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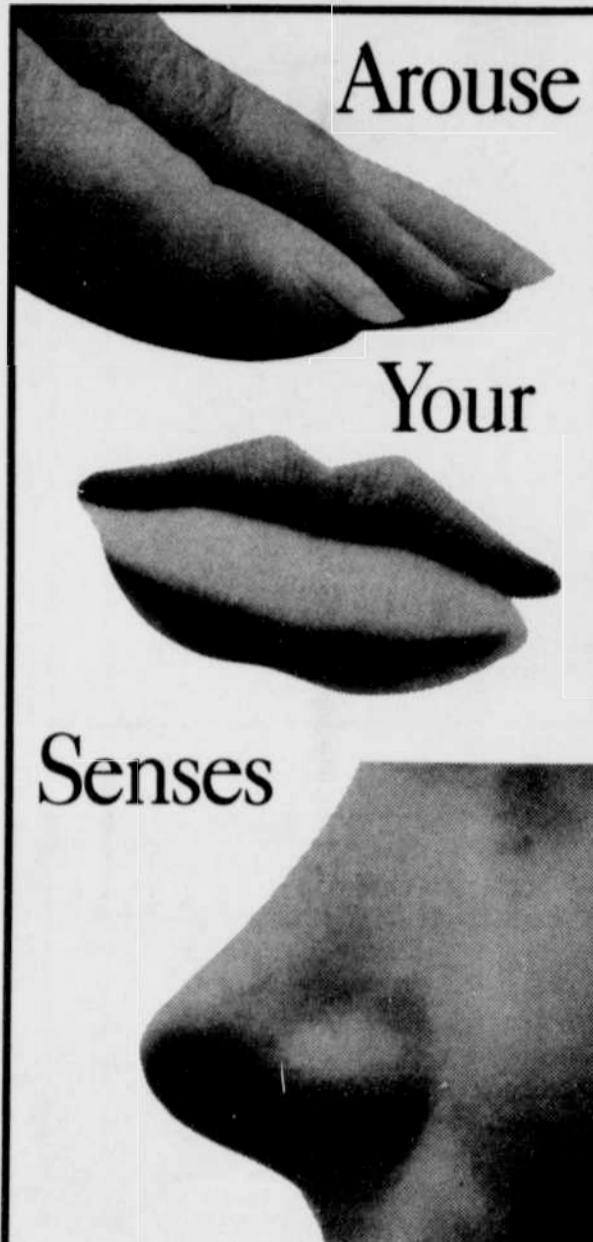
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## local news

# Driven by values

A Northwest man is forced into activism by his discharge from the Navy under the "don't ask, don't tell" policy

by Teri Ventura

**O**n June 26, Lt. Richard P. Watson announced a multi-level assault to the U.S. Defense Department's "don't ask, don't tell" policy regarding gay men and lesbians in the military.

Watson is being involuntarily discharged from the U.S. Navy because of homosexual conduct. He will file an injunction sometime this month to stop his forced discharge from the Navy; doing so will allow him to stay in the military while challenging the "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

Watson has also filed a formal discrimination complaint against the Reserve Officer Training Corps at Oregon State University, where until June 30 he was the Sophomore Instructor and Nuclear Programs Coordinator for the Naval ROTC. In that complaint, Watson requests that the provost of OSU halt all ROTC operations until the Navy stops its discriminatory practices. OSU has a policy forbidding discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Last, Watson will initiate legal action against the Department of Defense to eliminate its discriminatory policy of reducing separation pay benefits to members of the armed forces who are involuntarily discharged because of their sexual orientation.

Watson's ordeal began in October 1994, when he provided written notification to the professor of Naval Science at OSU that he is gay, in an effort to stop an extortion attempt and to abide by the "Core Values" of the U.S. Navy prescribing naval ethics. A formal inquiry ensued to consider Watson's fitness to serve based on his truthful statement regarding his homosexuality. On March 1, 1995, a three-member Board of Inquiry deliberated for 22 minutes and voted unanimously that Watson be "recommended for separation from the naval service by reason of homosexual conduct." The board recommended an honorable discharge.

Although Watson is being honorably discharged, his severance pay has been cut in half because the basis of his involuntary separation is homosexuality. Current Navy policy lists homo-

sexuality as one of the conditions that requires reduction of full severance pay by one-half. The secretary of the Navy has the discretion to grant full separation pay in extraordinary instances, where denial of such pay would be unjust. In this instance the secretary determined that Watson is not entitled to the full amount, despite his 13-plus years of exemplary service as a nuclear submarine officer and the recommendation of his commanding officer that he receive full pay.

Rep. Elizabeth Furse (D-Oregon) was moved to intervene on Watson's behalf. She wrote to Capt. Marty Alford at the Department of the Navy, requesting that Watson "receive a fair and impartial review of his military service record and that his severance pay be determined accordingly." Furse received a response from C. West, an assistant with the Navy's Congressional Liaison Office, who wrote: "Only those personnel fully qualified for retention are offered full separation pay. Lt. Watson is not qualified for retention since he voluntarily revealed his homosexual orientation to his Commanding Officer.... Even though Lt. Watson is a good officer, this does not entitle him to full separation pay."

Watson's attorney, Frank Dixon, believes that the Navy's severance pay policy is inconsistent with the new "don't ask, don't tell" policy. The severance pay policy was not reviewed or revised when the Department of Defense

adopted the "don't ask, don't tell" policy. Dixon has corresponded with representatives of the General Counsel's Office of the secretary of the Navy, and they have agreed to review these policies for consistency.

Watson is waiting to hear from the OSU provost regarding his complaint about discriminatory Navy practices through its ROTC program on campus, and is considering other options should that complaint fail to bring the Navy into compliance with the university's anti-discrimination policies.

Watson would like nothing more than to be allowed to continue to serve in the Navy and fulfill his lifelong goal to someday command a nuclear-powered submarine.



Lt. Richard P. Watson

PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER

## Pride of the Rose Scholarship applications available

The Pride of the Rose Scholarship is available to members of the lesbian and gay community and/or their children who reside in the Portland tri-county area or Clark County, Wash. Applicants must be pursuing their education beyond the secondary level and must be in demonstrated need of financial assistance to attain their educational goals.

The scholarship fund was founded by Rose

Emperor V Frank and Rose Empress XXI Allison Grey and is administered through Equity Foundation.

The final day for submission of applications is July 31. Applications are available from: Equity Foundation, PO Box 5696, Portland, OR 97228, 220-0628; The Embers, 110 NW Broadway; and The City Nightclub, 13 NW 13th Ave.

The award recipients will be announced in September during an annual benefit for the fund, time and location to be announced in the near future. The Pride of the Rose Scholarship fund has awarded \$40,000 to 33 students during the past 15 years.

Inga Sorensen