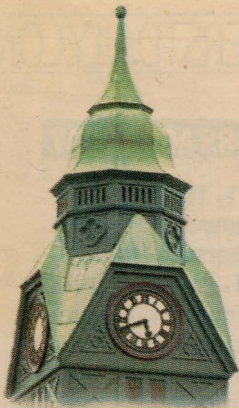


April 11, 2007



YOU SAID IT

"If our neighbours in Sackville see fit to accommodate same-sex marriages, then I see no reason whatsoever, for Amherst and area churches not to embrace these couples."

Gerard Veldhoven - Page 3

APR 11, 2007

Gay rights activist challenges churches

*Churches must open
doors to same-sex
marriage: Veldhoven*

BY DARRELL COLE

AMHERST DAILY NEWS

AMHERST – A prominent gay rights activist is challenging Amherst's churches to open their doors to gay marriages.

Gerard Veldhoven, whose marriage to Norman Carter in 2004 is believed to be the first legal same-sex union in Nova Scotia, feels churches must open their doors to same-sex couples wishing to tie the knot in a religious venue.

"The fact civil marriage ceremonies have now been legal in the whole of Canada for some time now, I believe it to be fair and justified that same-sex couples are afforded the opportunity to marry in their churches," Veldhoven said.

Presently, Amherst churches do not permit same-sex marriages to take place on their premises, but they are allowed across the border at both Sackville United and the chapel at Mount Allison University.

"It's not something that's within our control," Rev. Byron Corkum with Amherst First Baptist said. "It's a convention policy and we have to follow it to remain as part of the convention."

Corkum said the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches voted on the matter last year, rejecting the notion of allowing same-sex marriages within their churches.

Veldhoven said the fact same-sex marriages are allowed in some places demonstrates the willingness of those congregations to allow marriages regardless of sexual orientation.

"With this in mind, I wish to bring forth a challenge to the Amherst and area churches to do likewise. If our neighbours in Sackville see fit to accommodate same-sex marriages, then I see no reason whatsoever, for Amherst and area churches not to embrace these couples," Veldhoven said.

Veldhoven said it's ironic that the United Church of Canada has been instrumental in allowing gay and lesbian couples to legally marry, but Trinity-St. Stephen's United in Amherst does not allow it.

Rev. Susan Estabrooks said it was left up to individual churches to determine whether to permit same-sex marriages.

"Several years prior to our arrival here they had a vote and it was against allowing it," Estabrooks said. "Some churches have opted to allow it, but this one said no and I think it was by a narrow margin."

Estabrooks is unsure if another vote will be held anytime soon.

OUR VIEW

Same-sex unions can't be forced

When the federal government and then the Nova Scotia government voted to legalize same-sex marriages, both were very specific about protecting a church's right to refuse to participate in such ceremonies. Under Canadian law, churches are within their right to say no thanks to same-sex couples.

Gerard Veldhoven of Amherst is challenging that stand by calling on churches in his community to get with the times and allow same-sex unions to happen within their buildings.

Veldhoven is basing his feelings on the fact both Sackville United Church and the chapel at Mount Allison University have opted to open their doors to same-sex couples. He believes that if it's allowed on one side of the border, it should be allowed in Amherst.

It's not surprising for churches on the Nova Scotia side of the border to be a little hesitant about reopening what has been a very divisive debate. While those churches that have opened their doors to same-sex couples are to be commended, it would be wrong to force those who haven't to do the same, especially if it's going to drive away members of the congregation and create wounds that may never heal.

For some churches, namely the Catholic Church, reopening the same-sex debate is a non-starter because their orders come from Rome.

For others, they will eventually take another look at this issue, but it should be on their terms and not forced upon them by the state. Just as we don't accept the church meddling in the affairs of state, it would be wrong for the state to meddle in the affairs of the church. For now, that will have to do.

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Are the church doors really open?

To the Editor,

In recent weeks I have proposed a dialog of sorts to have the churches open their doors to same-sex marriage. This is a long and arduous process and in time shall see positive results for gay and lesbian couples who wish to marry within their churches.

Therefore, I have developed a short guide for clergy in an effort to instill understanding and educate those who remain oblivious of facts regarding homosexuality. Consequently, I have distributed this "Guide" across Canada to as many church offices and schools of theology as possible.

A few weeks ago Rev. Charlie Cross Jr. pronounced "The church doors are open." Such a preposterous statement is completely without merit as same-sex couples are not welcome in most churches and recognized as such. This has been well documented. As long as this archaic idea of homosexuality being a "lost and confused", continues to be a thorn in the lives of gays and lesbians, there shall remain a wall around us. Consequently, it is imperative positive education is developed within the churches to raise awareness of just who we are as part of society.

No Rev Cross, all church doors are not open, except to admit discrimination of the worst kind and that is to alienate and deliberately punish a large group of people who are decidedly worth knowing for who and what they are. I would dare say, Rev. Cross and others would not consider the fact they were born with blue or brown eyes. Would you then consider they change the colour or banish them from equal treatment and opportunity? Perhaps they practice a type of Christianity that allows such discriminatory action.

"The church doors are open" is hardly the answer at this point in time. Some churches have opened their doors, such as The United Church of Canada and The Quakers. The work ahead is difficult, but I shall continue in my quest in distributing my little "Guide" to rest of the churches.

Gerard Veldhoven, Amherst

June 14, 2007
Amherst Daily
News

LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

Attack on Hay mean-spirited

TO THE EDITOR,

I feel compelled to respond to Glen White's letter which appeared in the Amherst Daily News, Nov. 3, 2004.

His views are typically associated with a person who does not realize the facts and is totally saturated with intolerant and homophobic thoughts. While reading his letter, it became abundantly clear he is a religious person. However, it seems he is not able to profess love for people who are perhaps a little different in their way of life.

The fact remains gays and lesbians are now able to be legally married and are finally on equal footing with the rest of society. The last line in our marriage ceremony has not been changed yet, therefore, it sounded a bit odd. It will be changed shortly and then we will all be the same.

Mr. White speaks of evil and I put it to him, where is the evil in a loving, committed marriage. Yes, it was on the front pages of newspapers, as well as, television networks throughout the country and the time has come to celebrate this terrific progress in establishing equal rights.

Kudos to Rev. Eldon Hay for receiving the Order of Canada. He has fought for gay and lesbian rights for years and now we see the wonderful results of his efforts, as well as, any other. This man has been instrumental in letting people know that it is great to be gay or lesbian and we are all, everyone of us, entitled to the same rights, responsibilities and

obligations.

It is of concern that a few people shall remain hateful and I sincerely hope Mr. White shall put his Christian ideals to work so that he also will be able to love his family, friends, or his neighbours, whether they are gay, lesbian, heterosexual or whatever they may be. Marriage is not going to the dogs. As a matter of fact, lives are now enriched because of this exciting and very fair decision.

Oh yes, as a matter of interest. The law now reads that "marriage is the union of two people to the exclusion of all others." Canadian provinces are getting onboard with same-sex marriage, as are many European countries. Loving relationships are now recognized through the availability of marriage, whether in a heterosexual or homosexual situation. The author of that letter has obviously some very irrational and again, very homophobic thoughts. I sincerely hope he will be able to come to terms with the idea that Norman Carter is my legal spouse, regardless if he deems it morally correct.

