

Visionary leadership

A Multnomah County mail-in election for sheriff and school board seats features candidates who publicly support diversity

by Inga Sorensen and Renée LaChance

Perhaps the sexual minorities community should consider itself lucky to have a tough choice to make: As increasing numbers of candidates for public office publicly support the notion of diversity—including the need to protect the rights of gay men, lesbians and bisexuals—deciding who to vote for is becoming more difficult.

Ballots for the March 28 mail-in election will be sent to voters March 13. Citizens in Multnomah County will be asked to select their choice for Multnomah County sheriff. Four candidates are running for the post: Vera Pool, who is currently a lieutenant with the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office; Dan Noelle, assistant chief for the Portland Police Bureau; acting Multnomah County Sheriff John Bunnell; and Mark Hanson, a corrections sergeant with the Clackamas County Sheriff's Department.

The Multnomah County Sheriff's Office oversees 702 employees. With its \$53 million budget, the agency operates the county's five jails and patrols the unincorporated parts of the county. (Due to substantial annexation by the City of Portland, the Sheriff's Office is being forced to reconsider its role, which has long focused on law enforcement.)

On the law enforcement side, six of the agency's 114 deputies are women and even fewer represent marginalized communities. On the corrections side (352 officers), those numbers get a bit better, though it is widely held that the Sheriff's Office continues to be an entrenched good-ol'-white-boy network.

During the past four years, under the leadership of former Sheriff Bob Skipper, who retired in November, and Bunnell, 32 complaints from women and men alleging sexual harassment discrimination and retaliation have been filed with the Internal Affairs Department. Many concede that morale at the Sheriff's Office is low.

Just Out sat down with Pool and Noelle to hear their thoughts about an agency they both contend is in need of serious revamping and visionary leadership.

Multnomah County Sheriff

DAN NOELLE

Noelle is currently the assistant chief of the Portland Police Bureau. He has served 29 years—including 12 years as a street officer and detective and 14 years in command positions. Noelle backs community policing efforts but also says it is critical that we "plan for the long-term expansion of jails...to keep criminals locked up." He says he wants to scale back sheriff's patrols and instead focus more on corrections. He says he would strive for a more diverse workforce by creating a management structure that included all types of people: women, people of color, and people of various sexual orientations and religions.

Noelle admits getting deputies to support diversity "is going to be tough."

He says, "It's like a locker room mentality. I started out by giving these great speeches about moving the Sheriff's Office into the year 2000 and I stopped doing that. I honestly started talking about moving them away from 1975."

Noelle has a strong link to Portland's lesbian and gay community. He is the Portland Police Bureau's liaison to the sexual minorities community and has marched in uniform in the city's Gay and Lesbian Pride parades. He is the vice president of the Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment, a five-state watchdog organization

that tracks white supremacist activities. Noelle was one of the original drafters of the nation's first-ever "partnership agreement" between a city police bureau and the sexual minorities community. (The signing of that agreement took place last fall between community leaders and the Portland Police Bureau. The agreement calls upon the parties to work together to promote understanding and tolerance.) Noelle says he would take a public stand against discriminatory initiatives sponsored by the Oregon Citizens Alliance or others.

VERA POOL

Pool is a Multnomah County sheriff's lieutenant and has served as a corrections officer for 24 years. She would like to see the agency focus more on corrections, though she backs an approach that would help bolster inmates' positive behavior so they won't ultimately wind up back in jail. Pool also stresses the need for the Sheriff's Office to work more closely to form partnerships with other agencies to provide more effective service. She, too, is a community policing advocate.



Vera Pool

Pool says the Sheriff's Office is woefully lacking in diversity; as sheriff she says she would create a workforce that is reflective of the community.

"I would make it a goal of mine to hire people of diversity," she told *Just Out*. "I know of situations where highly qualified people of diversity have been rejected by the Sheriff's Office, and

they've been given a whole host of reasons as to why."

