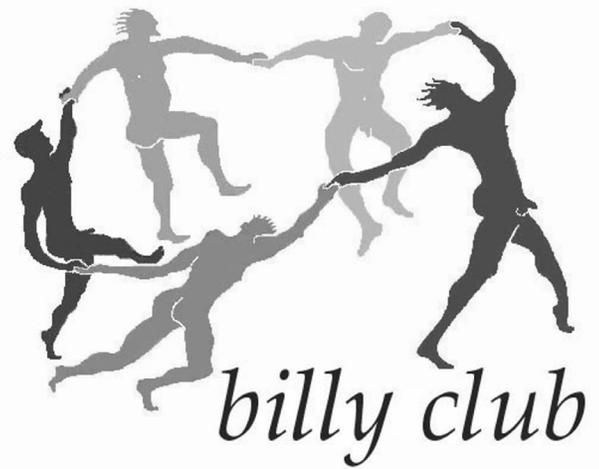


BILLY TIMES

September 2006



The mission of the Billy Club is to promote intimacy and community among gay and bisexual men, and to build bridges with supportive communities.

Letter from Board President, Charlie Seltzer

It's been two years since I joined the Billy board and a year that I've been prez. As a community we continue to create amazing, heart-centered gatherings for us gay and bisexual men (and our allies), and like any community, continue to face challenges. I want to write about one of our recent gatherings and describe one of the challenges before us.

A year ago at this time, two county public health departments – Mendocino and Santa Cruz – approached the Billy board with an offer. If the Billy Club would organize an HIV-prevention gathering inviting both HIV-positive and negative men, the two counties would pick up part of the tab. The board accepted, and this past Memorial Day weekend, we held a 3-day gathering called +Positive/-Negative Retreat and Dialogue.

About 70 people attended, equally divided by HIV-status. About half had never been to a Billy gathering. While most were from the sponsoring counties, many other Billies attended as well. Unlike the usual laid-back Billy gathering, this one was structured, with workshops and playshops scheduled throughout the day. An evaluation form at the end of the gathering gave participants the chance to share their feedback. If their comments are any indication, this gathering was a remarkable success. In fact for me, it was the best HIV-prevention intervention I've ever seen. I want to share just a small number of participants' comments:

- This gathering made me feel healthy, stronger - not alone any more. I have more brothers. You saved my life.
- Retreats of this nature help build community and thereby help sustain the health and welfare of us all.
- This was a revolutionary gathering. Opportunities that allow people to be visible in and accountable to their communities are the greatest HIV prevention interventions we have.
- This event brought hope, fellowship and connection to many who feel isolated and alone. It allowed me, as an HIV-negative man, to reach out, support and offer my heart to HIV-positive men.
- This retreat helped me realize that I don't have to spend my life living at home, alone.
- I am prepared to help heal my community and be an advocate for HIV-positive men and for helping HIV-

negative men stay that way. This retreat may be the catalyst that saves my life.

- Building true, lasting, organic community among and between those most impacted by HIV in California is the most effective way for us to prevent the spread of HIV. Keep building community!!
- Thank you from the depth of my being for this wonderful, healing, opening and profound experience.

I personally typed all the hand written feedback forms from this gathering into a Word Document. It's 10 pages long. Clearly what's above is just a small fraction of the feedback received. And the rest of it is just as profound. If you'd like to see the whole 10 pages, send an e-mail to the Billy office, and it'll be on its way to you.

It's feedback like this that makes me so proud of what we do in the Billy Club. Clearly our gatherings are so much more than just weekend vacations in the country. We change lives! By the way, the two sponsoring counties have offered to fund a second Billy-organized HIV-positive/negative retreat. We'll send you a gathering Call when we have all the details worked out.

We also face some challenges. Gathering attendance has been slowly declining. It's tempting to say this is because gathering fees have been slowly rising. But we're not sure this is the reason, or the only reason. Some of us board members plan to phone people who've stopped attending gatherings to ask "why." Perhaps we'll learn something that we can address.

Related to this, there's been a great discussion on Billenet about declining attendance and outreach. As one Billy put it, it's the Billy Club's mission to build community for gay and bisexual men; perhaps we've just been building it for us Billies; perhaps we need to do more outreach. We've had discussions in the Billy community for years about outreach. It's a loaded topic. Some say we must keep renewing our membership, keep inviting new people. Others say outreach will dilute the feeling of familiarity they enjoy at gatherings. Personally, I'm all for more outreach. I'd like to see us do an each-one-bring-one gathering. Yes, it might reduce the number of familiar faces I see, and yes, that might make me feel more isolated. But hey – I'd be at a Billy gathering. I know what to do when I feel isolated. Talk about it in heart circle. Reach out. Get involved. What do you think?

