

Role model of parental love

A March 31 memorial will honor a fatherly advocate for lesbian and gay rights

by Inga Sorensen

Oregon has lost one of its most passionate advocates for gay and lesbian civil rights. Portland attorney William K. Shepherd, co-founder of the state chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, died March 9 of leukemia and complications of a stroke.

The 81-year-old Shepherd, along with his wife, Ann, are known not only for their public support for their two lesbian daughters, but for gay men and lesbians across Oregon.

"They have been a role model of parental love and support to their lesbian daughters—and to thousands of 'adopted' gay and lesbian kids over the years. Their passion for justice is reflected in their belief that only through education, often one-on-one, do people exchange their bigotry for a heart of love and acceptance," says Jeff Rose, Mr. Portland Leather 1993, who experienced the Shepherd's warmth and acceptance firsthand. "Bill's zealous practice of law has guided and protected so very many of us over the years [and] Ann's kitchen table has been the healing place for countless people of all ages," says Rose.



Bill Shepherd with his wife, Ann

Shepherd was born July 25, 1913, in Portland. He graduated from the University of Oregon and the University of Oregon Law School. During World War II, he served as an infantry major and fought in the Battle of the Bulge. In 1944, he married Ann Marcotte and opened a legal practice in Portland.

The Shepherds became active in the gay and lesbian community in the mid-1970s after their daughter, Susie, came out to them as a lesbian. In 1975, Ann testified before a state legislative committee considering the second gay and lesbian rights bill. Soon after, the couple co-founded a Parents of Gays group, which in 1982 affiliated with the international organization now known as Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. During Portland's Lesbian and Gay Pride celebration in 1977, Susie and her parents were featured on the front page of *The Oregon Journal* (then Oregon's evening daily newspaper). That same year the Shepherds were the only parents to be featured on a KATU *Town Hall* program about gay men and lesbians.

As elders at Portland's First Presbyterian

Church, Bill and Ann participated in discussions about gay- and lesbian-related issues with clergy and Christian educators in a precedent-setting conference held by the Presbytery of the Cascades in 1981.

Additionally, Shepherd organized the Legal Resource Committee of the Portland Town Council, which was Oregon's first umbrella organization serving the legal, political, educational and social needs of sexual minorities. Portland Town Council spawned the creation of Right To Privacy PAC, Phoenix Rising, and Cascade AIDS Project.

In the mid-1970s, Bill led the charge to stop what many viewed as the entrapment of gay men in Portland by law enforcement officials; he was also willing to write wills and perform other legal services for gay and lesbian couples during a time when few attorneys would make themselves available.

The Shepherds, who received Right To Privacy's Lucille Hart Award in 1985 for their work on behalf of gay and lesbian rights, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary last November.

Bill is survived by his wife; daughters Sally Hyde of Gallup, N.M., Susie and Jean of Portland, Jennifer of New York, and Kathryn of Aloha; three grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held at noon on March 31 at Portland's First Presbyterian Church. The family suggests remembrances be contributions to the Bill and Ann Shepherd Legal Scholarship Fund, care of the Equity Foundation, PO Box 5696, Portland, 97228. The scholarship will be awarded to third-year law students who are attending Oregon schools and are dedicated to practicing human-rights law in the state.

Phoenix Rising Foundation founder dies

Dr. John F. Abele, a founder of Phoenix Rising Foundation, a Portland counseling center serving the needs of the sexual minority community, died Jan. 24 at the age of 85.

Abele, who was born in 1909, followed in his father's footsteps by graduating from the University of Oregon Medical School and serving in the U.S. Army. After his military service, the younger Abele set up private practice in Portland. He was on the staff of Good Samaritan Hospital and other area hospitals and was a clinical professor and professor emeritus of orthopedic surgery at Oregon Health Sciences University.

Abele also was the first director of the Oregon Crippled Children's Program, and a member of the board of directors of the (now-defunct) Portland Town Council, an early gay and lesbian organization that spawned the creation of Phoenix Rising and Right To Privacy, Oregon's largest gay and lesbian political organization.

Abele married Doris Hope Gramm in 1934. The couple separated in 1957. Soon after, Abele met Portland resident Warren James, to whom he became a lifelong companion.

"It's my understanding that John lost two or three friends to suicide because they were having a tough time dealing with their sexual orientation," explains Phoenix Rising Executive Director Allanya Guenther. "He founded Phoenix Rising using \$30,000 from his own practice. This was something that was very important to John and Warren, and they continued to provide significant support to the agency over the years."

Guenther, who has headed up Phoenix Rising for about eight months, adds: "I'm sorry to say that I did not personally know John Abele, but I believe that he and Warren, who had been together for 35 years, had an extremely nurturing and supportive relationship. Their relationship is an inspiration to others."

In addition to James, Abele's survivors include his daughter, Judith Baker, and son, John C., and two granddaughters, all of Portland.

Guenther says Phoenix Rising will hold a banquet honoring Abele on June 15 at the Portland Hilton. Remembrances may be made to Phoenix Rising Foundation or the Alzheimer's Association, Columbia-Willamette Chapter. For more information about the June ceremony, contact Phoenix Rising at 223-8299.

Inga Sorensen

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