

SPORTS

Lesbian and gay softball takes off

Still in its first year, The Rose City Softball Association is a big hit

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by Inga Sorensen



The Rose City Softball Association brings men and women together

Jim Hernandez and his partner, Joseph Burgos, love to watch baseball. The couple, who moved to Portland from California's Bay Area a year and a half ago, were San Francisco Giants season ticket holders for many years.

"There was a woman who was also a season ticket holder who sat next to us. One day we struck up a conversation with her and she mentioned that her son was gay and that he was involved in a gay and lesbian softball league. We thought that sounded really intriguing, so we contacted him. Needless to say, we were hooked," says the 40-year-old Hernandez. "I started playing softball in 1992 and it was the most invigorating experience."

So when Hernandez and Burgos moved to the Rose City in 1994 and saw there wasn't much going on in the way of organized lesbian and gay softball, they decided to take the initiative.

"We circulated softball sign-up sheets at Portland's [1994] Lesbian and Gay Pride celebration to see if others were interested in playing. The response was great," he says.

From that interest—and a lot of diligent paperwork—grew the Rose City Softball Association, a nonprofit, slow-pitch softball league serving the gay and lesbian communities of Oregon and southwest Washington.

Upon determining there was in fact a high level of interest, Hernandez and other local gay and lesbian softball enthusiasts successfully petitioned the North American Gay Amateur Athletic Association for RSCA membership in the organization. NAGAAA has hosted a slow-pitch gay and lesbian World Series since the late-1970s.

According to Hernandez, seven teams are currently enrolled in RSCA—two all-gay male teams, two all-lesbian teams, and two co-ed teams, all of which play one another. Teams may have 15 members on the roster; participants must be 18 or older, and the individual membership fee for the regular season is \$35.

RSCA teams play 12 games over a 10-week period, which began April 30. Regular season play ends July 16. A post-season, single elimination tournament is slated for July 23. The winner of that tournament will go to the NAGAAA Softball World Series, which will be held in Seattle from Aug. 13 to 20.

"NAGAAA has more than 50 teams representing 30 cities across the country," says RSCA

commissioner Scott Franklin, who has played in a handful of NAGAAA Softball World Series over the years. "It's a terrific way to promote a positive activity, make friends across the country, and enjoy some friendly competition."

Both Franklin and Hernandez say it's also been a great way to bring the gay and lesbian community together.

"Gay men and lesbians don't have much opportunity to come together and play. We only seem to unite around health and political issues—or alcohol. We think this is a healthy option for us to develop relationships with each other, get some exercise, and enjoy a little competition," says Hernandez, who plays on a co-ed team sponsored by C.C. Slaughters.

The 40-year-old Franklin adds: "Though I play on an all-male team [sponsored by JOQ's tavern], I've had the opportunity to spend time with lesbians, which, to be honest, I had not previously done. It's been a real learning experience for me, in a positive way."

According to Franklin, businesses and individuals can sponsor a team for a \$275 regular season fee. This year's team sponsors are The Dirty Duck, C.C. Slaughters, JOQ's, Travel Agents International, East Avenue Tavern, Boxxes, and Drs. Sara Wu and Nancy Barron. *Just Out* and Friends of Our House are league sponsors. Hernandez says RSCA and its teams welcome additional sponsors.

"We have players with all different skill levels. Some of our members have never played softball before, yet wanted to be a part of something social. It's fun to watch them learn and grow. It's a real team effort," says Hernandez.

After the NAGAAA Softball World Series, RSCA plans to hold a "fall mini-season" in September and October. "The primary reason is that we want to meet NAGAAA's guidelines to establish a women's division next season. We have two all-women's teams now, and I think we'll be able to get at least two more for the fall mini-season," he says, adding that more than 60 men and women stopped by RSCA's Pride booth last month and expressed interest in joining the league.

RSCA games are held Sundays at Alberta Park, Northeast Twenty-second and Ainsworth Street, Field no. 2. Regular season games begin about noon; the July 23 tournament will begin around 9 am. For further information about RSCA, call 281-7637 or 244-8520.



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