katie Replogle

We extend a warm welcome to twenty-nine new members who have joined since the last newsletter.

BGLAD now has 264 members, our highest number ever. Ally membership has grown steadily over the last four years, from 60 in January, 1996, to 145 today. BGL numbers (now 119) have held steady for the last three years, with gains in that period (30 new members) offset by losses.

LET'S GET MORE PEOPLE INVOLVED!

Over 350 people came to the Country Club to hear Betty Degeneres on October 3, and three hundred or more others listened by phone. That's six hundred fifty people! At most, only 264 of them are already BGLAD members. So there are at least 135 other DuPont folks out there who have shown an interest in learning about BGL issues. If you know a non-member who attended the talk, how about inviting him or her to join BGLAD? Contact me (Katrina S Replogle) or the BGLAD email account for membership information.

Remember that you can stay connected to BGLAD after you retire if you can receive email at home! Just send us your address!

Want information on BGL events in the Delaware Valley area? You should be on the Mid-Atlantic Chapter's mailing list. The contact is Elizabeth.A.Oneal@usa.dupont.com