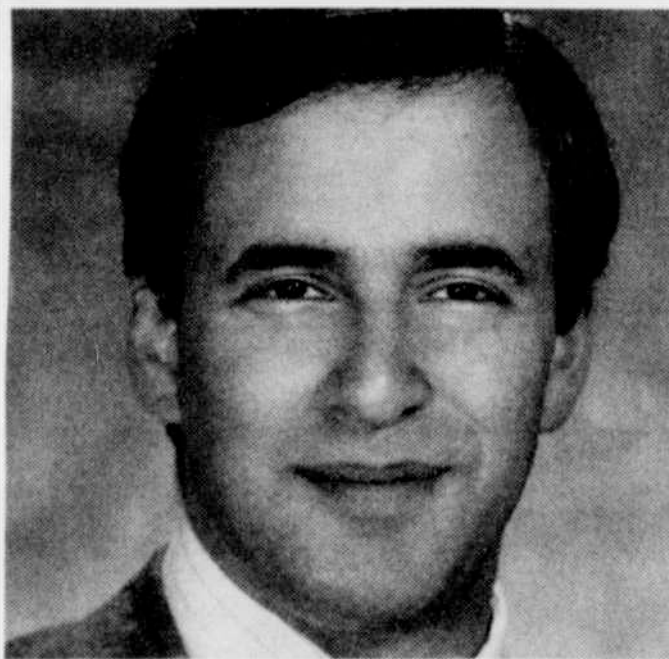
Pool does not have a track record of working specifically on sexual minority issues, though she says she has associated for many years with people "who have nontraditional sexual preferences." She says she has experienced firsthand what it feels like to be discriminated against and understands the inherent injustice of that type of behavior.

"I would never discriminate against someone based on their sexual preference or based on their race," she says. "My position is that I would hire people based on their ability to do the job."

Pool received a master's degree in criminal justice from the University of Portland and also holds a master's in education. She has served for eight years on the Board of Police Safety Standards and Training.

Both of these candidates agree that the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office needs to be blown apart and rebuilt. Both are more than qualified for the job. The question is, who would be the best dynamite?

Portland Public School Board



Marc Abrams

The Portland Public School Board rules the Portland Public Schools system. Advocates for sexual minorities are needed on the board to monitor curriculum and set policy for the schools.

Four zones are up for election on the Portland Public School Board. Some good friends of our community are running.

In Zone 1, Hank Miggins, who served with former Multnomah County Chair Gladys McCoy, should get our vote. Miggins' background managing the finances for Multnomah County will come in handy as the public schools system flounders under the cutbacks of 1992's Ballot Measure 5. He is also an outspoken opponent of the Oregon Citizens Alliance.

In Zone 2, Susan M. Hagmeier supports educating students—on an age-appropriate basis—about diversity, reproductive rights and HIV/AIDS.

In Zone 3, Marc Abrams is a Portland attorney and a father who has actively worked for equality for sexual minorities.

In Zone 7, Joseph Tam is a candidate of particular interest to the sexual minority communities. The 41-year-old father of two was instrumental in getting the statewide Parents and Teachers Association to pass a resolution last year condemning the Oregon Citizens Alliance's discriminatory Ballot Measure 13.

As a senior investigator for the state Bureau of Labor and Industries, Tam investigates discrimination complaints. Four years ago, Tam, who was born and raised in Hong Kong before moving to Portland in 1974, lost a close race for a school board seat.

"My children are in the Spanish Immersion

Our endorsement goes to Vera Pool. She has worked within the system for 24 years and knows the agency well. She knows its weaknesses and its strengths. She has a workable vision for change. After the abuses she has suffered as a woman and an African American in the Sheriff's Office, she deserves the chance to right the wrongs and disband the good-ol'-white-boy system. She would be the first woman and the second African American to serve as Multnomah County sheriff.

We look forward to Pool joining the sexual minority community at events celebrating diversity and those rallying against racism and discrimination. We will welcome Sheriff Pool and a Multnomah County sheriff's contingent at this summer's Lesbian and Gay Pride Parade.

It is important that we vote in this election, or we may end up with a sheriff who will continue to perpetuate sexism, racism and homophobia in the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office. A candidate must garner 51 percent of the vote in order to avoid a run-off election that will be costly to us all. Your vote now is vital. The sexual minority community of Multnomah County should stand firmly in support of Vera Pool.

Program at West Sylvan Middle School," he explains. "Back then I was concerned about the board's commitment to continuing that program, so I ran. This time, my reasons are different. I'm very concerned about finding a stable source of funding for our public schools."

Tam says he would like to secure funding through a variety of means, including seeking corporate and business sponsorships for programs and establishing partnerships with community agencies and organizations. He backs school AIDS-prevention and sex-education programs, and would like to see better support for gay and lesbian students, teachers and parents. Tam supports implementation of Oregon's Educational Act for the 21st Century, which calls upon students not only to master basic skills such as reading and math but also to develop marketable work skills.

Tam worked with members of Asian/Pacific Islander Lesbians and Gays to educate Asian American communities in defeating ballot measures 9 and 13. He initiated and lobbied for a nondiscrimination resolution on gay men and lesbians at the national conference of the Chinese American Citizens Alliance in 1993.

"My wife, who grew up in the United States, had parents who did not speak English. She would go to school and her teachers would tell her that she could only use English when she went home. It was a very hard time for her. She felt torn. She felt like she was somehow different," says Tam. "I know that's how gay and lesbian young people often feel in schools these days. They should not have to feel different from the rest."



Joseph Tam