

# COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

SERVING WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA'S LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDERED COMMUNITY

## HUGE VICTORY IN VERMONT: STATE SUPREME COURT RULES SAME-SEX COUPLES ENTITLED TO EQUAL BENEFITS AND PROTECTIONS

Same-Sex Marriage Legislation is Best Way for Vermont Legislature to Comply with Ruling to Treat Sex Same-Couples Fairly and Equally, Says HRC

WASHINGTON - The Vermont Supreme Court handed down a monumental decision today, ruling that same-sex couples must be offered the same "benefits" and "protections" that married heterosexual couples now receive. In its ruling, the court directed the Vermont Legislature to decide whether these benefits will come through traditional marriage or through a similar arrangement such as domestic partnerships. Today's historic victory assures that same-sex couples in Vermont will receive the legal rights and protections they deserve. It also continues the trend towards offering equal benefits and protections to gay and lesbian couples, says the Human Rights Campaign.

"We are thrilled that the Vermont

Supreme Court had the wisdom and courage to hand down this historic, landmark decision," said HRC Political Director Winnie Stachelberg. "There has never been a logical or justifiable reason to exclude same-sex couples from marrying, and this decision validates the unfairness of exclusion. This is a tremendous victory for gay and lesbian couples in Vermont who are now one-step closer to being considered equal in the eyes of the law." Mary Bonauto, and Susan Murray and Beth Robinson of Langrock, Sperry & Wool represented the couples who challenged the ban on same-sex marriages.

"This is a legal and cultural milestone," said Bonauto, co-counsel for the plaintiffs, and Civil Rights Director at the New England-based Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders. "The court recognized that same-sex couples need and deserve the same legal rights and

protections other people take for granted. The court's decision paves the way for more secure families and stronger communities."

According to the court justices: "We hold that the state is constitutionally required to extend to same-sex couples the common benefits and protections that flow from marriage under Vermont law."

"We urge the Vermont Legislature to legalize same-sex marriage because it is the most fair and comprehensive way to comply with the courts mandate that same-sex couples receive equal treatment under the law," said Stachelberg.

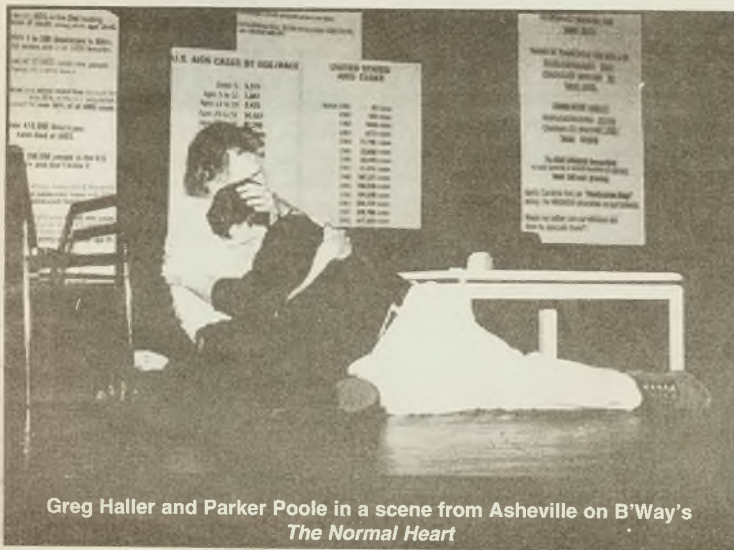
The court also ruled that the state legislature will have the final say in how these benefits will be administered. The court ordered the legislature to act in a timely manner, which leaves the possi-

bility of the legislature taking up the issue in the next session.

The impact of this decision on the nation is still unclear and much will depend on whether or not the Vermont Legislature approves marriage or a separately constructed system, says HRC.

"Same-sex couples in Vermont will soon have legal recognition and protections afforded heterosexual married couples," said Stachelberg. "The question that remains is how will these couples be treated when they visit or move to other states? For example, if a couple travels to a neighboring state on vacation and one person ends up in the hospital, does his or her partner still have the same hospital visitation rights he or she would if they were in Vermont?"

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Greg Haller and Parker Poole in a scene from Asheville on B'Way's *The Normal Heart*



### "Asheville On Broadway"

Actors, Artists and Activists Against AIDS

The Steering Committee of "Asheville On Broadway" would like to thank the entire community for its support and generosity in making this 1st Annual World AIDS Day Fund Raiser a great success. We have received numerous compliments on the event, and have realized our goal of not only raising money for People with HIV/AIDS in our area, but also the goal of raising awareness with the production of "The Normal Heart".

For a first time event we have been consistently told that we should be very pleased with the results. And, as promised, we are including the details of how much money was raised and how it was spent. It has been our promise from the beginning to produce a positive event that allows all of you who gave so kindly to know how your donations were utilized. We hope this report accomplishes that goal.

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