

# Just news

## Regional planning conference successful

*A firm commitment to make those who attend conferences aware of issues of racism, ableism, and ageism was accomplished*

BY JEN ODENBAUGH

"So, are we in general consensus about a conclusion without any hesitancy or ill feelings in our hearts or our souls?"

This should have been the concluding statement of the second planning meeting for the National Lesbian Conference, slated for April 24-28, 1991, in Atlanta, Georgia. Attending the conference were over 120 women, including representatives of the Portland community. Women from Boston, Washington, DC, Salt Lake City, Northern California, and as far away as Florida attended. Nine representatives from Atlanta, the site of the 1991 convention, were in attendance, to gather and coordinate information for planning of the conference itself.

The idea for a conference was born over two years ago when Kay Ostberg, Michelle Crone, Joyce Hunter and Angela Bowen, all involved in lesbian and gay rights on a national level, began brainstorming while at the 1987 March on Washington and established an office in Albany, New York.

Nedra Bagley, spokeswoman for the Portland Host Committee, stated that the Atlanta conference "would allow an opportunity for lesbians from all regions of the country, from all walks of life, to gather and share information on political/social/economic issues."

The move from the 1987 march progressed to Durham, North Carolina in March 1989, where over 200 women from across the country attended the first planning meeting.

In April, the Host Committee in Portland began the design and recruitment of women to establish a steering committee for the planning conference. The committee coordinated housing, transportation, media, volunteers, medical needs, fundraising, entertainment and special needs. A subcommittee of differently-abled women was formed to assist in accommodating special needs of conference participants.

The Portland conference ran by consensus, a feminist process which included starting out in large groups, breaking into committees, and reporting back to the large group. This system allows for individual opinions while eliminating empowerment of just one individual.

Committees established during the three-day conference included fundraising, programs, media, and logistics. Various caucuses met to discuss issues of concern for lesbians of color, older lesbians, lesbians on the land, lesbians with disabilities, and deaf lesbians. Saturday's agenda included regional meetings where women voiced their concerns about such issues as the skinhead/Neo-Nazi movement, environmental issues, lesbian mothers, adoptive rights, disabled lesbians and Native American lesbians. This group also selected Marcia Cook, Ann Ocean, Janet

Spotted Owl, Chrystos and Eeve Smith to represent the Northwest until the Regional Lesbian-Feminist Conference in Seattle on September 22-24, which is being sponsored by the Gay Community Social Services.

"We got a lot of tasks taken care of in this planning meeting," said Yvonne Eldress of Seattle. "We established a structure for this conference, as well as committees and regional representatives for the Interim Coordinating Committee."

A firm commitment to make those who attend conferences aware of issues of racism, ableism and ageism was also accomplished.

Goldie Washington, a visiting host from the Seattle area, indicated that ageism is still a current issue with women nationwide. "I don't understand why old lesbians have to fight for their spot [in the agenda]. Some women are afraid," she continued, "to address the issue of old. If you don't see it, it doesn't exist. That's not reality."

An evening of entertainment by the Portland Lesbian Choir, Musica Femina, and Motherlode was well attended by women from Portland as well as out-of-town participants. The concert concluded with a rousing finale combining the Choir, Musica Femina, Motherlode and the audience.

Both visiting lesbians and Portland lesbians found music and non-alcoholic entertainment at the newly-established Café Mocha on Saturday evening. Café Mocha also served as the reception site for women from out of town, who were met there by those who were providing their housing. The Portland Host Committee wishes to thank Café Mocha for providing hospitality to the conference participants.

Special needs for this conference were accommodated by listing of local accessible restaurants and wheelchair-accessible accommodations at Montgomery Court, a Portland State University housing dormitory; as well as public and private transportation access. Local and visiting lesbians acted as volunteer hosts for women needing food, rest, nurturance and sane conversation throughout the conference itself.

One lesbian arriving from Rochester, New York stated, "I feel very comfortable here. In my town, we have one 'women's bar.' It is dark and dank and not wheelchair accessible. I have freedom and movement here; I can appreciate the people around me as well as the Tri-met system. I like Portland and have felt welcome here."

Women from the Portland Steering Committee wish to express their appreciation to Portland State University for waiving the fee for the use of their facilities. The committee would also like to thank Phoenix Rising, who served as fiscal agent for this planning conference, and the volunteers who assisted at the conference. ▼

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