I suggest he befriends some gay or lesbian people and he may be pleasantly surprised to learn they are not unlike anyone else. Perhaps Mr. White would contact us, as we would be more than happy to have a mature and sensible conversation with him regarding this hateful and morally superior letter to the editor.

Gerard Veldhoven,
Amherst, N.S.

Why does it matter?

Contrary to the opinion of Del Atwood (April 17 letter), it is widely accepted that one's sexual orientation is determined before birth. Rev. Eldon Hay is quite correct (April 10 opinion article) to assume his daughters did not choose to be either heterosexual or homosexual.

Why does it really matter when and if our sexual orientation is determined? Some know at a very early age; others come to an awareness of it, depending on their awareness of their feelings and the censorship of the culture in which they grow up. The fact is that there are many examples of same-sex love and gender variations across cultures, throughout history, around the world. Why do we need to know exactly

when or why someone feels that way? It just is. Arguments about the need to find the biological origin are steeped in a mindset that same-sex love is inherently wrong and therefore must be cured.

We must be aware that the nature-versus-nurture debate and the scientific-medical quest to determine a genetic, biological cause for same-sex attraction is not a constructive use of our time and money. A better scientific question to ask, if one feels the need to ask it, is: What causes heterosexuality? Then ask oneself: What socially constructive reason is there to care about the answer?

Gerard Veldhoven, Amherst

Makes no sense

Del Atwood makes no sense in his April 17 attempt to discredit Eldon Hay's opinion (April 10) that gays are born gay. How else would one become gay?

Would you choose this lifestyle voluntarily? Choose to be the object of prejudice and judged by the religious, governments and countless other fear-based, homophobic people? I think not.

Self-evidenced truths are truths that are self-evident. Ask yourself: Would you like to make love to another of the same sex? Therein lies your answer to what makes one gay. It can't be shamed, changed, prayed, or programmed out of a person; it just is your sexual preference, genetically assigned from birth.

Rick Toupin, Chignecto

A time for tolerance

TO THE EDITOR,

During the past few weeks, two letters appeared in the Amherst Daily News condemning homosexuality as well as same sex-marriage. It seems the time has arrived for these gentlemen to educate themselves, then perhaps they will enjoy the benefits of knowing how normal, loving and contributing we are in Canadian society.

One should not condemn another person just because they seem a little different from someone else. There is ample proof from the scientific community, as well as, the medical experts, that homosexuality is not a choice but determined before birth. Henry Legere and Glen White, aside from being unaware of the facts, also attempt to solidify their views with biblical ramblings, which they fail to understand. If they "love the sinner", but "not the sin", they do not love at all, since one is part of the other.

This is not a sin, but a healthy form of a natural existence between two loving individuals. I was under the impression that the Bible's foremost message is "love", but then again perhaps this is an illusion. As I am not a member of any Christian denomination or any other affiliation to any religious group, it is of concern that members of such organizations do not follow these teachings.

These men obviously did not do their homework, as they would know the majority of Canadians are for same-sex marriage, hence the decisions by the courts to uphold the rights to all Canadians, including the ruling that marriage be granted to gay and lesbian couples. So, now we all have our rights, as far as they go. I suggest Mr. White and Mr. Legere get used to the idea, as it is now

entrenched in the law. We also thank the governments for standing in full agreement with the court rulings.

It is of little consequence if there are people who do not agree, for now we are on equal footing with the rest of society and I feel that hate and intolerance will fade away as time goes on. I wonder if these gentlemen realize that in a number of European countries, only civil marriages are recognized, thus to separate church and state.

It is curious neither of these men contacted us to discuss their objections. This indicates to me, their intentions are to hide behind the pen, and are only voicing their points of view to promote hate and use the Bible as a tool to do this.

It is indeed unfortunate these letters are being written. Sometimes there is an underlying problem, such as not being totally comfortable with their sexual feelings; therefore, attacking those people who are extremely satisfied with who they are. This is not to say these gentlemen are experiencing that problem, but it is known to be the case at times.

This is my last reply to these horrible letters and I intend to live life to the fullest with my spouse for many years to come. We are very grateful to the majority of Canadian society who support the equality we are now able to enjoy.

So, Mr. Legere and Mr. White, I feel it is unfortunate you must go through life with such hate in your hearts. However, you do have the choice of coming to terms with this issue and join the majority who are able to demonstrate what real love is all about.

Gerard Veldhoven,
Amherst

Archbishop Pendergast's hypocrisy

Rec
2005

By Gerard Veldhoven

Upon reading the article in the Chronicle Herald, July 26, 2005, by Archbishop Terence Pendergast, it becomes apparent he is attempting to minimize the importance of the equal social fabric of Canadian society.

The fact is, he is of the opinion same-gender marriage is not and should not be recognized. The fact this is a civil issue and not a religious one, does not even occur to him. It seems plausible to me, it is the attitudes of some of the so-named Christian churches that should be of concern to us, as we know not all Canadians practise the teachings of Christianity, especially as of late.

There is a reason the pews in the churches are emptying, at a rate not previously realized. The reasons are clear and the Archbishop, along with the Catholic teachings, should accept responsibility. He speaks of the government trying to coerce the clergy into accepting the legislation. This begs the question, who is the Catholic Church trying to coerce? I wonder about the consequences, should the church succeed in this fruitless exercise. It shall certainly put us on a fast track to inequality and social chaos.

We are now the fourth country to have legalized same-gender marriage and to stir up further debate by religious leaders is harmful and indeed, detrimental

to Canadian society as a whole, not to mention the thousands of gay and lesbian couples who now live in a loving and nurturing marriage, including the possibility of raising children.

Church leaders, such as Archbishop Pendergast, insist they "neither reject or condemn" homosexuals and they should "have their human dignity". So, where is that human dignity if it is repressed by some of the "Christian churches" and the "Christian teachings"? I wonder. It is hypocrisy at work and though we are hearing these negative ideas, we also know the advances we have made in a relatively short period of time.

Kudos to activists, such as Rev. Eldon Hay and the insight of the majority of Parliamentarians, same-gender marriage is now the law of the land. We must, however, continue the task of teaching others, such as Terence Pendergast, certain churches and the likes of Stephen Harper and Peter Mackay, we are now living in a progressive and fair society.

Let Christianity prove to us the churches are willing and ready to embrace us. Some churches, such as the United Church of Canada, have embraced same-gender marriage. This is a Christian organization, so the Roman Catholic Church would do well to do likewise.

Gay rights proponent critical of archbishop

BY DARRELL COLE

Amherst Daily News

AMHERST – Church leaders do not have the authority to change human rights laws as they see fit, says a prominent gay rights advocate.

In a strongly worded letter to Archbishop Terence Prendergast, Gerard Veldhoven said it's up to the population at large to change the laws of the land through the democratic process.

"It is regretful our religious leaders do not respect the democratic process. On the contrary, they seem to want to squash us, with no remorse whatsoever," Veldhoven said in his letter.

"Canadians have spoken on the issue of same-gender marriage and the majority is very much in favour of equal civil marriage. The Roman Catholic Church shall not succeed in its attempt to change the minds of Canadians."

