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PUBLISHER AND EDITOR

Reneé LaChance

CO-EDITOR

Ariel Waterwoman

CALENDAR EDITOR

Meg Grace

FREELANCE REPORTER

Jeff Williamson

STAFF PHOTOGRAPHERS

Linda Kliewer
Linda Carter

ADVERTISING

Amanda Colorado
Meg Grace
E. Ann Hinds

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

E. Ann Hinds

PROOFREADERS

Jean Casalegno
Carol Wright
Marilyn Davis

TYPESSETTER

Amanda Colorado

FORMATTER

Meg Grace

DISTRIBUTION

Up Front Distribution

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Carol Steinel
Chloe De Segonzac

CONTRIBUTORS

Lee Lynch
Dr. Tantalus
Marilyn Davis
Rex Wockner
Sandra de Helen
Matthew Nelson
Kim White
Ellen Hansen
Jim Hunger
Barbara Bernstein
Kier Salmon
David Lane
Susan Baker

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steppin' out



PHOTO BY LINDA KLIEWER

editorial

The early years of Lesbian and Gay Pride in Portland

On June 29, 1969, the New York police raided the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village. The attack was not an unusual event; the police routinely harassed gay clubs, but this time the bar patrons fought back. They barricaded themselves in and kept the police at bay. The following riots and anger gave birth to the modern lesbian and gay liberation movement. Communities across the U.S. began honoring the Stonewall riots with celebrations and marches in the month of June.

So, we thought this would be a good time to review some highlights of the early years of lesbian and gay pride in Portland.

The Rose City began celebrating the anniversary of the Stonewall riots with Gay Fairs on the waterfront in 1975. The first year an enthusiastic 200 people showed up. In 1977, the mayor of Portland, Neil Goldschmidt, made the first Gay Week proclamation. Susie, Ann and Bill Shepherd appeared on the cover of the evening *Oregon Journal* that week. "Our daughter is gay" read the headline.

In 1978 the Eugene anti-gay discrimination referendum had just been lost to the Right; Anita Bryant was foaming at the mouth, and Harvey Milk was scheduled to speak at the rally but an emergency with California's proposition 13 forced him to cancel. This was the first year Portland incorporated a march into the celebration.

The 10th anniversary of Stonewall, 1979, prompted two marches in Portland, one in June and one in October to coincide with the National Gay March on Washington.

In 1980, the Portland Gay Men's Chorus gave its first concert in conjunction with Gay Pride. Up until then the Gay Fair had been planned by the Portland Town Council and had run pretty smoothly. But that year a controversy arose about whether PTC should continue to organize the event, or whether it should be passed on to another group. The next year PTC decided to pass the gauntlet to the Gay Pride Activities Com-

mittee, a group of local gay businessmen. This began a controversy that would last for several years. A group of lesbians and gays of every color along with Radical Women, demanded input into what they perceived as a bar-controlled event. Frustrated by the divisiveness, the Gay Pride Activities Committee ended up withdrawing their support, and PTC pulled an event together in just two weeks. Boycotts were declared by all sides.

In 1982, TKO (a group of lesbians and gay men working together) formed and held meetings to build solidarity between what had become two separate communities. The resulting coalition organized a Lesbian and Gay Pride week that year, and developed a statement of purpose which was inclusive of the diversity of our community. A major debate developed about including the word "lesbian" in the gay pride name.

The San Francisco Marching Band attended the 1983 Lesbian and Gay Pride March and Rally, in the rain. The dispute over having the word lesbian in the gay pride name continued.

Three thousand people attended the rally in 1984, the largest crowd yet, and the march took up seven blocks. This was a significant number, but 1992's parade and rally beat all with over 9,000 people marching, and over 15,000 attending the rally.

Though many issues have complicated the planning of each year's event, it always miraculously comes together, uniting individuals and groups who put aside grievances and differences for a day. The solidarity, love, respect and pride we feel on Lesbian and Gay Pride Day needs to extend throughout the year as we fight the Oregon Citizens Alliance. There will always be disagreements, but divisiveness needs to be overcome through clear and honest dialog in order to eradicate the OCA and its hate-initiative and maintain a common vision for our community. Let's use the energy and solidarity of Lesbian and Gay Pride day to help maintain our spirits through the hard work of the coming year.

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