

# Opening a dialogue

*Transsexual activists and the Right to Privacy board will sit down together to seek common ground*

by Inga Sorensen

**T**ranssexual rights advocates are scheduled to meet on Feb. 10 with the full board of Right to Privacy PAC, Oregon's largest gay, lesbian and bisexual rights organization. That plan stems from a Jan. 2 meeting—the first of its kind—between some RTP representatives and members of the transsexual community, who say they have been seeking an audience with RTP for several months.

"The meeting was a success in that we were able to start the dialogue with RTP. That is very encouraging to us," says Candice Hellen Brown, a local transsexual activist.

Brown was among a group of seven transsexual activists—five of whom are from Seattle—who met with RTP's executive director, Barry Pack, and two board members for a three-hour meeting in which transsexual activists shared their concerns about the name of the RTP political action committee's flagship fund-raiser, the Lucille Hart Dinner.

The annual 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 a woman, Hart lived an adult life as male—dressing as a man, using a male pronoun and marrying a woman. Some believe 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.

Last spring, activists formed the Ad Hoc Committee of Transsexuals to Recognize Alan Hart, and began demanding that RTP PAC change the name of its dinner. In October, a joint action by members of the Lesbian Avengers and the Ad Hoc Committee was conducted at the fund-raiser, and hundreds of flyers highlighting the matter were distributed to attendees.

"This is a part of our transsexual history that has been stolen from us," Brown told *Just Out* in the Dec. 1 issue. "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."

Following the Jan. 2 meeting, Brown said: "We went in there prepared to fight over this point, but we didn't have to at all. RTP told us their main concern about changing the name had to do with [the dinner's] name recognition. We were pleased that was their only concern."

RTP held a retreat a few days later, and the decision was made to allow transsexual activists to address the organization's entire board of directors in February.

"I think it [the Jan. 2 meeting] was a terrific meeting," says Pack. "It was enlightening. It's one thing to simply hear stories about discrimination. It's another thing to talk face to face with people about those experiences."

Pack says no decision has been made by RTP

about a name-change. "But the whole board will at least get to talk directly with members of the transsexual community about this on Feb. 10. That's important."

Additionally, Pack says RTP has made no decision about altering its mission statement to include transsexuals. He says RTP's mission statement currently—and explicitly—covers gay men, lesbians and bisexuals.

Another issue in question concerns statewide anti-discrimination legislation. RTPAC has been lobbying legislators for more than a decade to pass an anti-discrimination law. Transsexual activists have urged the group to push legislation that protects not only gay men, lesbians and bisexuals from discrimination, but transsexuals as well.

Activists have criticized RTP's decision last legislative session to push a bill that excluded language they believed could have covered members of the transsexual and transgendered communities.

"That's a bigger issue," says Pack. "There's no doubt our board supports full civil rights protections for the transsexual and transgendered communities, but whether our organization is the one to do that—or whether we should support others' efforts to do that—remains up in the air. That is a decision that requires a lot of input and cannot be made hastily."

In related news, Portland transsexual activist Margaret Deirdre O'Hartigan has asked the Portland City Council to extend civil rights protections to transsexuals and transvestites.

O'Hartigan, who made that request Jan. 10, reportedly wants those references included in the

existing sexual orientation definition contained in a civil rights ordinance barring discrimination based on race, religion, color, sex, marital status, familial status, national origin, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation or source of income.

According to the ordinance, sexual orientation is defined as "actual or supposed male or female homosexuality, heterosexuality or bisexuality." There is no mention of either transsexuals or transvestites.

Citing her personal experiences with transphobic discrimination, O'Hartigan also asked the council to direct the Metropolitan Human Rights Commission to take testimony from transsexuals and transvestites as evidence for changing the civil rights ordinance.

In response, Mayor Vera Katz reportedly says she will direct a Metropolitan Human Rights Commission hearing through Commissioner Gretchen Kafoury.

RTP, meanwhile, says it did not offer its official support of O'Hartigan's request "because we received news of her plans too late," says Pack.

"We just didn't have enough time to look at the language," he adds. "We didn't even know it was happening until we received a letter [from O'Hartigan] the day before the council meeting."



Margaret Deirdre O'Hartigan

PHOTO BY PETRANELLA YTSMA



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