Veldhoven, whose November 2004 marriage to Norman Carter is believed to be the first legal same-sex wedding in the province, is taking offence to a recent insert from the archbishop that appeared in Catholic church bulletins in various parts of the province.

With Prime Minister Stephen Harper promising a free vote in the House of Commons as early as this fall, the archbishop is urging church members to make their feelings known to their Member of Parliament.

He feels the church must stay out of state business and leave governing up to the government.

Veldhoven is proud of how far the gay rights movement has come and points out that civil marriages are part of a new era and must be tinkered with by those who oppose them.

"This is a human rights issue and one would think the churches would be delighted in the progress we have made," he said. "It seems not to be the case...Discrimination against gays and lesbians must end."

dcole@amherstdaily.com

DAILY MAILBAG

An ideal opportunity

To the editor;

My challenge to the Amherst and area churches is not intended as a far-fetched idea. On the contrary, it is a possible reality, however long it may take.

I strongly feel positive educational programs, in schools, in churches, in our homes, or any other public forum, is a must to inform our future generations about the vital importance of the equality of persons regardless of sexual orientation. The churches have a responsibility, I believe, to educate, so discrimination will eventually not rear its ugly head.

Then, perhaps the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and The Human Rights Acts could be amended in such a manner that would eliminate discrimination against same-sex couples. I dare say the possibility exists with determination and positive attitudes.

At my age it is unlikely I will witness the end of exclusion by the local churches. I urge the clergy to use their influence and not be silent in the pulpits of the churches. Equal rights and equal marriage are attainable through education. The churches have an ideal opportunity to get involved and prove they also believe in equality for all people who occupy their pews.

*Gerard Veldhoven,
Amherst*

Oct 4, 2005
Amherst Daily
News

Inquisition at the Vatican

TO THE EDITOR,

Vatican documents leaked to the press recently indicate the Roman Catholic Church is determined to blame gays for the crimes committed against young boys. Church authorities are displaying contempt for fairness, to say the least, as well as making it seem as if these sexual deviants are gay priests.

It has been well documented that the majority of these crimes are committed by pedophiles, most of who may happen to be straight offenders. This is another attempt by the Catholic Church to blame a lot of the world's ills on the gay and lesbian community.

Is the church prepared to screen prospective priests to determine if they are indeed gay, or are potential child molesters? I believe the Vatican views this as an opportunity to dig the knife in a little deeper and in the process believes it will rid the church of gay priests.

It is not clear how they plan to proceed with this ridiculous idea. However, I don't believe it will be successful. It will definitely cause more friction rather than an effort to heal the constant hatred and intolerance we are subjected to. Of course, the Pope has certainly made his views known. When he came to office, it was established he had little respect for the gay community.

The church surely must realize this is an absurd situation, as men shall continue to apply to enter the priesthood, whether they are gay or straight. They may never know a person's sexual orientation, unless an applicant divulges that information.

This is a blatant attack on the gay community and does nothing to heal

the rift, which I believe has intensified as more countries have allowed gay and lesbian marriages. The Catholic Church attempts to belittle this fact, as it views homosexuality a sin. Therefore, making it simple for them to pass judgement on gay men who wish to enter the priesthood.

I single out the Roman Catholic Church, as it is the most vocal in opposition to equal rights and opportunities for gays and lesbians. It is unreasonable to assume a prospective priest will molest a young boy because he happens to be gay. We constantly learn about pedophiles attacking young children and the culprits are usually straight men. The church must halt the obvious intolerance and come to terms with the fact homosexuality has always existed and will be here forever; because it is as natural as heterosexuality.

If the Vatican insists on continuing with this horrible plan, I cannot avoid the thought that women who choose to enter a Convent could also be put to the test to ascertain if an applicant who wishes to become a nun is indeed a lesbian. Some women are also capable of seducing youngsters and many are heterosexuals.

I must point to the fact pedophiles will sexually molest any child, male or female. It is a great injustice the Vatican, under the direction of the Pope Benedict XIV, is considering this totally unfair and positively unacceptable plan. Is this the future of the Roman Catholic Church, to repeat the awful practice of an inquisition? I suppose we can only hope the church will not stoop to this level!

Gerard Veldhoven,
Amherst

April 11, 2007

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DAILY MAILBAG

A challenge to churches

To the Editor,

The Sackville United Church and now the Mount Allison University Chapel, are open to same-sex couples who wish exchange wedding vows in a religious setting.

I commend these venues and thank them for the pure, inclusive decisions made by the authorities and the respective congregations. It demonstrates the willingness of some religious institutions to allow couples to be married in their churches, regardless of sexual orientation. The door is indeed opened to those who prefer to marry in a religious venue.

With this in mind, I wish to bring forth a challenge to the Amherst and area churches to do likewise. The fact civil marriage ceremonies have now been legal in the whole of Canada for sometime now, I believe it to be fair and justified same-sex couples are afforded the opportunity to marry in their churches. Presently, Amherst churches do not permit such unions to take place under their roofs.

As a gay rights advocate, I challenge the various churches to adopt changes and accept same-sex unions. Why should Amherst and area be left in the cold by shunning the developments so readily accepted by our neighbours?

Gerard Veldhoven, Amherst

Casey not being fair to gays

TO THE EDITOR,

Now that the Conservative party has decided to not support same-sex marriage, therefore denying a certain group of Canadians equal rights, I wonder what section of society will be next to feel the wrath of this intolerant and decidedly homophobic group of politicians?

Actually it's laughable when we hear they are moving to the centre. I would think if that's the case we would not, in all probability, be so concerned to write letters to the editor and resort to activism. However, it seems we must continue the fight. Although we are confident Parliament shall vote in favour of this new legislation, we must not lose sight of the fact that we still have to be vocal in an attempt to raise awareness we are entitled to equality and that it is "normal" to be gay or lesbian.

It is certainly worth mentioning that 25 per cent of delegates at the Conservative convention voted in favour of same-sex marriage. Sadly, our MP, Bill Casey, again chose to ignore pleas from the gay and lesbian community, as well as many others in this constituency, to have a positive vote.

Regretfully, we must continue to speak out in order to convince certain parliamentarians that we also have the right to love and marry the person of our choice. We also know the majority of Canadians support equality. Mr. Casey says he favours equal rights for gays and lesbians. He is willing to give us all the benefits accorded the rest of Canadian society. However, there cannot be equal opportunity if gays and lesbians are not allowed to marry.

The fortunate side in this contin-

uing saga is the fact eight jurisdictions have same-sex marriage legislation in place, which already give us the right to marry. Thousands of gay and lesbian couples have now legally married in Canada and since marriage laws are a provincial matter, the federal vote will have no bearing on the legality of these marriages.

A positive vote in Parliament would make it legal in New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Alberta and The Northwest Territories, unless they chose to change their marriage laws before that occurs. Mr. Casey and other Members of Parliament who have decided to attempt to squash the new legislation, should remember they are in the minority.

We must remember about 80 per cent of Canada already has this new legislation in place. In spite of Mr. Casey and others, we remain extremely optimistic Bill-38 will be in place in early summer.

I am certain Mr. Casey will be remembered by the gay and lesbian community in this riding as someone who demonstrates a lack of fairness, when election time rolls around again. Perhaps he is not concerned about the gay and lesbian vote, as well as our supporters.