Before I wrap up this letter, there's one more thing I need to

see President's letter page 3

Outreach, Insularity, and Direction

by Bill Blackburn

Billenet, our listserve, is living up to it's potential as a vehicle of community discourse lately with a lively discussion considering outreach, insularity, and direction that will lead to juicy deliberations at the Billy Visioning Retreat, September 15-17.

A variety of viewpoints have been expressed and the conversation has been respectful across differences. To me, respectful communication within diversity is the most hopeful thing we can foster: not only is it in alignment with our value of consensus and the clearest path to deeper wisdom, it's also the element that's most lacking and most needed in our polarized culture as a whole. Here are excerpts from recent Billenet postings:

"By this I mean a certain (more or less conscious) desire to remain amongst ourselves and not really let in newcomers. Or only to allow them in very slowly if at all."

"But I think it would be great if we weren't so insular. ... Even if we don't actively do outreach we could easily take down some of the barriers to the outside community if we wanted to."

"Over the years I have been most thankful for my Billy friends and the framework within which we can interact intimately in community. The price of belonging has been whatever I can afford...a few dollars every year, the use of my home for potlucks and board meetings, the use of my heart when a buddy needs love. ... How I appreciate those men who, year after year, continue to volunteer! It bothers me to see so few people on the list of volunteers ... We need followers and workers as much as ideas."

"I would like to see our web space become, among other things, a vehicle for prospective Billies to learn more about us. ... I would also like to "trade links" with other, sympathetic organizations, such as ... CMG, the GMSR and the Gay Buddhist Fellowship ... and any other groups that come to mind."

"I think that the comparison between the Billy Club and the CMG, for instance, only goes so far. Yes, CMG may have more willingness to "advertise," but their paradigm seems fairly different. CMG, in my experience, brings people together for a series of workshops and events. I feel that the BC tries to more deeply form an ongoing community... We do have new Billies at every gathering, so someone is doing the work of inviting them. Several of you have stated in this thread that you know men who would benefit from coming to our gatherings. Well, invite them!"

"Participation seems to be waning. If we are going to do outreach, could we please reach out to the men who started the Billy Club. I mean the men in Sonoma, Mendocino, and Humboldt counties who are isolated and need a place to connect with the larger world. They would bring back to us a non-urban way of being a gay man. I miss these brothers very much."

"I just wanted to chime in on [the last] observations and experiences. What once made us wonderful is not lost, it is still there in all its glory. The fact that some Billies have chosen new paths and other men have discovered the Billy Club is a natural and welcome state of evolution. The fact that we are family, that we love and care for each other in our own special and unique ways is fundamental to preserving the diversity that is core to our survival and growth."

"... even if you hear about the Billies, we put up curious

little roadblocks--passwords for the Gathering info, attendance rules for billenet, etc. Big irony ahead: those of us who somehow stumble into the Club are then permitted amazing, even pointless, liberties. One Billy can commandeer a Heart Circle for 30 minutes on a topic of vanishing social import without someone stopping him, even if it means many other people will not get to speak. A Billy can spend all three days at a gathering by splitting his time between the pool, the dining room and his bed, without ever participating in a single circle, hike, workshop or show."

"I support the idea of at least having a link in other willing, Billy-like groups' web sites and other media, IE, newsletters, etc. It would only be fair to include some kind of link or contact info on our web site about those groups who share our contact info with their readers. I also support listing in gay guides and under community org. in local gay newspapers. I doubt it will bring a flood of riff-raff as some fear."

"We can change how/whether we advertise the gatherings, but changing this one item may not make the larger change in the Community some ask for. I'm a little leery of the quick-fix for a large issue like how we present ourselves to the outside world or to new Billys, especially if the fix is simply something the office does for you."

"I have heard that from time to time in the past the club has oriented certain gatherings specifically so that they welcome our friends who haven't yet been to a gathering. Perhaps there are coordinators out there that want to take on that challenge!"

"For deeper, more personal retreats we [in another group] always had a policy of meeting with potential participants first. Sometimes we had to tell people that their expectations were not going to be met at the workshop and uninvite them. But what a loving way to bring a new Billy to a gathering than to have one of us meet him a few weeks before and talk heart to heart about what to expect?"

"Before we do wide random promotion on the web, I would rather we do ethnic & age oriented outreach... And first of all, I think we should discuss and survey why WE aren't coming to gatherings as much. Are we bored? busy with other things? more interested in other types of vacation/travel? are we annoyed with the organization? tired of the embezzlement scandal aftermath? have gatherings grown too expensive relative to other opportunities? are we too broke and don't want to ask for another scholarship?"

