



Bonnie Tinker host of Love Makes a Family on KKEY radio



Greg Jackson talking to media at SOC PAC rally

Shout it out

Continued from previous page

Wooten announced her lesbianism at last year's Lucille Hart Dinner, a glitzy RTP fund-raiser attracting more than 1,000 gay and lesbian rights supporters, including federal and state lawmakers, judges, and other prominent public servants.

A year later Wooten reflects, "I think we're setting a standard for the rest of the nation. The circumstances surrounding Measure 9 forced many people to come out. That was an important first step. Now I think we are shaping how the rest of the country will deal with this issue."

The primary goal of National Coming Out Day, which commemorates the 1987 March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, is to increase visibility of gay men, lesbians and bisexuals through a reasoned and personal dialogue with heterosexuals.

In Oregon, Ballot Measure 9 has given life to many innovative educational projects designed to do just that. A traveling photography exhibit, "Family, Friends and Neighbors," features depictions of



PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER

Marcy Westerling of the Rural Organizing Project

a wide array of gay and lesbian citizens, from jewelers and pianists to a mother and daughter baking cookies. The Oregon History Center is working with citizens to develop a gay and lesbian archive. And Tinker's radio program has been so popular it recently switched from a one-hour evening slot to a coveted two-hour, drive-time placement (7-9 am) each Wednesday.

Marcy Westerling is project coordinator for the Rural Organizing Project, perhaps one of the most influential forces in the campaign to generate constructive dialogue between sexual minorities and heterosexuals. "I believe we have helped to bring the overall temperature down surrounding lesbian and gay rights issues," says the 35-year-old Scappoose resident.

ROP, which was created in response to Ballot Measure 9, has developed a network of 52 human dignity groups throughout rural and small-town Oregon. Most of these groups, which are primarily led by openly gay and lesbian citizens, did not exist before Ballot Measure 9.

"Plain old everyday folks are working to transform their communities into better places," says Westerling. "Neighbors talking to neighbors—it's such a basic concept, yet it seems so cutting edge because in the 1990s it doesn't happen much, certainly not around gay rights issues."

THEN AND NOW

"I want you-all here to know that the top 11 serial killers in America have been admitted homosexuals," proclaims the middle-aged, bespectacled man in a short-sleeved shirt and brown corduroys. A slight sneer graces his face.

The time: October 1992, one month before the Ballot Measure 9 election. The occasion: A Ballot Measure 9 proponent speaks on the merits of the initiative in Sandy, a small town about 40 miles east of Portland. The phrase "admitted homosexuals" slides slowly from his lips. Most of the 200 people in attendance appear to be in agreement.

"These people, these homosexuals, want special rights. Look how dangerous they are. Measure 9 will stop these people from taking over our country."

Similar alarmist claims would be made by men, women—even children—at hundreds of pre-election forums, debates and public gatherings. Reported bias incidents and hate crimes skyrocketed. Pro-Ballot Measure 9 literature that did, in fact, include assertions that "the top 11 serial killers in America have all been admitted homosexuals," was dropped on doorsteps statewide. Such rhetoric galvanized those on both sides of the issue. Everybody from the ultra-popular grunge band Nir-

vana to then-presidential hopeful Bill Clinton weighed in on a debate that will assuredly be remembered as one of the nastiest in the state's history.

Jump to the present. The place: No on 13's administrative offices in downtown Portland. The time: 50 days before citizens vote on Ballot Measure 13, a proposed state constitutional amendment barring legal protections for bisexuals, gay men and lesbians. A strange quietness envelops the office—occasionally a phone rings, a few people silently attend to their tasks.

"It's amazing to me that the gay community is not highly involved in this campaign," says No on 13 deputy campaign manager Holly Pruett. "Unlike No on 9, whose phones were ringing off the hook with people wanting to volunteer, we just can't seem to muster the support. I think gays and lesbians are still exhausted from Measure 9."

Pruett is not the only person to notice the dramatic difference in the emotional climate. Nearly everyone we spoke with said they sensed a lack of fervor—even interest—in this campaign.

"[Ballot Measure 9] is all people could

talk about in my therapy room two years ago," says Larry Downard, a counselor at Phoenix Rising, an agency that provides counseling services to gay men, lesbians and bisexuals. "There was a lot of fear and despair then. These days, nobody is even talking about Ballot Measure 13. Some people may be emotionally disengaged because the last campaign was so intense, while others may simply be more seasoned and sophisticated. It's not new anymore."

Gov. Barbara Roberts, a longtime lesbian and gay rights advocate, agrees, "Oregonians are no longer shocked by this discussion. We have been through so much during the past two years that we are no longer naive. The climate is definitely different."

According to Lt. C.W. Jensen of the Portland Police Bureau, the temperature of the debate does indeed seem lower. During Ballot Measure 9, Jensen worked with the department's bias crimes unit. He says, "Two years ago I talked to people every day who said they were harassed or threatened. I saw their tears. The fear was absolutely palpable. It simply doesn't feel that way anymore."

Statistics bolster Jensen's observation: In 1992, Portland police handled 140 reported bias crimes based on sexual orientation. Up to September of this year, only 46 such incidents have been reported. The Lesbian Community Project's anti-violence reporting line recorded 608 incidents in 1992. A year later that number had dropped to 99. (Statistics for 1994 were not available at press time.)

Other factors that may be contributing to the change in climate include a lack of comparable mainstream media coverage, the late Oregon Court of Appeals ruling allowing the initiative to appear on the ballot, and a wide selection of other issues attracting community attention.

Whatever the reasons, Pruett says campaign coffers and volunteer interest are low. No on 13 hopes to raise \$2 million, but so far has only brought in about a quarter of that amount. An estimated 800 volunteers have stepped forth, when 5,000 are needed.

"Measure 9 may have brought people out of the closet," she says. "Yet ironically, that isn't translating into action this time around. We need to change that."