However, Mr. Casey must follow his own ideas as to what is fair and right for certain groups of Canadian Society. Now, if we could only show some concern for those of us who long to marry our loved one, as is the right of any other Canadian. We shall prevail in this effort to gain full equality, in spite of certain politicians.

Gerard Veldhoven,
Amherst

Amherst resident slams Casey for stance on gay-marriage

BY JASON SMITH

Staff Reporter

AMHERST – Amherst resident Gerard Veldhoven is hurt and angered to hear Cumberland-Colchester MP Bill Casey declare his continued opposition to same-sex marriage.

Veldhoven has lived in Amherst with his partner Norman Carter since 1975. The couple will celebrate their 30th anniversary next February.

On Monday, Casey said he'd continue to oppose same-sex marriage despite supporting Conservative leadership hopeful Belinda Stronach, who supports allowing same-sex couples to marry.

Veldhoven said homophobia continues to rear its ugly head in the Conservative Party of Canada.

"They just won't change their minds and provide equal rights and in the end we'll just be second-class citizens," he said. "I don't like that and I know a lot of gay people in the area feel the same way."

No matter who the Conservatives choose as their next leader, Veldhoven is convinced the new party will never vote in support of same-sex marriage.

United Church minister and gay rights activist Eldon Hay said Casey has every right to voice his opinion, but in this case, his opinion is wrong.

"I think he's against the provisions of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I think he's on the side of the Neanderthals. I think the future of our country is a more tolerant society."

Despite Casey's opposition, Veldhoven said he and his partner have felt welcomed and accepted by the community.

"The funny thing is within the Amherst community, most of our friends are straight and they're very close friends. We've been very accepted in this community. We've been very lucky that way."

Casey has voted against same-sex marriage twice and said he has no intention of changing his vote.

In 1999, Casey, along with the majority of MPs, and former Prime Minister Jean Chretien, voted to continue to define marriage as a union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of others.

Chretien, later changed his mind on the issue and came out in support of same-sex marriage, saying he needed to uphold the Charter of Rights.

Casey continued to stay his course against same-sex marriage last September when Parliament held its last free vote on the issue.

Veldhoven said he hopes Casey's negative view on same-sex marriage will also have a negative result for the MP at the polls in the next election.

"I hope he realizes that there's going to be a lot of lost votes this election because of the gay community and the people who support us in the heterosexual community won't stand for it."

J_smith@amherstdaily.com

Casey's silence not golden

TO THE EDITOR,

Silence is not golden and Bill Casey's silence on the subject of same-gender marriage is an obvious attempt to distance himself from the Conservative party's rhetoric.

At a recent news conference in Saint John and a consequent debate in Halifax, religious officials and right-wing politicians were discussing how to get rid of equal rights for gays and lesbians.

The fact two Conservative candidates were told by party brass not to say anything, seems very suspicious. If elected, what will the Harper government spring on our community. Very scary indeed!

Legal experts have already advised that the only route is to use the notwithstanding clause. So, is Stephen Harper set to do this?

Vote Marriage Canada is the brainchild of right-wing former politicians such as Elsie Wayne, Grant Hill and Liberal Pat O'Brien. They are pushing Mr. Harper to take away the equal right for gay and lesbian couples to be married.

It is obvious this is a matter of homophobia and the marriage issue is just ammunition to bolster their cause. Mrs. Wayne, while displaying an obvious hate attitude and with thrill in her voice, denounced homosexuality, using Christian values and morals to down the Canadian Charter of Rights.

This is completely unacceptable and I call on voters to think of what sort of Canada they would like our children to inherit. A Canada of intolerance or a Canada embracing equal and human rights.

Mr. Casey's silence on this matter

is alarming and as a gay rights advocate I challenge him for an answer whether he intends to support the move to take away a human right.

Gerard Veldhoven,

Amherst

LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

Where does Casey stand?

TO THE EDITOR,

Bill Casey has indicated he will dwell mostly on local concerns during the election campaign. Perhaps this is an attempt by him to distance himself from the rhetoric of his boss, Stephen Harper.

The issue I am referring to is Harper's promise to revisit the new law, which allows same-gender couples to be legally married across Canada. This is totally unacceptable and indeed a cruel jab at same-gender couples who are already married and those who choose to do so in the future.

I have difficulty believing Mr Harper has such a deep-seated intolerance toward our community. He demonstrates exactly how far to the right he is willing to travel and in the process is consumed with how he will be able to take away equal rights. This is a human rights issue and Parliament dealt with it and the right for same-gender couples to marry is the law of the land.

One cannot hide behind other issues in the hope same-gender marriage will be ignored by voters. Stephen Harper has made the pledge to re-open the debate in Parliament and because of this he is undermining the reality of same-

gender marriage.

Mr. Casey opposes the new marriage law as he voted against it and he likely will do that again, if the opportunity arises. This has to be fought by everyone concerned with equal rights for all.

We have made great strides in the last few years and for Stephen Harper to even suggest an attempt to reverse the law is not acceptable.

Canadians have already indicated they do not wish to revisit this issue. It is scary indeed to contemplate what else he has up his sleeve. Of course, we also know the courts will not endorse this mad scheme and Mr. Harper will be forced to use the notwithstanding clause.

I hope this is not the direction the citizens of this country wish to travel. Bill Casey has been silent thus far, but I call upon him to make his thoughts known and tell us how he intends to vote, should the marriage law be brought back to Parliament.

The rights of the gay and lesbian community are at stake and I like to know if Bill Casey wishes to be remembered for attempting to change a law which is part of a progressive Canada.

Gerard Veldhoven,
Amherst

Dec 14, 2005

Vote Marriage Canada endorses Tory candidate

Continued from page A1

Last week, the organization endorsed 10 candidates in New Brunswick.

Casey, who repeated his stance on same-sex marriage during last week's candidates' forum, is the lone candidate in Cumberland Colchester Musquodoboit Valley to receive the organization's endorsement.

The Tory candidate said he is aware of the endorsement, but isn't taking it too seriously and quickly pointed out he is in no way connected with Vote Marriage Canada.

"I have no connection with them," Casey said while on the campaign trail in the Westchester area Monday afternoon. "I have always supported equal rights for gays and lesbians even when some of the members of my own party haven't, but I just don't think the traditional definition of marriage should be changed."

Casey said he is supporting his party's election promise of holding a free vote on the subject in the next Parliament and he's prepared to live with the result even if it means the definition as it now stands, allowing same-sex marriages, changes.

Wayne believes getting her organization's endorsement will help

candidates at the ballot box because she feels most Canadians do not support what the prime minister and his government did by changing the definition of marriage.

"You're darn right having our endorsement will help those candidates because the largest percentage of people are not in favour of changing the traditional meaning of marriage," Wayne said.

Local gay rights activist Gerard Veldhoven, whose marriage to Norman Carter in October 2004 is believed to be the first legal same-sex union in Nova Scotia, said he is not surprised with Wayne's endorsement of Casey and hopes the veteran politician will do the right thing and not accept the endorsement.

