

Spectrum: Energy & achievable goals

by Pat Scott

There's a new kid on the block. It's young, has a lot of energy, and is interested in getting from point A to point B in the most direct fashion. It's also still evolving.

Spectrum is fairly new to the community. It was conceived after the nondiscriminatory hiring practices ordinance failed, the community networks proved inadequate, and the community failed to mobilize. Out of adversity can arise a better future, however, and that's what Spectrum envisions for the lesbian/gay community.

"Our goal is to help make Portland a better place for gays and lesbians," says Spectrum coordinator Gale Schmidt. A laudable objective, but can they pull it off?

Through its very ordered, incremental methods Spectrum may do just that. Members work to identify "tangible, achievable goals that we can do progressively. You have to break things down and go for it by steps, otherwise you burn out," Schmidt wisely observes.

Among the steps taken already by Spectrum is formation of a networking committee to "find out who's in the community, what they're doing, what services they have to offer" and to enable members of the community "to get in touch with each other, to find [and offer] input, to have an impact on any decisions that are made." This move to catalogue resources within the community and provide a means to rally them when necessary is already an admirable undertaking.

A second task Spectrum has set itself is monitoring of print media, radio & T.V. for accurate and timely reporting of gay and lesbian events and concerns. Other work in this area includes positive reinforcement for accurate reporting, seeding of significant information and events, and constructive criticism — to ensure that the gay/lesbian community has a voice in how it's represented.

Another task Spectrum would like to undertake is formation of a "Hiring Policy Group" urging employers to put a nondiscriminatory "sexual orientation" clause in their hiring practices statement. An interesting and ambitious concept.

The task the group has most actively pursued, however, is that of developing liaisons with government officials and entities to encourage mutual understanding and sensitivity. In September, Deputy Chief Tom Potter was appointed as advocate for the gay and lesbian community within the Portland Police Bureau. It's one of the "wins" Spectrum can point to with justifiable pride. "We got a liaison. We got the community to agree on some things that the liaison could help us with, and we got agreement with the department that this would be effective," remembers Schmidt.

In achieving this end Spectrum facilitated community dialogue, dialogue with governmental agencies and individuals, and the marketing of an accurate and sensitive portrait of gays and lesbians to the major Portland community. No mean accomplishment. And it's just this three-pronged attack that Schmidt considers so necessary to the community.

Spectrum is also spearheading efforts now toward formation of a Ride-Along program, with members of the community volunteering to ride with police officers during their rounds. It's hoped this will sensitize members of the community to the difficulties and hazards of police work while allowing the

police to see us as individuals. And it's this people-to-people contact that Schmidt and Spectrum see as particularly beneficial. "The more support we have and the more understanding that we get, the more we're just gonna be your next door neighbor — and be accepted."

All this reflects Schmidt's personal optimism particularly regarding the gay/lesbian community's position within the larger Portland community. She finds that the social consciousness has raised and people are learning that they need to be more tolerant... a view she wouldn't have had five years ago, she stresses. Belief in the future is a trademark with this Spectrum member but not blind optimism. "I'm not saying everything's okay," Schmidt hastens to add. "If things were okay Spectrum wouldn't exist." And she allows that her vision isn't shared by everyone — even within the group itself. "There are people in Spectrum and the community who've gone through some really hard times. They've been put down or persecuted or bashed. They're not willing to say everything's okay. And that's good; we need that awareness and that history in order to keep us on track."

Spectrum doesn't claim to represent the entire gay male and lesbian community although it mirrors many of its diverse interests. It would like to be of service to the total gay/lesbian community. "I see Spectrum as a grassroots thing," Schmidt says. "We're down here trying to work within our community — not to work with the legislature and political agendas — to work with people, not with entities." Not every need can be fulfilled through this organization, nor should it be. There's room for all. And Spectrum doesn't claim to have the only resolutions to difficulties nor to provide the best way to achieve goals. "I don't think there is a 'best way,'" Schmidt says, "until you get the goal — and

then it doesn't matter."

One major concern of Schmidt's personally is the inability to reach all members of the gay and lesbian community, from all walks of life. There are invisible members out there who are or who consider themselves so at-risk that they won't even pick up a copy of *Just Out* or go to Primary Domain or Hobo's. Schmidt would like to identify these silent members: "I'd like to let them know things that are significant."

And it's this concern for the community and the desire to facilitate communication that marks Spectrum. Since Portland Town Council met its demise there's certainly room for Spectrum, its interests and methods. If it is able to aid in the mobilization of our community toward goals that we, in all our diversity, share then it's welcome indeed.

Will it last? Time will tell. Can it do what it intends? Its achievements are already tangible, highly publicized; its efforts ongoing and concise. Not a bad beginning for a young organization. And it has dedication and energy. "What I've found out," says Spectrum coordinator Gale Schmidt, "is that, personally, if I have something that I see is achievable, that is not out there in Never Neverland — it's not a dream, it's tangible — then I can go for that. I'll just pick it and I'll go for it. And I can usually get things done."

One suspects this is pretty representative of the entire organization.

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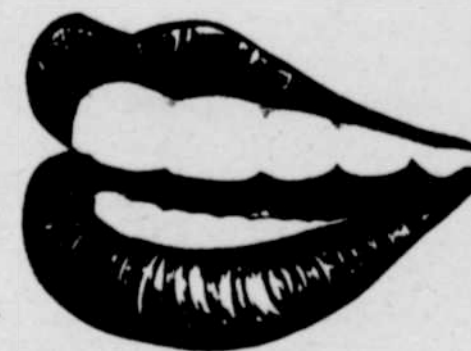
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