"In view of all this, why not consider expanding the notion of outreach to include internal outreach -- inreach if you will? ... guidelines that might be posted at gatherings: ...A) Make an effort today to socialize with or at least say a kind word to: 1) A man you think has radically different interests than you 2) A man whose state of health is radically different than yours 3) A man you are not remotely attracted to sexually 4) A man who you feel superior to 5) A man who you feel inferior to 6) A man of another race 7) A man of a greatly different chronological age 8) A man of a radically different economic strata 9) A man who you feel it would be generally impossible to relate to. B) Keep an eye out for a man who seems to be spending a lot of time alone ..."

There's no way I can neatly wrap up that variety of input except to say that this is collaborative community at it's best, expressing diverse opinions with honesty and respect. I hope

see Outreach page 3

New Office for the Billies

by Paul Mueller

Remember some of those big, wet storms last Winter? Well, the memory of those storms lingered in the Billy Office in Ukiah long after they came and went since the roof of the aging building where our office was located leaked and water was causing wallpaper to peel off the walls, cinder block walls to degrade -- we even had a fine crop of mushrooms growing in the carpet! Yuk. While the landlord was sympathetic to the situation it was becoming apparent that this wasn't something that fixing a leaky roof would resolve, the building needed extensive work and was becoming a health hazard for our employee. The landlord agreed to let us out of our lease (we were in year four of a five year lease) and we started looking for a new home for the Billy office.

The new Billy office, located about two blocks away from the old one, is fabulous! It has a new carpet, four rooms that include a reception area, a separate office for Marcus, a storage room, and a meeting room. The new landlord gave us permission to put up a utility shed out back to store the tables, chairs, pool toys, Halloween decorations, and other stuff that we use at various gatherings. Local Billies contributed \$1,000 to enable Marcus to have a new desk and filing cabinets and to pay for the utility shed. Located in downtown Ukiah across from the Post Office, we couldn't have a more central and inviting location for our headquarters. We signed a two-year lease at less rent that we were paying for the old office. Special thanks to Lark, Charlie, Joe, Buddy, [editor: and Paul!] and others who rolled up their sleeves and helped with the move.

Come visit if you happen to be in Ukiah, especially on your way to or from a gathering. The address is 211 Standley St. Marcus can give you directions if you call the office. ♦

You are invited to PFLAG North Bay Annual Awards Dinner and Fundraiser

**Featured guest of honor and speaker:
State Assembly member Mark Leno**

Sunday October 15 at The Flamingo Hotel,
2777 Fourth Street, Santa Rosa

Wine Reception starts at 5:30pm
Dinner at 6:00pm, Silent Auction

Individual Tickets \$50, Sponsor Tables 10 @ \$500

Rykken-Scull awards will be presented to non-profit organizations that have helped alleviate bigotry towards gays and lesbians. Your tax deductible contribution supports ongoing work of PFLAG North Bay.

For reservations call Nancy 707-539-4037

Outreach from page 2

Billies keep talking about our community, dreaming of ways to improve what we're doing in the world, and inviting men they meet to explore the Billy experience with us at gatherings. ♦

Matching Gift

Last December, a generous Billy offered to match all 2006 donations to the Billy Foundation up to a total of \$10,000. (This is the second year in a row this anonymous donor made a \$10,000 matching grant to us.) I am pleased to tell you that by July, Billies had donated \$13,000 to our General Fund, to our Richard Locke Scholarship Fund and to our Billy Emergency Support Fund. Way to go, Billies! Many thanks to all our donors, whether their contributions are large or small. Together, we make a huge difference in the world. ♦

President's letter from page 1

say. It's time for me to step down as your board prez. I joined the board just about two years ago. Our community was in crisis, and I thought I could help. We are much stronger today than we were two years ago. Until just a few weeks ago, I was planning to sign up for another two-year term. But sometimes life interferes with our plans. For personal reasons, I'll be stepping down from the board when my two years are up (October). I will stay as involved as I can, but more from the sidelines.

It's been a great pleasure being on the board and serving you and our community. In the early days of dealing with the crisis created by our last office manager, I described being on the board as a "terrible honor." I'm happy to say the terrible part is over. Only the honor remains. ♦

Questions unanswered

Am I going to go to every gathering this year?
Do they cost too much? Is the time too dear?

Are there too many gatherings? The themes too lame?
Are the beds too hard? too torrid? too tame?

Are events overcrowded and heart circles immense?
Aren't more bodies better (especially in tents)?

Do I love being intimate but don't seem to bond?
What would make true community? What enlivens the wand?

