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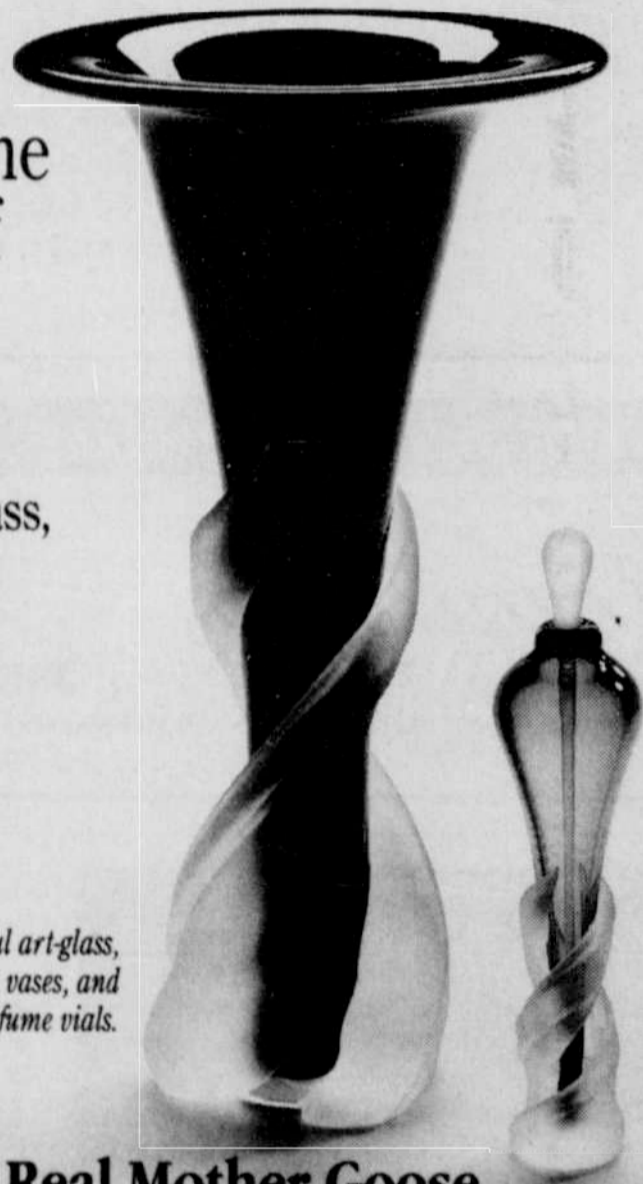
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local news

Fringe no more

The transsexual community takes RTP to task
for perceived exclusionism

by Inga Sorensen

Transsexual rights advocates say they want Right to Privacy PAC, Oregon's largest sexual-minority-rights organization, to change the name of its flagship fund-raiser and push for state-wide legislation that protects not only gay men, lesbians and bisexuals from discrimination, but transsexuals as well.

"We are really tired of being ignored and mistreated. The TS [transsexual] community was purposely excluded from the ADA [the Americans with Disabilities Act, a federal law barring discrimination against people with disabilities] and HIV/AIDS activists didn't do anything. We had to fight like hell to be allowed to participate in the Gay Games. We are a part of this community, too, and we want to be treated as such," proclaims 38-year-old Candice Hellen Brown, a local transsexual-rights advocate.

Brown says she is concerned about Right to Privacy's decision last legislative session to push a bill that excluded language she believes could have covered members of the transsexual and transgendered communities, in addition to gay men and lesbians.

Right to Privacy PAC has been lobbying state lawmakers for more than a decade to pass legislation that could protect gay men and lesbians from discrimination. During the 1995 session, Right to Privacy put forth a bill prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation in housing, employment and public accommodations.

According to Brown, more inclusive options were presented during an earlier brainstorming session among members of the sexual minorities community. She specifically points to a draft offered by state Rep. George Eighmey (D-Portland).

It read, in part: "Sexual orientation means having or being perceived as having an emotional [or] physical attraction to another person without regard to the sex of that person, or having or being perceived as having an orientation for such an attraction or having or being perceived as having a self-image or identity not commonly associated with one's biological sex..."

