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Community

Day to celebrate 'Coming Out'

By Hon Walker
Emerald Associate Editor

National Coming Out Day, designated as a day for local gays and lesbians to be truthful, powerful and liberated, will be celebrated Wednesday.

A 12:30 p.m. rally in the EMU courtyard and a gathering in the EMU International Student Lounge at 7 p.m. are co-sponsored by the Willamette AIDS Council and the Gay and Lesbian Alliance.

"Take the Next Step" is the message of the second annual Coming Out Day. For the majority of gays and lesbians who live partially or completely in the closet, taking another step toward openness about homosexuality can be emotionally rewarding, said Amy Baker, a GALA volunteer.

The first step for every gay or lesbian's coming out process is acknowledging his or her own sexuality, Baker said. Subsequent steps include coming out to friends, co-workers or family members, participating in demonstrations, or public disclosure, such as talking with news media, she said.

Not all gays and lesbians follow the same process or have the same degree of openness, Baker said. "It varies for everybody. It is important not to pressure people into coming out; people just need their space. It's a very personal issue."

Wednesday's rally will be an opportunity for non-closeted gays and lesbians to show those not yet ready to come out that support is there, Baker said. "An option to being in the closet is being out, and not just being out but being proud of it," she said.

"It's easy to stay hidden and not receive any emotional support," she said. "But when you do come out of the closet, it's emotionally self-rewarding, because for once you have a positive self-image," she said.

"If someone is coming out, it's important to know that there are others who will support them," Baker said.

GALA co-director Laurel Sharp said that the process of coming out continues every day, even for the small number of gays and lesbians who

are most visible.

"It's always a risk to come out," she said. "But by doing so I feel more comfortable with myself and the world. The danger is outweighed by the integrity I feel." National Coming Out Day is "a very celebratory time," Sharp said.

Many gays and lesbians reach a point where concealing their sexuality becomes too great a burden, Sharp said. "When it gets to be too hard to stay in the closet, then it's time to come out," she said.

However, she cautioned, "I would always listen to intuition about it. If I felt unsafe about it, I wouldn't come out," she said.

Sharp also said that the extent to which members of the gay and lesbian community are open about their sexuality varied widely. Those who are most visible tend to receive more harassment and abuse, she said.

"There's a lot of support in the gay and lesbian community for those who are out (of the closet)," she said, but added that those who are less visible consequently may be less supportive.

Tadd Tobias, outreach director for Willamette AIDS Council, said that the council is co-sponsoring local Coming Out Day activities in an effort to protect those who may be at risk of contracting AIDS.

Self-acceptance of a gay identity is a necessity for feeling worthy of protection, Tobias said.

"If you want to live a healthy life, you have to protect yourself and protect others," he said. To do this, "you have to feel okay about yourself," he said.

This form of behavior modification can keep AIDS from taxing Eugene's health care systems the way the disease has in larger cities, Tobias said.

The Willamette AIDS Council is selling shirts, posters and stickers as a fundraising effort both for the council and the non-profit National Coming Out Day Foundation.

Coming Out Day is a time for taking a first step or a next step toward feeling better about being gay or lesbian, Tobias said.

"If you're not gay or lesbian, support someone who is," he said. "We're talking about basic human rights, not just sexual preference."

Peace Corps recruiting in EMU

Group offers career guidance, experience abroad

By Alice Thornton
Emerald Reporter

Seniors who will be graduating with a science or liberal arts degree in the next 12 months may want to consider the Peace Corps to help them achieve career direction.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, the Peace Corps will be hosting a recruiting drive on campus. Interested students are encouraged to attend the presentations and arrange for interviews with a Peace Corps representative.

An information table will be open both days from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the EMU Lobby.

Representatives from Seattle and Washington D.C. will be available to answer questions and discuss their experiences as Peace Corps volunteers.

Films and discussions highlighting Peace Corps opportunities will be offered in the EMU Maple Room at 3:30 p.m. on Tuesday and at noon on Wednesday.

A forester from Roseburg will present slides and discuss his Peace Corps experience in Niger, Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. in the EMU Gumwood Room. The discussion will also explain how a science or liberal arts degree can help a student achieve suc-

cess through Peace Corps experience.

Jake DuDell, the campus Peace Corps coordinator, said the Peace Corps provides a good foundation for students who are unsure of what to do with their degrees.

"Many students graduate without knowing how their degree can benefit them," said DuDell. "The Peace Corps is a way of getting the kind of background needed for higher responsibility."

"When I graduated, I wanted to live abroad, but not as a tourist. The Peace Corps gave me career direction," said DuDell.

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