What would oil up my muscles for worship and play?
What would make me remember I'm glad that I'm gay?

Do I long for adventure and brand new terrain?
Have I been there, done that, the same old refrain?

Are there honestly better things to do with my time?
Are there other-than-Billys who get me all primed?

Am I inviting them in? Or holding them out?
What kind of space would bring it about?

Has imagination gone south, in my dotty old age?
Or will ripeness and sweat, inspire a new page?

So what's the one weekend that would toast all my cookies?
And why not just do it? What's up with you rookies?

Show me your fantasy, I'll show you mine.
Let's do what our hearts need, and have a great time!

-- Moonriver

If you have thoughts about what would make upcoming gatherings the time of our lives, please drop a line to Steve Rockwell (the club's incoming Gathering Portfolio holder): 415-553-8680; He's new at this job & needs your ideas, steve.rockwell@jud.ca.gov. ♦

Billy Club Gatherings

typically start with a potluck dinner the first day and end after lunch on the last day. You can contact the coordinators, below, to volunteer for any of the many positions necessary to make gatherings a success. Contact the office if you wish either to coordinate a gathering or work with its future coordinators.

Visit www.billyclub.org/gathering for online access to the current gathering call, or to register and pay with a credit/debit card. Back issues of the Billy Times are also available.

2006 Gathering Schedule

Halloween

Billys Only

Scott Marley, Steve Rockwell, Nature
Thursday, Oct. 26 - Monday, Oct. 30
Saratoga Springs, Lake County

New Years

Billys and Billykin

Coordinators Needed

Dates Pending

Heartwood Institute, Humboldt
County

Mid Winter 2007

Billys Only

Coordinators/Theme needed

Could be canceled

Location to be determined

Billy Announcements

Billy Board minutes, agendas and other "official" information are available via email, separate from the gathering list. If you're interested in receiving them, email office@billyclub.org. Billenet is *not* part of the Billy Foundation.

The Billy Office

211 W. Standley Street

Ukiah, CA 95482

Voice 707. 462.0766

Fax 707. 462.1164

office@billyclub.org

Office Open: Wednesday - Friday
10am - 1pm and other times Wed -
Fri unscheduled, call for information.

Billy Lunch

Wednesdays at 12:45pm - 2pm
Meet at the Billy office to dine out.

BillyFon

The official, board-sanctioned telephone message service providing information on all things Billy. Call 510.533.8136 to receive current info on gatherings, ride sharing, etc. Send your message to billyfon@planetaria.net.

Local Socials

are unofficial get-togethers that happen monthly and usually include schmoozing, a potluck meal and heart circle. Here's contact information and their attendance policy. Some socials welcome Billykin.

East Bay Potlucks

Contact Alan Oakley at 510.436.3330
or at alanoakley@aol.com

Mendocino Potluck

Coordinator Needed! Call Billy office.

San Francisco Billy Potlucks

Alternates men only/open to all

Contact G-Fry at

gregthebarbersf@yahoo.com

SonoMen

Men only

Coordinator Needed!

Contact Jack at 707.838.4193

or at jack@touchforlife.com

South San Francisco & Santa Cruz Area

Coordinator Needed!

Contact Lou Ceci at 650.969.9556

or at ceci_lga@yahoo.com

The Billy Times

should be published four times per year and included with gathering calls. We need a regular editor. Please contact the office if you can help! To subscribe to the Billy Club's mailing list for gathering info, send a \$25 sliding scale yearly subscription fee. Short on cash - send what you can afford. Your renewal date is noted on your address label. Contact us at:

The Billy Foundation

211 W. Standley Street

Ukiah, CA 95482

Voice 707. 462.0766

Fax 707. 462.1164

office@billyclub.org

Resource Coordinator:

Marcus Borgman

The Billy Times

Temporary Editor: Marcus Borgman

Board Meetings

Are open to all Billys and Billykin on the 3rd Sunday of each month. Two meetings a quarter are at the Billy Office with the third month in Sonoma County. Call office for location details.

Board of Directors

President: Charlie Seltzer

Vice President: Paul Mueller

Treasurer: Robert "Goat" Conrad

Secretary: Jim Burke

with Bill Blackburn, John Cwiakala

More board members are needed.

Call the office or look online for our application.

Ongoing Board Portfolios

BESF: Wil Gonzales, Paul Mueller,
Bob Kuder

Gatherings: Steve Rockwell

BillyFon: Jason Bellecci-Serinus

Billy Boutique: Bill Murphy

Billy Times: *Volunteer needed*

Website: Joe Kukulka

The mission of the Billy Club is to promote intimacy and community among gay and bisexual men, and to build bridges with supportive communities.