"I would like to hope he wouldn't, but I won't be surprised if he does," Veldhoven said. "This organization represents everything that's wrong in that it's hateful and awful. You can see it on their faces that they are adamant in their views and if Bill accepts that endorsement I would almost have to put him in the same group. Bill Casey's not hateful, he has a lot of good qualities, I just hope he would be his own man on this."

dcole@amherstdaily.com

Archbishop missing the point of same-sex debate

TO THE EDITOR,

Upon reading the article in the Chronicle Herald, July 26, 2005, by Archbishop Terence Pendergast, it becomes apparent he is attempting to minimize the importance of the equal social fabric of Canadian society.

The fact is, he is of the opinion same-gender marriage is not and should not be recognized. The fact this is a civil issue and not a religious one, does not even occur to him. It seems plausible to me that it is the attitudes of some of the so-named Christian churches that should be of concern to us, as we know not all Canadians practise the teachings of Christianity, especially as of late.

There is a reason the pews in the churches are emptying at a rate not previously realized. The reasons are clear and the archbishop, along with the Catholic teachings should accept responsibility. He speaks of the government trying to coerce the clergy into accepting the legislation. This begs the question, who is the Catholic Church trying to coerce? I wonder about the consequences, should the church succeed in this fruitless exercise. It shall certainly put us on a fast track to inequality and social chaos.

We are now the fourth country to have legalized same-gender marriage and to stir up further debate by religious leaders is harmful and indeed, detrimental to Canadian society as a

whole, not to mention the thousands of gay and lesbian couples who now live in a loving and nurturing marriage, including the possibility of raising children.

Church leaders, such as Archbishop Pendergast, insist they "neither reject nor condemn" homosexuals and they should have their "human dignity." So, where is that human dignity if it is repressed by some of the "Christian" churches? Is this the attitude of the Catholic Church and the "Christian teachings?" I wonder. It is hypocrisy at work and though we are hearing these negative ideas, we also know the advances we have made in a relatively short period of time.

Kudos to activists, such as Rev. Eldon Hay and the insight of our Parliamentarians, same-gender marriage is now the law of the land. We must, however, continue the task of teaching others, such as Terence Pendergast, certain churches and individuals, we are now living in a progressive and fair society.

Let Christianity prove to us the churches are willing and ready to embrace us. Some churches, such as the United Church of Canada have embraced same-gender marriage. This is a Christian organization, so the Roman Catholic Church would do well to do likewise.

Gerard Veldhoven,
Amherst

Church & Sexuality

By Gerard Veldhoven

Much has been said, and written, about same sex marriages lately, unfortunately, in mostly negative ways. Unfortunate, because, as the years passed, people have simply kept on arguing, whether or not, homosexuality should be legally recognized. It seems the problem is far from over, since religion stands in the way of a progressive, and fair society. We see, and hear reports in the media regarding views from religious leaders, and lay people alike, who would be delighted, if the gay community would simply disappear. Sorry folks, we're here to stay, and we will get our equal rights, however long it will take. To get my views across to you, wayves readers, I feel obliged to tell you the reasons for these personal thoughts.

Growing up in The Netherlands in the 40's and 50's, churches were still quite powerful, and people were easily persuaded to believe many things that they were not supposed to question. My parents never attended church, but my maternal grandmother did. Visiting grandparents was always a great treat. On Sunday's, if I was visiting, my grandmother always took me to church. She died in 1948, when I was eight years old, and my church attendance passed into history. Eventually, my family moved to Canada in 1954, and

attending church never became an issue again, until about 1960. We had moved to Jollimore, outside of Halifax. Being very naive, even at twenty years of age, I decided one Sunday morning to go to the local United Church. The fact I was gay, and entering a church, might have future complications, did not occur to me. Before long, I was asked to teach Sunday School, without really understanding biblical teachings. Two years passed, and I became quite well acquainted with what was expected of me, even so far as to have contemplated going into the ministry. The brainwashing had taken place, and in the process, other things were expected of me, such as getting married. That took place in 1963, and eventually I had two sons. As it turned out, I had an argument with the clergyman in this church as to how I should proceed going into the ministry. My eyes were really opened that day, and it occurred to me: the hypocrisy that exists in these institutions is almost beyond belief! Moving to Amherst in 1969, to teach at the School for the Deaf, I was pleased that I had cancelled my plans to go into the ministry. Trying to integrate into the community also meant trying to attend church again. By now, my sexuality had really become an issue, and I began to realize, after much soul

searching, that steps had to be taken. I am certain that many of you are able to understand my predicament at that time, keeping in mind it was 1974. We separated under very difficult circumstances, and of course the boys were affected during this process. It became even more difficult when my oldest son was thought to be gay, and the blame was put squarely on my shoulders. In 1975, I started to live with my Partner, and that relationship has lasted now for 29 years. He is Roman Catholic, and has also questioned his church's pronouncements. As time passed I distanced myself from churches, as I knew that if I kept going, it would be hypocritical. I cannot comprehend, especially now, how people are able to go into these places of worship, fully aware, that they are not welcome.

We could say that we should fight, to get churches to agree with equal rights for us. But, the way I see it, why is that necessary? The important acceptance is legally, not fighting to try to be accepted by church hierarchies, and its hypocritical members. If gays would like to attend church, why not become a member of the Metropolitan Community Church? At least you would be welcome there, without all the hassles. The possibility of changing these peoples minds is very remote, and to them,

against their Christian teachings. To legalize gay marriages, the courts and the government had better decide soon, and separate church and state. Needless to say, I am bitter about this, and hope that Canada will eventually follow the lead in The Netherlands, where only civil marriages are legal. Belgium also has legalized same sex marriages.

Listen, my friends, all is not gloom and doom, as we are a strong and determined lot. My oldest son is gay and the youngest straight (and was married in the Catholic Church, I might add.) That is great, and I do hold out hope that the churches will come to terms with this issue.

Gay fathers unite

Two groups of gay dads sprung up in Halifax in late August. The initial reaction was why would Halifax need two groups. The organizers quickly met and agreed to combine their efforts. The wisdom of this decision was evident at the first meeting when eight men met to share their stories in confidence and provide support to men who wish to parent their kids

Gay Fathers Halifax is a peer support group that meet on the first Tuesday of every month from 7pm to 9pm. For more info on location and other events send an email to GayFathersHalifax@hotmail.com or contact Jack/Ken 453-6392 or Doug 832-7002

PUBLIC'S VIEW

Gay marriage is human rights issue

To the editor:

In a letter to the editor, June 7, 2006, Janet Hammock correctly states, "Stephen Harper must learn that equal marriage is a human rights issue." The problem we face with someone like Mr. Harper is the mind-

set of those who regard this as a religious issue. The fact it is a human rights issue is not on his mind. The Prime Minister, who is a deeply religious person, is determined to view this as a sin. This has not so much to do with equal marriage, as it has to do with a deep-seated intolerance for homosexuality. This stems primarily from the religious right to which Mr. Harper belongs.

The Prime Minister must set aside his personal archaic views and come to terms with the fact he has the obligation to make certain everyone is entitled to equal treatment. We must remember this man, as well as a great number of other MPs, were once the

head honchos of the now defunct Alliance and Reform parties. These individuals will never cross the line to fair treatment for all citizens. Unfortunately, we find ourselves in the midst of continent where hard-headed and hard-hearted politicians rule. Harper in Canada and Bush in the United States...it is a dilemma.