"That draft proposal incorporated inclusive language which could have covered transsexuals, but Right to Privacy went with something else," says Brown. "What that says to me is that Right to Privacy views the TS community as some fringe group that is expendable. They want us to disappear. Well that's not going to happen."

According to Eighmey, several proposals were discussed during that strategizing session. (On hand were representatives from Right to Privacy and several community organizations, as well as gay, lesbian and bisexual legislators.)

"We got together to discuss what we thought could pass, and how to do that," he says. "The majority decided the best thing to do was to go with a sexual orientation omnibus bill with a couple options in the wings, including an employment bill."

"I presented my draft," continues Eighmey, "but I think there may have been some people who thought if you included transsexual or transgendered people, it would frighten too many legislators. But this just wasn't Right to Privacy."

There were other people there."

"We were exploring different possibilities," says Right to Privacy chair Lisa Maxfield. "We had considered defining sexual orientation by listing various groups, but when you do that you're actually limiting yourself."

"On the flip side, you can get into trouble by using language that is too vague and ambiguous. If you do that, a lot of lawmakers will simply drop-kick the bill by claiming it is technically unsound.... We decided to go with a very clean bill."

According to Maxfield, specifiers of sexual orientation—such as homosexuality, heterosexuality or bisexuality—were not included in the bill that Right to Privacy ultimately went with. "Which we believe actually made the legislation more inclusive," says Maxfield, adding that perhaps it is best there be a separate bill covering the transsexual and transgendered communities.

"All I'm saying is that *maybe* that's the best way to handle it," she stresses.

That is an option that doesn't sit well with Brown. "To the OCA there is no difference between being gay and being part of the TS community. To them we are all the same."

Brown and other transsexual rights advocates also want Right to Privacy to change the name of the Lucille Hart Dinner, its well-known annual fund-raiser. The event is more than a decade old and attracts powerful political figures, including the governor and members of Congress.

The dinner was named for Alberta Lucille Hart, an accomplished physician and author who lived in Oregon from 1890 to 1962. Born female, Hart lived an adult life as male—dressing as a man, claiming a male pronoun, and marrying a woman. Some believe that Hart was actually a lesbian who lived outwardly

as a man as a way to better deal with society's homophobia.

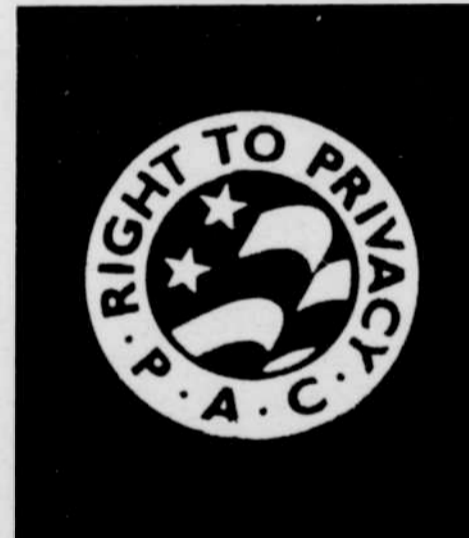
Brown and others, however, maintain that Hart was actually transsexual—someone whose essence was male, both internally and externally.

"This is a part of our transsexual history that has been stolen from us," says Brown. "To put Alan Hart out as a lesbian dressed as a man is inaccurate. We want the name of the dinner changed to the Alan Hart Dinner because that's who this person really was."

Says Maxfield: "How do you or I know the truth about whether Lucy was a lesbian or a preoperative transsexual? I'm not yet convinced that was the case."

And then there is the whole issue of tradition and name recognition. "People know this event as the Lucille Hart Dinner. For that reason alone there is some reluctance to change it," she says.

Maxfield encourages those who want to see a name change to present the Right to Privacy board with written information that they believe bolsters their case. "Right to Privacy wants to be more inclusive. We will be discussing all of this during our board retreat [in January]," she says. "I would also be surprised if anyone on this board wasn't fully supportive of backing legislation that protects transsexuals and transgendered people from discrimination. We are in total agreement with that goal."



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