

tion. "Many women are afraid to receive our newsletter, even though they are mailed very discreetly. . . . People will be afraid to sign up on the mailing list; they'll talk to me for half an hour, asking, 'Who gets your mailing list? Where does it go?'"

"There are a lot of really wonderful women out there who are afraid to be associated because it has the 'L-word' in its name," said Jordan. "We need to reach those closeted women out there and say, yes, there are women who are willing to come out and say, 'Yeah, I'm a lesbian,' and nothing happens. They don't get shot."

Homophobia doesn't live exclusively in the closets of women LCP hasn't yet reached, or in the voices of right-wing extremists. It crops up at LCP functions, too, in auditoriums and offices and, sometimes, in the minds of lesbian leaders.

"Our first board training was at a hospital," recalled English. "I went in and requested that we have coffee, and the woman I asked said, 'What's the name of the organization?' and I got that feeling, you know, sweating, the knot in the pit of the stomach, but because of the strength of all these women being there, I was able to say, 'It's the Lesbian Community Project.'"

"I've been able to conquer a little bit of my own homophobia."

"I don't feel I've learned as much as been changed," said Siemens. "I've learned to take myself more seriously, to respect and value myself. . . . I've learned about banging your head up against people's internalized sexism and internalized homophobia. It limits how we're able to think; it limits how we're able to dream."

LCP's literature shows pieces of the dream coming to life. Funds raised from grants and individual pledges have paid Siemens' salary for a year and a half; they have financed printing, telephone and other costs. There is a phone list and a mailing list; there is a place for someone to call if they need information about the lesbian community.

Siemens is proud of the accomplishments, pleased with the membership roster. But she and LCP board members believe there are many women they haven't yet reached. Young lesbians and older ones. Lesbians who say they're not political. Women who feel the word "lesbian" excludes them because they're bisexual. Or unsure.

LCP has touched "the tip of the iceberg," says Siemens. "Under the tip . . . are the folks who have retreated totally into private lives . . . that next layer of women who may be more closeted or more identified with their careers. And it would be nice if we had more older lesbians involved."

Part of the solution may be pragmatic. Figure out what might interest potential members, what their concerns are, then create activities that fill those needs. Softball tournaments and square dances. Forums on racism and concerts of folk music.

"For LCP to exist, to function, it has to be more mainstream than extreme," said one board member. "It's not going to be all things for all lesbians — it never will be."

"What LCP is trying to be is a resource center so no matter what your interest you can draw on what LCP has to offer. There can be a lot of isolation for us, and LCP can act to contradict that," said Enrico. "Can we all gather under the same roof? . . . I don't think that is a realistic picture."

The brochure describes LCP as having a "multi-issue perspective," and the roster of activities follows suit. Members have trained Portland police officers in cross-cultural sensitivity, organized letter-writing parties to urge passage of the statewide gay rights bill, awarded "Spirit of Portlandia" recognition to individuals and groups for serving the lesbian community and sponsored a sold-out party in June at the

Pittock Mansion.

Although LCP drew some criticism for hosting the party, a women-only affair, on the weekend of the Lesbian and Gay Pride March stressing "unity," members say the event was successful in drawing women who might shy from more strictly political events.

It was also an event that, for one night, seemed to bridge differences in the community, juxtaposing old and young, dissolving barriers of occupation, ethnicity, geography. Siemens, a veteran leader of Portland's lesbian community, stood on the winding stairs in silver shoes and presented Baldwin with an award for new leadership. There were lesbians in leather vests, lesbians in sequined gowns, lesbians in satin tuxedos, several hundred lesbians, in all, walking and laughing through the rooms of the elegant Pittock Mansion. For a few hours, it seemed as if the lesbian community had gathered under one roof. For a few hours, it seemed possible that such a thing could happen.

With the party over, in the bright glare of daylight, there is business at hand for LCP. Members are searching for a building — for office space so Siemens can move the bulging files from the third floor of her house, for meeting rooms, for a place women can go to seek information and resources. There are deadlines and meetings, tax-exemption papers and membership counts, fundraisers and heated discussions. There are, always, the varied visions of the women whose ideas are shaping LCP.

"I would like to see LCP have a solid funding base in the community," said Siemens. "I would like to see it have a center where people could go and pick up any information on gay, lesbian, feminist, progressive communities. I'd like to see a more coherent political presence, to be better linked with lesbian groups nationally. . . . I think in a couple of years, if all goes well with LCP, we'll take this show on the road to say, 'Here, this is how you can do this in St. Louis.'"

