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FAX (503) 786-1227**local news****Racist letter surfaces
in Woodburn**

For the second March in a row, Woodburn's Latino/a community has been harassed. This year, a racist letter ranting about a housing project for farmworkers was sent to the Stonehedge Court Apartments, which is next to the project's site.

The letter was sent in a plain envelope with no return address. It was signed "Americans for the Last Crusade." Police Chief Ken Wright says it's impossible to say if the letter is from the same source as anti-Latino/a fliers found in the area at this time last year. Those fliers were signed "America Values Association." Both the letter and the fliers were typed in the same format.

Gov. Barbara Roberts has stated that the letter shows why the state needs a human rights commission. Roberts endorsed the housing project, which is financed by state, federal and private funds, in December. Police are continuing to investigate.

**INS forced to deal
with racism**

Portland's controversial U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service office is facing complaints from inside and outside the INS. District Director David Beebe has agreed to meet with Latino/a community leaders and discuss their concerns. The Portland office is also being used as an example in a lawsuit filed by a group of African American agents, which charges discriminatory hiring practices.

Discussions between Beebe and the group Hispanics in Unity for Oregon are likely to focus on a recent raid INS agents conducted without warrants on a Northeast Portland apartment complex. Portland's Latino/a community has been unhappy with how the INS office uses its resources for some time. In mid-April, Hispanics in Unity called for Beebe to be replaced. They have rescinded that request now that Beebe has agreed to open a dialogue.

"We've decided to try to put everything aside and work together," said Hispanics in Unity spokeswoman Gale Castillo. "We'll see how it goes."

Meanwhile, a group of African American INS agents cited Portland's office in a lawsuit as a prime example of discriminatory hiring practices. The agents filed suit in Los Angeles against the INS Western Region, claiming that white agents were promoted ahead of more qualified African American agents. Portland is part of the Northern Region, and now agents are considering making the lawsuit national.

Portland's INS office employs 80 agents, none of whom are African American. Unofficial reports claim that the staff includes about 10 people of color. One of the agents filing the suit had recently applied for a position with the Portland office. Although the African American agent had 17 years of experience with the INS, a European American with six years experience was hired.

"Portland is by far the worst example we've encountered," said David Ross, the attorney representing the African American agents.

Congratulations, Lawrence

Young Lawrence's story is sad, but not unique. Lawrence is a Canadian teenager who recently told his best friend, Mike, that he is gay. Mike talked him into telling his mother, who panicked and told his father, who panicked even more and threw Lawrence out of the family home. It happens to a lot of gay teenagers. What's unique about Lawrence and his family is that they are cartoon characters in the strip "For Better or Worse" by Lynn Johnston.

Some newspapers across the country are reacting to Lawrence's coming out much like his

father did. Halfway through the five-week story line, about 70 papers have either thrown the strip out or replaced it with substitutes. *The Oregonian* is keeping "For Better or Worse," and running all of the episodes about Lawrence. The paper solicited readers' opinions and received more than 5,200 responses. While they haven't published the results in percentages, a column by Assistant Managing Editor Richard C. Johnston said the vast majority of the callers approved of the story line.

In Grants Pass, however, *The Daily Courier* is under siege for running the comic strip. Oregon Citizens Alliance supporters are picketing the paper's offices and jamming their phone lines. Messages of support can be sent by fax to Editor Dennis Roller at 474-3814. Medford's *Mail Tribune* is also continuing the comic, despite protests from OCA supporters, who are demanding it be moved to the editorial page. *The Mail Tribune* recently ran an editorial in support of Oregon Senate Bills 34 and 35, which would extend civil rights protection on the basis of sexual orientation.

Johnston says the story line was just a reflection of reality. This isn't the first time she's covered social issues in the comic; past stories have featured teenagers suffering child abuse and eating disorders, a married couple facing an unplanned pregnancy, and a teacher using a wheelchair. For Lawrence's story, Johnston draws on her family's experience when her brother-in-law came out. "For Better or Worse" has focused on Lawrence's coming out for five weeks, but that's not the end. Lawrence will continue in all his queer glory as a regular, if not central, character.

**Health conference
addresses men of color**

The annual Minority Health Conference drew more than 500 people to examine this year's theme of "Male Health in Evolution." Workshops, lectures and panel discussions addressed topics such as sexual minority youth; the health of African Americans in the military; medical researchers and people of color; and health care on Native American reservations.

Another health threat discussed was homicide. J. O'Neal Adams, minority health coordinator for Region X, U.S. Public Health Service, noted that the homicide rate for African American men rose from 50 per 100,000 in 1985 to 61.5 per 100,000 in 1989. That's for black men of all ages; the rate for young men is even more horrific. In 1989, 80 per 100,000 African American young men between the ages of 15 and 19 were murdered. Their European American peers suffered fewer than 10 per 100,000 murders in that year.

Emmally Williams-Mitchell, director of the Oregon Minority AIDS Coalition, worries that highlighting these statistics, to the exclusion of other issues, diverts the focus from people caring for their health. "It keeps black men in denial about health care," she said.

The conference, held April 12 and 13, featured close to 50 different events. Williams-Mitchell compared choosing between the available workshops to picking flavors at an ice cream parlor; they all looked wonderful, but an individual could only choose a few. Speakers included Adams; Dr. Alvin F. Poussaint, associate dean for student affairs at Harvard Medical School; Leonard Olguin, a California State University professor and author; and Sasheen Little Feather, a Native American activist who was involved in the 1969 takeover of Alcatraz Island. Gov. Barbara Roberts gave a luncheon speech and made a pitch for her proposed tax increases on beer, wine and cigarettes. The keynote speaker was U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Joycelyn Elders. The conference was sponsored by the Oregon Health Division's Minority Health Program and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health.

compiled by Irene K. Hislop