However, we must continue the fight and be vigilant. Apparently, a number of Conservative MPs are now indicating they wish to end this situation. Peter MacKay and Bill Casey, as examples, were quoted in the paper recently they have not heard negative comments from their constituents. One must remember these MPs voted against same-gender marriage.

So, the tide may be changing and perhaps more Conservative MPs will now vote to drop the issue once and for all. The Prime Minister and his old cronies must eventually admit defeat

in this offensive attempt to rescind equal marriage in Canada. It is imperative Harper and his conservative caucus come to terms with accepting equal marriage is the law of the land. The religious leanings of Members of Parliament should have no influence over human rights. One would like to believe religious affiliated members of society are at the forefront of wishing equality for everyone. Evidently, there are those whose beliefs get in the way of granting equal opportunity. So far, I seem to observe this is so.

Yes, Harper must learn equal marriage is a human right. I also believe this man is not capable of leaving his personal beliefs in the closet and embrace us all. As well, I believe Harper will come to regret this action as the majority of Canadians want this issue to be left alone.

Gerard Veldhoven,
Amherst, N.S.

Same-sex couples now have equal rights in Canada

To the editor:

Recent events solidly established the equal marriage rights of gays and lesbians in Canada. Parliamentarians soundly defeated the efforts by the religious right and others.

Respect and tolerance at times seem unattainable in the gay and lesbian world. I remain greatly concerned, especially with the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church who do not hesitate to continue to promote intolerance. Leaders such as Archbishop Terrence Pendergast, amongst others, remain very vocal in their opposition to equal rights for gays and lesbians.

Church leaders demand respect from their parishioners

PUBLIC'S VIEW

and those who do not adhere to the Christian faith. Everything being equal, one imagines the feeling to be mutual as far as gays and lesbians are concerned. This is not the case. The constant struggle to obtain respect and tolerance has been a long and very difficult process.

One country where respect for one another is of the utmost importance is in The Netherlands. The following is quoted from the text of the Christmas and New Year's message to the Dutch people from Queen Beatrix. The queen calls on the

Dutch public to: "Show respect for one another. Treat your neighbor the way you want to be treated yourself."

She goes on to say, "Clashing beliefs create tension but that open discussion and debate should not be avoided. In discussions, nobody may dictate their opinions to others."

According to the monarch, "Tolerance starts with the admission that the truth of one person never can be the truth for everyone. Religious freedom may not be used to offend others or promote hate."

In closing, she maintains, "A right to insult does not exist. Those who ridicule others undermine their own credibili-

ty."

The Dutch again demonstrate the extent of the tolerance exhibited in that country. Everyone is entitled to be treated equally, regardless of the interference by some religious leaders. Hopefully the Dutch queen's message will resonate in other parts of this world.

Gerard Veldhoven,
Amherst, N.S.

PFLAG holding Amherst meeting

On Monday, April 14, the Amherst/Sackville Chapter of PFLAG Canada will meet at Maggie's Place, 12 LaPlanche Street, Amherst, at 7:30-9:30 p.m.

Our guest speaker for the evening will be a well-known and well-respected gay rights advocate in the area Gerard Veldhoven. Veldhoven has been involved in advocating equal rights for the GLBT community for a number of years. As well, he has been active in raising awareness across the province and beyond. Living in Amherst gives him the unique opportunity to be involved in the quest for equal rights and opportunity in both Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

Veldhoven was instrumental in establishing Cumberland Pride and is presently chair of this organization for the GLBT community in Cumberland County, as well as for the Sackville area.

Veldhoven will be speaking about the first Pride celebrations ever to be held in Amherst, a historic event slated for July 11, 12 and 13.

The Amherst/Sackville chapter of PFLAG normally meets every month on the second Monday night of each month, alternately in Amherst (at Maggie's Place) and in Sackville (at the United Church Parlours). If you require further information, email sacknb-amns@pflag-canada.ca, or phone Janet Hammock or Marilyn Lerch at (506) 536-4245.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

*Amherst Daily News
June 27 2005*

Parliament must pass same-sex legislation

TO THE EDITOR,

News that the Liberal government is prepared to sit well into the summer to deal with Bill C-38, amongst others, is extremely welcome.

This has been discussed and debated for too long and now it will easily pass into law. Then, same-sex couples will have the right to marry across Canada. New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Alberta and the North West Territories are the only jurisdictions in Canada where this law does not prevail.

In the event the bill does not pass, it still is the law in most of Canada. Finally, we see a light at the end of the tunnel and all same-sex couples across the country will have the opportunity to marry.

Many thousands of couples have already taken the necessary steps to be united in matrimony.

Kudos to the government for having the common sense and determination to extend the sitting of the House of Commons and have indicated they plan to pass the legislation, no matter if it

takes all summer.

Of course this is mainly due to the insistence of the NDP and the Bloc. They have pushed for this a long time. The NDP has always been in favour of this legislation, seeking equality for all.

Canada is ready to be one of the first to recognize same-sex marriage, along with the Netherlands, Belgium and Spain.

The time has come for Parliament to do the obvious and that is to immediately pass Bill C-38 into law. The Conservative Party will no doubt do what it does best and try to stall the proceedings.

It's too bad they so adamantly speak against equal rights. It is indeed scary and disconcerting to think of what kind of country we may envision with this party at the helm. I shudder at the thought. However, we do know the majority of our MPs support this very important piece of legislation.

Stay tuned for a summer that shall see Ottawa pass Bill C-38.

Gerard Velhoven,
Amherst.

The time for equality is now

TO THE EDITOR,

The first nationally televised same-sex marriage ceremony recently, indicated without any doubt, the love, respect and determination these two men intend to share for the rest of their lives.

The CBC is to be congratulated for being the pioneer in Canada, daring to show love being demonstrated between two people of the same sex. The fact they chose to have a debate at the same time is questionable and perhaps improper.

We are aware of those who are adamantly against this for various reasons, most of which are well known, as the negative try to influence the positive. We cannot let these feeling determine what is essentially our right, as human beings. It would have been much more positive had the CBC just shown the wedding as an historic occasion, without the controversial aspects. The media certainly fuels debates and as we must respect the opinions of others, we also must receive our inherent rights as citizens of Canada. Debates are important and democratic, however, in a reasonable amount of time a decision has to be made. The time has come to act and put the issue to rest.

People can hold different religious or cultural beliefs and practices. Not all heterosexuals have the same beliefs and the same goes for gay, lesbian and bisexual people. This is all part of a country that is seeking to lead the world in recognizing diverse human rights and putting that into daily practice. One group should not be bullying another and in effect denying that other group equal rights and freedoms under the law of this country. No one

loves a bully. In the same community, people should participate equally: Muslims, Jews, Mormons, Protestants, Catholics, Hindu or Atheists; you can be from Spain, South Africa, China, England, Peru or Canada; you can be someone who loves women and or men, or any combination of the above.

Human rights law is about making sure there is a place for everyone in this country. When the rights of one group are dismissed or actively suppressed, this creates a climate where this can happen to any group. Hitler comes to mind as a prime example, as most of us will recall the persecution of Jews and homosexuals.

In Canada, we should be aiming to be the opposite. This is a country that has debunked myths and beliefs about people who are same-sex oriented. Hopefully this brings Canadians to a point where all its citizens are able to enjoy equal freedom and participation under our civil law.

