local news

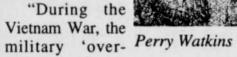
Military legend dies

The Pacific Northwest-and the nation-lost one of its pioneering civil rights activists following the recent death of Perry J. Watkins, the first openly gay man to challenge the U.S. Department of Defense's ban on gay and lesbian service members. The 48-year-old Watkins died March 17 of AIDS complications at his home in Tacoma, Wash.

Watkins was inducted into the U.S. Army in 1968, during the Vietnam War. Though he was openly gay, he was still admitted into military service. However, 15 years later, during the early years of the Reagan administration, Watkins was discharged under provisions prohibiting gay men and lesbians from serving in the military.

He fought the order and eventually won reinstatement, after a nearly decadelong court battle,

when the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the Army's appeal case. Sgt. Watkins was able to retire with an honorable discharge, making him the only open gay man or lesbian to retire with full military honors and benefits.



looked' the fact that a service member was gay. It wasn't the kind of hot-button issue that it is today," says Portlander Frank Dixon, 45, who served in the military during that time period. "I could identify with [Watkins'] struggle. Here was this man who served his country with distinction and great bravery, yet 15 years later his government turns on him—and I mean aggressively turns against him yet he had the incredible courage to resist. When you have pledged yourself and your life to your country, to have that happen, well, there must have been so much emotional anguish, yet he was able to stand up for what was right."

"Watkins was an example of how honesty and perseverance can make a difference," says Mark F. Johnson, news media director for the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, which assisted in the production of Sis: The Perry Watkins Story, a 1994 documentary that was made about his military career. The title, reports GLAAD, refers to Watkins' many performances as a female impersonator, which he staged for peers throughout his military career.

According to Johnson, Watkins was an outspoken opponent of the Clinton administration's "don't ask, don't tell" policy, calling it "absurd." He was also prominently featured in author Randy Shilts' book Conduct Unbecoming, a book detailing the military's unequal treatment of gay men and lesbi-

A script for a feature film-tentatively called Sovereign Immunity-and based on Watkins' life has reportedly been optioned by a production company in Hollywood.

First Women's Natural Building Symposium set

Women builders and artisans—as well as women interested in environmental and affordable housing issues—are coming together to share their skills and knowledge in building with natural and environmentally sound materials during the First Women's Natural Building Symposium and Hands-On Extravaganza to be held June 1-8 in Grants Pass.

Participants will design and co-create actual buildings: a cob gazebo and a hybrid structure incorporating natural building techniques. Workshops will be presented by women skilled in light clay/timber joinery and straw-bale, cob and sand-

bag/rammed-earth construction. Finishing skills will cover natural plasters and paints, earthen floors and tiling. Additional workshops will be offered dealing with building foundations, passive solar design, permaculture, living roofs and recycled-tire roofs.

On June 8 a Women's Natural Building Fair will be hosted for women and girls, who are encouraged to come to the site and join natural building in action. Cost of the fair is \$5.

The symposium and fair are sponsored by Groundworks, an organization dedicated to teaching people how to build low-cost, minimal-impact cob homes. This symposium is designed to inspire women to network with others in allied fields, forming personal links and working associations.

For more information or to register for the First Women's Natural Building Symposium and Hands-On Extravaganza contact Becky Bee at Groundworks, PO Box 381, Murphy, OR 97533; (541) 471-3470. Registration is limited to 45. The event costs \$200 to \$300 sliding scale for the week, including vegetarian meals and camping space. Early registration is appreciated.

Multnomah County touts diverse workforce

A new study released by the City/County Affirmative Action Office says Multnomah County is leading the state in equal opportunity employment.

According to the report, the county's workforce diversity closely matches the availability of women and minorities in the job market, measured at 59.28 percent and 14.61 percent respectively. For women, the county is 7 percent shy of the matching availability percentile; for minorities, the county is nearly 2 percent above the percentile.

"I am very proud of our success," says Multnomah County Chair Beverly Stein. "Having a diverse workforce is one of the ways we ensure fair service and creative, culturally relevant programs for county residents. I will continue to emphasize the importance of maintaining this high standard."

The latest numbers represent the highest total achieved by Multnomah County, which posted halfpercent gains in both categories, adding 107 women and 50 minorities during the second quarter of the county's 1995-96 fiscal year.

Women in the Woods again

For all of those women who enjoyed Women in the Woods-an all-women's event at Breitenbush Retreat Center—in years past, there's good news: It may be coming back.

According to "On Track," the newsletter of the Portland-based Lesbian Community Project, Phoenix Rising has given LCP permission to rebirth Women in the Woods, scheduled for 1997. That may sound like a long way off, but LCP is currently seeking volunteers to help with planning the event. Interested parties should call 223-0071.

Red Rose School kicks off spring term

The Red Rose School, providing continuing education for activists, begins its spring term with an open house and forum on April 7. The event, which is held at the Friends Meeting House, 4312 SE Stark St. in Portland, begins at 6 pm.

The forum will feature Bill Bradley of the Portland Greens; Susan Wall of the Rainbow Coalition and the Oregon Public Employees Union; and Jason Wehing of 223 Freedom and Mutual Aid Center, an anarchist center. It marks the first event in the Red Rose term, which includes 10 classes and 11 seminars addressing issues including campaign politics, labor history, radical theater, politics through film, Cuba and other topics. For more information, call 230-0488 or 659-9384.

Compiled by Inga Sorensen



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