

# Harris wins

African-American lesbian elected in Seattle



Terry Bean, Sherry Harris, and Gail Shibley

Sherry Harris, Seattle's newly-elected City Council member, made history on several fronts following her sweeping Nov. 5 victory over longtime incumbent Sam Smith. Harris, who garnered 66 percent of the vote during last month's general election, has become the nation's first openly lesbian, African-American elected official. She is the first black woman elected to Seattle's City Council, and the first publicly-known lesbian elected to any office in Washington state.

"It feels great. We ran an effective, grassroots campaign and addressed a lot of important concerns. My sexual orientation seemed to be an issue with the media, but not at all with the public," explains an exuberant Harris, a US West engineer and longtime feminist activist. "I think my victory proves that we can run and win on our credentials, yet still be honest about who we are."

Harris defeated Smith, a 24-year council member and self-described "moral conservative," by stressing the need for new leadership, improved public transportation, affordable housing, economic development, and social justice. Unlike her opponent, Harris accepted the city's \$110,000 campaign spending limit. A portion of her campaign contributions came from the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, a new national organization committed to electing openly lesbian and gay candidates.

"Harris was one of the first candidates we

supported...and we won," says GLVF Director William Waybourn. David Mixner, GLVF board co-chair adds, "Sherry Harris exposed Seattle to a side of our community that is rarely addressed. Obviously (Seattle) responded very favorably to her message. We have also promoted the fact that gay men and women make excellent candidates on a wide range of issues."

Among those on hand for Harris' victory party was Rep. Gail Shibley, Oregon's first openly lesbian legislator. Shibley is currently campaigning to regain the House District 12 seat she was appointed to last January. In addition to providing Harris with financial backing, the Victory Fund has recommended Shibley to its donor network. Members of the Victory Fund agree to make \$100 contributions to at least two recommended candidates each election cycle. The Victory Fund's recommendation will introduce Shibley's candidacy to hundreds of donors throughout the country who have agreed to support qualified openly gay and lesbian candidates.

Shibley, a self-described "progressive Democrat," is running her first, full-fledged political campaign, and has her sights set on the 1992 election. Harris, meanwhile, takes her seat on the Seattle City Council on Jan. 2, 1992.

For more information about the Victory Fund or Shibley's candidacy, contact the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund at (202) 842-8679.

Inga Sorensen

## Roseburg community center needs help

Gays and lesbians in Roseburg are asking for your support in their effort to keep their gay community center open. The facility, which is described as the "only rural gay and lesbian community center in America and Canada," is slated to close Jan. 1 due to a lack of funding.

"We are struggling month to month to month," explains Mark Miller, the center's project coordinator. "Finances are tight everywhere, and the recession has kept many contributors from offering the support they had in the past."

The center, which has been operating since

1987, houses a 24-hour gay support switchboard, a library, kitchen, work and recreational space. It is also the site of weekly gay and lesbian worship services. "This is really a wonderful space," says Miller. "It's very difficult to find a place for lesbians and gays living in rural areas, a place that is as accessible and safe as our center is...we view ourselves as an outpost struggling to survive. There are thousands of lesbians and gays living in rural, isolated areas. It's vital we be here for them if they need us."

According to Miller, an estimated \$850 per month is needed to cover the center's rent and auxiliary expenses. Grant money has been scarce, he says, and the center's membership has been "taxed to its fullest capacity."

Anyone wanting to make donations can contact the Gay and Lesbian Alliance of Roseburg, PO Box 813, Roseburg, OR 97470, or call 679-4583.

Inga Sorensen

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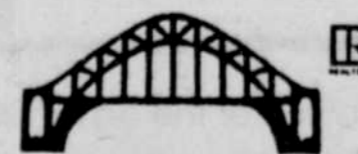


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