We hope that as politicians and the courts struggle with the issue of same-sex marriage they keep in mind the long road we have traveled and finally give us the equality we have yearned for. Then gays and lesbians will be able to marry without a televised debate.

Recent court rulings have made same-sex marriage legal in Ontario and British Columbia, the result being that thousands of couples have tied the knot. It will most certainly be the norm, making it an event respected by all who covet the right to equality and freedom of expression in Canada.

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DIRECT KEYPAD DIALING Load Document → Dial → START	
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Local man continues battle for same-sex marriage

BY JASON SMITH

Staff Reporter

AMHERST – At 63, Gerard Veldhoven is frustrated, waiting for the federal government to decide if he can marry his longtime-partner Norman Carter.

He wants gay marriage made legal and he knows the outcome of this month's election could determine how much longer he'll have to wait.

For several months, Veldhoven has taken it upon himself to speak for several members of the gay community and those who support gay marriage in Amherst.

"The gay community in a smaller town like this are a little scared to speak in public but when you get to my age," he said, "you just hope you'll see a lot of changes before... well time waits for no one. And I'll do whatever it takes to see it happen."

A few months ago, Veldhoven was named as the NDP provincial council representative for Cumberland County.

He said it's the first time he's been involved in politics.

He believes only the NDP party can be trusted to follow through and make gay marriage legal.

"The Liberals have been hesitating on the issue and as far as (Conservative MP) Bill Casey goes, he has said many times before he won't support us at all. So I feel that a vote for Bill Casey is a vote for Stephen Harper and then everything that we have gained will just be taken away again."

Although Casey supported Belinda Stronach's leadership bid for the Conservative party, he said he did not support her support of gay marriage.

North Nova Liberal candidate Dianne Brushett has said she endorsed more rights for gay couples, but that marriage should only be defined as the union of a man and a woman.

North Nova NDP candidate Margaret Sagar has said she supports gay marriage, which is what attracted Veldhoven to support her run for a seat in North Nova.

"People have to vote the way they see is right but I think it would be nice to see Canada as a country where its leader accepts this and makes it happen."

Veldhoven hopes the election results will place gay marriage back on the federal agenda.

Until he is legally entitled to marry his partner he said he will continue to fight on.

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SANDRA BALES-AMHERST DAILY NEWS

TO US – Gerald Veldhoven (left) and Norman Carter toast to their life together just prior to their wedding ceremony on Saturday. The couple has been together for close to 30 years and were excited to be finally able to make their same-sex union legal in the eyes of their friends, family and the law.

Same-sex couple makes history with weekend wedding *Oct 16, 2004*

BY SANDRA BALES
Staff Reporter

AMHERST – Gerald Veldhoven and Norman Carter made history in Cumberland County on Saturday, becoming the first same-sex couple to become legally wed in a service that was solemnized in front of 100 of their family and close friends and in the full glare of the media spotlight.

Dawn Estabrooks, a justice of the peace from the Nova Scotia Justice Centre in Amherst, joined the two in marriage. The wedding was held in a beautifully decorated tent in the yard of Sandy and Doug Gallagher of East Amherst after a whirlwind three weeks of planning.

“It has all come together now and finally it is a legalized relationship,” Veldhoven said after the ceremony.

They both admitted they were nervous, but it has sunk in.

“When we received the marriage

certificate, it became real,” Veldhoven said.

Although they don’t think the ceremony changed their lives, it gives them a much closer feeling together.

The outspoken Amherst couple, who have been together for close to 30 years, had been strongly pushing for Nova Scotia to legalize same-sex marriages. When the Nova Scotia Supreme Court handed down its decision that such unions were lawful, they jumped at the chance to make their union legal and wasted no time.

“We’ve been waiting for this day for 30 years. When they announced it was law, we planned to get married. It was a bit of surprise that it happened so quick after all this time waiting and fighting for it,” explained Veldhoven.

Although same-sex marriages have been legal in other provinces, including Quebec and Ontario, for

some time now, the couple said they wouldn’t have dreamed of going away to get married.

“We wouldn’t have had all our friends here if we did that. They’ve all been very supportive over the years,” Carter said.

They added they didn’t want to waste any time waiting to get married because they have been together for nearly 30 years already and they aren’t getting any younger.

The couple has always considered themselves married, but now that it is legal, they feel this makes their relationship legitimate, bringing normalcy to their union and making it acceptable in both the eyes of their families, friends and the law.

“You’re friends will now see you as a couple and hopefully, your family,” Veldhoven said. “Everywhere we’ve gone people have congratulated us.”

(see Couple - page A2)

Same-sex couple says vows

(continued from page A1)

Carter added that Amherst has been a very accepting community and they have never faced any discrimination based on their sexual orientation.

Both agreed the legal aspects the union conveys on the relationship are very significant as well.

"If anything happens to one of us, the other can make decisions," Carter said, pointing out neither of them are young men.

Both are hoping other same-sex couples will see their union and move towards getting married themselves. They noted a lesbian couple in Amherst is in the process of planning their wedding for next summer.

Eldon Hay, the former leader of PFLAG in Cumberland County and a long-time advocate for same-sex marriages and legal rights, was in attendance at the wedding.

"It was a great experience. It is very significant because it normalizes the relationship between gays and lesbians, normalizes and makes regular marriages of gays and lesbians," Hay said.

It is his hope others will see gays and lesbians who marry as normal loving people.

In neighbouring New Brunswick same-sex marriages are still not legal, but Hay anticipates there may be couples there that make the trip to Nova Scotia to tie the knot.

"My hope is the Canadian government might act whenever the ruling comes down from the court and it will be legal across the country, but I'm not holding my breath on that," he added.

sbales@amherstdaily.com

July 13, 2011

Pride flag raised in Amherst

By JOCELYN TURNER

AMHERST DAILY NEWS

AMHERST – Locals gathered to raise the rainbow gay pride flag at Amherst town hall Monday.

“Throughout much of the world now the pride flag raising ceremonies are held,” said gay rights activist Gerard Veldhoven. “In Amherst, I’ve been doing this for the last four years and it will continue. It has great meaning. We get to celebrate all the rights we’ve obtained and we celebrate who’s been here before us.”

A small collection of people gathered at town hall for the ceremony, including Mayor Robert Small, Brian Skabar, the MLA for Cumberland North, and Eldon Hay, an outspoken gay activist from Sackville, N.B.

“It indicates the Town of Amherst, I mean the mayor and the other officials, some members of the council are here and that means a great deal that the officials in the community are standing behind gay pride,” said Hay. “It helps. It doesn’t mean everyone in Amherst is behind it, but it helps. A huge step in the right direction.”

For Hay, the issue of gay rights and freedoms hits close to home.

“I have a gay son and a lesbian daughter,” he said. “I was interested in it even before that but I must admit having a gay son and a lesbian daughter certainly makes it far more vital. The way I see it is, my son lives in Toronto and he might be shot just because he’s gay and I couldn’t live with that and I don’t want to.”

Hay said the message behind these gatherings is a positive one and they hope to spread and share it.

“If we make small circles of tolerance and friendship wherever we are, then the circles join.”

“I’ve seen so many improve-



Amherst Mayor Robert Small (left) and Gerard Veldhoven raise the gay pride flag at a ceremony held Monday afternoon. JOCELYN TURNER – AMHERST DAILY NEWS

ments and so many gains, I’m really very, very thankful,” said Veldhoven. “The work’s not done yet but we’ll just keep on going with it.”