Liz Konsella

It was 1980, five years before the Lesbian Community Project was a spark in anybody's vision. Liz Konsella was applauding at her first Holly Near concert. She was 11 years old.

"I can remember going to this Holly Near concert, and it was really exciting," said Konsella, now 18 and the youngest member of the LCP board. "Somehow, I knew. She was singing, 'We are gay and lesbian people,' and I was going, 'Yeah!'"

"Somehow, I think I have a totally different perspective [on LCP] because I come from a different generation.

"I came out when I was 15, and, when I was 16, I got involved in Windfire," a peer group for gay men and lesbians under age 21. "It was good for me to meet other gay people who are young. . . . I'm one of the oldest members now. [At meetings] sometimes we just gossip, but last week we had a really good meeting — a girl was trying to decide if she was gay, and we were all giving her advice. She was asking, 'If I feel this way, does it mean I'm gay?'"

"Most of my friends who I hang out with at the City [an underage club] or at Windfire don't know what LCP is doing, or they can't afford to be members. . . . I was talking to this girl who I'm friends with, and we were talking about PC, you know, political correctness, and it's almost like if you're not PC then you might be considered kind of out of it. I think it would be really hard to get someone from the City to represent anybody on the LCP board because it wouldn't be 'cool.'"

Others in LCP agree that younger lesbians are a particularly difficult group to reach. "I think we need a higher profile in the bars and with women age 21-25," said LCP's executive director, Cathy Siemens.

"A lot of us are still in school," said Konsella. "Or are just coming out, or are living at home. . . . a lot of [young women in Windfire or

"I want to reach mainstream America," said Jordan. "That's my thing, and it freaks out a lot of people who aren't willing to be as public. I want to reach out to mainstream America and work on some homophobia stuff."

"It would be nice to see LCP encourage higher education to teenagers, education about how to become a parent, education about how wonderful life can be without drugs or alcohol," said Baldwin.

"I would really like to be . . . focussing on issues like racism in the community," said Enrico. "I would like LCP to be a model, maybe for the country, to prove that we can work through the oppressive messages we've gotten about each other."

Katharine English wants to see the membership list grow. "I really wish all dykes would become members. . . . so LCP can become financially solvent. Then I'd like to see it become a real moving political force. I'd like to see a community center purchased, a permanent building. . . . The bottom line is — and we never would have said this ten years ago, either — all of that depends on financial support, and we've got to get it from lesbians."

She would also like to redefine the word "community."

"One reason I objected to this project is that I don't believe there is such a thing as a lesbian community, any more than there is a Republican community. . . . There is a real need for this kind of organization to spread its fingers out to all lesbians so they can pick and choose what they want."

The visions are different, but they pull in the same direction, tugging at the concept of community until it stretches to cover all the things lesbians do and don't have in common, all the ways there are to live.

"I want to see LCP being strong in all areas — educational, social, political," said Enrico. "I have this picture of LCP's arms being . . . all over the place. And that each arm is really strong."

at the City Nightclub] are bisexual, and it's 'Lesbian Community Project' — it doesn't include them at all. . . . This girl was saying, 'You're so PC. You wear Reeboks and are in LCP.' She was into drugs and wears a leather jacket. She got kicked out of her house when she was 17.

"It seems like LCP is for people who are already established, who already have some set pattern of what they're doing with their lives. For somebody who's just coming out, their main concern would be trying to figure themselves out, not being members of a community they don't even know if they're part of."

In high school at Grant, where Konsella graduated last spring, "I wasn't really out. You really can't be. I came out to a few teachers and a few friends the second semester of my senior year. It wasn't until the middle of this year that I started being able to speak up if someone was being an asshole or a homophobe.

"I'm glad LCP does exist because we need a powerful lesbian organization. We need to have people who are there and ready to speak for other lesbians, who are there when some anti-gay thing comes along. But I feel like I'm not really a part of it, in a way. I've never had any experience with anything like the 1970s women's movement. I wasn't old enough. I just don't know how much I'm contributing.

"I can't imagine a lot of my friends being political; they don't even know where they're at. . . . I've always had a lot of support in coming out and I've had pretty much kind of a stable life, so I'm not dealing with things like being kicked out of my house or having to be on my own and support myself.

"But LCP is really nothing my friends can relate to. Some people I don't really mention it to because it's hard to explain. I would just feel better if I was able to do more, to reach out to people my own age."



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