

AIDS on the campaign trail

"... if we don't take the bull by the horns and establish our own AIDS project within the school district, the state or federal government will do it for us."

BY BILLY RUSSO

The rural community of Winston-Dillard is buzzing with the announcement of my candidacy. I have met with a number of community



The Roseburg Report

leaders, including the high school principal, city manager, local business people, the media, and church leaders. They all agree that AIDS is an important issue; however, they are not real excited about a queer running for the school board.

I shared my concerns about transmissions of HIV, and we discussed the IV drug

problem which plagues our community. Essentially, I told them that they can take the wind out of my sails by initiating their own AIDS project. I also cautioned them that if they attempt to broadside me by fanning the flames of homophobia, I would turn my campaign to gay rights and safe sex. So far, everyone has been polite.

What I didn't tell them is that I've produced 3,000 brochures announcing my candidacy: 1,300 are being mailed to rural residents, the rest are being distributed by my campaign team in the residential areas. The brochure focuses on the importance of keeping the AIDS virus out of the schools, "... if we don't take the bull by the horns and establish our own AIDS project within the school district, the state or federal government will do it for us."

I didn't tell them that I'll be running a series of newspaper ads during the last 48 hours of the campaign, nor that I intend to appear on two radio talk shows. Likewise, I didn't mention that on election eve we'd be calling the 4,500 households in the district, asking them to vote for me.

I did, however, tell them that I'm raising my money through gay communities outside this area, and that I expected to raise about \$1,200. So far, 30 checks have been received from Portland to San Diego, totaling \$900. And a local attorney has pledged to raise an additional \$200 through



non-gay professionals.

The school newsletter has distributed a special supplement on the race for Position No. 5. In it I am quoted along with the other four candidates for the position. I'm running against the incumbent chairman of the school board, an attorney with five kids, a city councilman, the owner of the local 7-11, and a "housewife" who presently serves on the school board's budget committee. The newsletter quotes me repeatedly on the AIDS issue. It is a fair, balanced representation of my platform.

A victory celebration is scheduled for

election night at a local bar which will show the election returns through the evening. If I don't win, it won't be because I haven't tried.

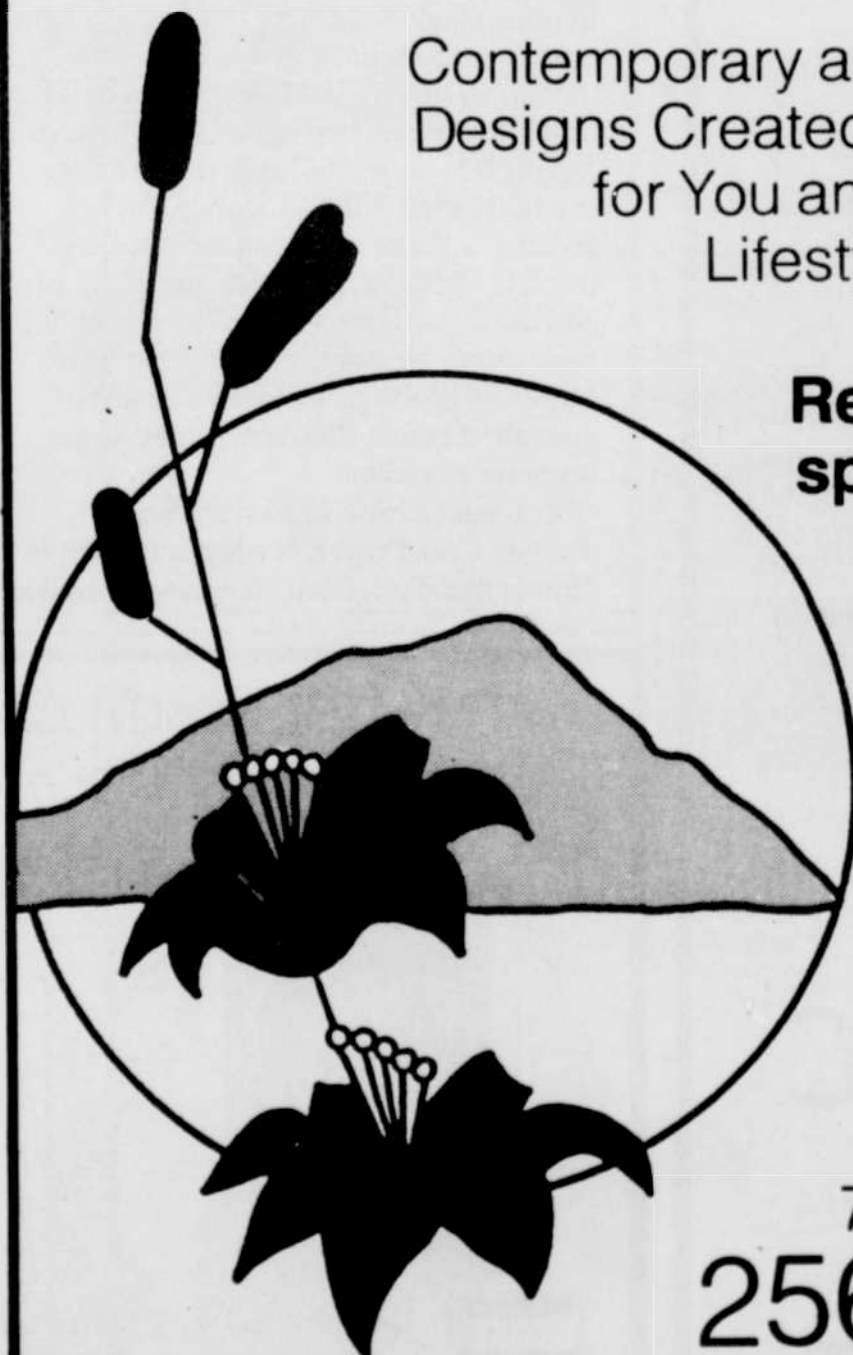
Ed. note: In the final days of the campaign, publicity concerning a student diagnosed with ARC in a neighboring school district focused attention on the Winston-Dillard school board election. Using the media to full advantage, Russo increased his emphasis for a locally established policy to help check the spread of the AIDS virus.

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