Veldhoven said the ceremony, for him, is about sending a message of understanding.

“With these little speeches, we can make people understand what is going on, what a community is all about, what we’re striving for and just to have a nice time and celebrate who we are. We are all individuals but we’re all the same somehow.”

Amherst raises pride flag

‘Never in my 67 years did I think that I would see this day’

By **TOM McCOAG**
Amherst Bureau

AMHERST — Gerard Veldhoven shed tears of joy as the Rainbow flag, the gay movement’s symbol of diversity and equal rights, was raised in front of Amherst town hall Monday.

“It’s an extremely historic day,” Mr. Veldhoven said moments before he pulled the rope that raised the flag.

“Never in all of my 67 years did I think that I would see this day because change and acceptance has been so slow in coming.”

The chairman of Cumberland Pride was proud of his community for erecting the flag without the controversy that dogged Truro town council after it refused to raise the flag last summer. That community has since agreed to raise the flag.

“The mayor, councillors and staff at Amherst town hall have been very supportive of our efforts to raise the flag here,” Mr. Veldhoven said. “It’s wonderful to know that we live in such an understanding community.”

People in the town have accepted Mr. Veldhoven and his partner, Norman Carter, since they came out 34 years ago.

“Back then, it was rather scary. We didn’t think we’d be accepted as a couple, but to our surprise the community took it quite well,” Mr. Veldhoven said.

“That’s right, the heckles and jeckles and the nasty phone calls we expected to get never happened,” Mr. Carter interjected.

The couple were the first in the Maritimes to be officially married four years ago and the flag raising is just another step in society’s recognition of gays and lesbians as equals, the two said.

Amherst Mayor Jerry Hallee, after helping to raise the flag, read a proclamation declaring the upcoming week Gay Pride week in Amherst to a small crowd of about 50 people who came to the event.

The week will include a dance, a picnic and a forum on advancing a positive relationship between Cumberland County’s gay and straight communities. The forum will be held July 12.



Gerard Veldhoven, president of Cumberland Pride, and Amherst Mayor Jerry Hallee raise the Rainbow flag in front of Amherst town hall Monday. It was the first ceremony of its kind in the town.

(TOM McCOAG / Amherst Bureau)

One of those attending the flag raising was Eldon Hay.

He couldn’t wait to shake hands with the mayor and tell him how proud he was of the community.

“I’m a straight person, but I believe that having this flag raised in a small

town like this is fantastic,” Mr. Hay said.

“It shows that people are finally understanding that all people, no matter the colour of their skin, their religion or their sexual orientation, are equal.”

(tmccoag@herald.ca)

DAILY MAILBAG:

Pope Benedict out of touch with the times?

TO THE EDITOR,

Pope Benedict XVI is out of touch with advancements certain countries have put in place.

His attempt to interfere in the politics of other nations is totally unacceptable and entices thoughts bordering on spreading hatred toward the gay and lesbian community.

The Pope completely ignores equal rights, which are contained in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. He also attacked the Spanish government for allowing same-gender marriages.

The Pope must realize these laws are now part of the social fabric of The Netherlands, Belgium, Spain and Canada. In short order other countries will follow.

If Benedict were against these new rules, he would be wise not to interfere with the social progress so important in our world.

The pontiff is far to the religious right, where equal rights for gays and lesbians do not exist.

As well, he must come to terms with the fact these are civil rights for the gay and lesbian community.

It is sad for a leader of a religious denomination to express such intolerance. He made these remarks during a meeting with bishops from Ontario. Hopefully, they will not take his comments to heart. However, I am not very optimistic on that point.

Then again, equal rights exist in Canada, in spite of Benedict XVI. Churches must stay out of the affairs of state.

If Benedict were against these new rules, he would be wise not to interfere with the social progress so important in our world.

Gerard Veldhoven,
Amherst



COMMUNITY

Amherst raises Pride flag

Velhoven amazed at how accepting the community has become

BY DARRELL COLE
AMHERST NEWS

AMHERST

Gerard Veldhoven remembers what it was like to show his support for gay rights in the early 1970s and he's amazed at how accepting the community he called home for many years has become.

Veldhoven was among the speakers to celebrate the raising of the Pride flag at the opening of Pride Week celebrations in Amherst on Wednesday.

"I was advised by many that this move was unwise because of rampant discrimination, but I pressed on with letter writing to politicians, speaking openly to those who would listen and hoped my words would reach those who had closed minds," Veldhoven said. "Soon, I became very aware that the journey would be challenging and arduous in many ways.

"Here we are 43 years later and now we are able to gather at functions such as Pride flag raising ceremonies and experience a Pride parade in Amherst."

Veldhoven thanked Amherst for not giving up on the LGBTQ community and supporting him



DARRELL COLE/AMHERST NEWS

Gerard Veldhoven speaks during the Pride flag-raising ceremony in Amherst on Wednesday.

Cumberland Pride in 2006 and hosted several Pride flag-raising events.

He said raising the flag gives people the opportunity to bring together all who recognize the diversity of the population and respect unique qualities everyone possesses.

"The flag remains a symbol of our fight for equality," Veldhoven said. "We are each and every one of us individuals who seek to be equal in this world where discrimination is rampant. This is reality. However,

raised high on a flagpole, regardless of location, we see the symbol that unites the LGBTQ community and lets the world know that we are proud and we are not going anywhere."

He said something he could only dream about in 1974 is becoming more real, but it's not there yet. He said the flag gives activists and their supporters encouragement to go forward, regardless of the twists and turns along the way.

Other speakers included Rohin McKenney, a member of

cil, fellow ARHS student Mason Carter, Rev. Byron Corkum from First Baptist and SOAR Community Health Board member Bill Schurman.

Also speaking was Emma Brown, whose seven-year-old daughter Sara was born a boy but has always thought of herself as a girl and came out as transgendered last year.

Carter said he's not ashamed of being transgender.

"I'm not ashamed of my being transgender, I'm still attempting to understand it all. I love this quality about myself," Carter said. "The reason I struggle to take pride in this is because I rely too much on other people's opinions of myself. I rely on how well do I pass as a boy rather than how much I like what I'm wearing. I rely on if I look like a boy, rather than paying attention in class some days, I rely on other people to tell me I look like a boy rather than being able to look in the mirror and tell that to myself."

He said gender and sexuality are not something you choose and eventually you find out you're not as "cookie cutter" as you thought you were.

"Pride isn't about celebrating every last detail of yourself,

"The level of pride is impossible to keep; everyone has things they don't like about themselves. Pride is knowing you are completely correct in every possible way and nothing in the entire universe can change that. The only thing holding you back from happiness is accepting that."

Emma said Sara began to ask questions at a young age and express that she felt she should be a girl.

"My husband and I were not surprised and we have always been supportive. The most important thing for us is our children are happy, healthy and true to themselves," she said.

Last summer, Sara chose to come out publicly and they were a little scared for her and how she would be accepted in the community and her school. However, she said, Sara received overwhelming support from the school, friends, family and the community.

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Gerard Veldhoven speaks during the Pride flag-raising ceremony

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May 2

Amherst shows its Pride

