

explains ROP project coordinator Marcy Westerling. "Those types of campaigns put more time and money into communities with the largest voter bases. ROP does just the opposite. The smaller and more rural a community is, the more time and effort we'll put into helping people organize around human dignity issues. These are the folks that have too often been ignored. They're also doing work that's geared toward the long term—creating understanding, as opposed to getting that 50 plus 1 in an election."

With a staff of two, ROP is funded through grants from groups like the McKenzie River Gathering Foundation. Westerling spends most of her time touring the state assisting local groups. In order to further decrease the sense of isolation among rural citizens, ROP has also developed a computer network enabling activists to share strategies, discuss problems, and connect with activists in other counties in a matter of moments.

"The Measure 9 campaign was so divisive," says Westerling. "Many rural citizens said they didn't want to be enemies with their neighbors. During the past year and a half they've been working on ways to bring their communities together."

According to Westerling, they have done so in a variety of ways: In Clatsop County, for instance, the human dignity group organized rallies denouncing bigotry after Latino/a citizens became the target of a series of racist incidents. The human dignity group has also conducted joint fund-raising efforts for a new library and senior center in Warrenton, and a youth center in Seaside. In Junction City, civil rights backers are building homes for the impoverished, and in Coos County, citizens have launched a campaign to confront issues of sexism and intolerance.

"We think it's important to work with the largest diversity of groups we can," says No on 13's Davis. "That's the way we will win. We'll work with any of the human dignity groups to help defeat Measure 13, but we also respect their autonomy. If they choose not to work with us, that's their decision."

Two years ago, No on 9 came under heavy fire from small-town and rural activists who felt they were either being ignored by the campaign or, conversely, suffocated by it.

"No matter what happens in November, this is a very exciting time for Oregonians," says Westerling. "People are really beginning to think about what they want their communities to be like, and they're drawing their lines. This is a terrific opportunity for us to honestly connect with the people around us and transform our communities. This type of work will continue long after the election."

State Rep. Avel Gordly agrees. The Portland lawmaker and longtime civil rights activist belongs to African Americans for Human Rights and the People of Color Group, both of which work for social change. According to Gordly, one concept being advanced by these groups involves building "beloved communities."

"'Beloved community' was a phrase used by Martin Luther King Jr.," she explains. "Essentially, what it acknowledges is that many of us have a yearning to have a place of harmony—a place where we can just be ourselves as human beings without being attacked. Right now in Oregon we have an opportunity to create this place in our homes, our workplaces, our social movements. That change begins in our hearts when we choose to become conscious of the fact that we can't continue taking people for granted. How often do we say to someone, 'I love you' or 'I appreciate the work you do'?" These seemingly small acts lift people higher. We need to build these interactions into our day-to-day lives and into our political campaigns."

Building beloved communities should also take a more physical form, says Gordly. Certain spaces—from churches to private homes—could be designated as "safe havens" for people to go to when they feel stressed and in need of support. "We're talking about the first steps in building beloved communities," she says. "We have to make a concerted effort to build bridges and bond with others outside of our personal circles of comfort. I believe we will all benefit in the long run."

According to Gordly, both African Americans for Human Rights and the People of Color Group are working "hand in hand" with the No on 13 Committee to defeat the anti-gay and -lesbian rights initiative. "It's important we continue to get good information to the people of color communities," she says. "During the Measure 9 campaign, we were concerned the OCA was making some inroads into the black community via the black churches. We responded to the OCA's efforts with open letters, by writing columns, and by developing our own media campaign."

Gordly adds the education and outreach effort is an ongoing one. "Recently I attended a Unity Breakfast Committee gathering. The committee, comprising African American community leaders from organizations such as the Urban League and the Coalition of Black Men, meets on a regular basis to discuss issues important to the black community. While there, I requested we discuss Measure 13 during our next meeting, which is now on the next meeting's agenda. Educating people—that's what we all must continue doing, even after the election."

**Both African Americans for Human Rights and the People of Color Group are working "hand in hand" with the No on 13 Committee to defeat the anti-gay and -lesbian rights initiative.**



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### How to get involved:

If electoral politicking is your cup of tea, contact the No on 13 Committee at 222-6151, fax 222-6418, or write PO Box 40625, Portland, OR 97240. The campaign is seeking financial donations and volunteers. For more information about the regional field offices, call 222-6151.

If "transforming communities" appeals to you, contact the Rural Organizing Project, PO Box 919, Scappoose, OR 97056. If you live in small-town or rural Oregon and would like to get involved with, or start, a local human dignity group, contact ROP's Marcy Westerling at (503) 543-3978.

For more information about African Americans for Human Rights call 282-0744. For information about the People of Color Group, contact Floreid Walker at 238-6036.

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