

A Tale of Two 'Citys'

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community.

Prunk says The City Nightclub "is an unhealthy environment" for youth. To drive that point home, he says 10 arrests were made inside the club from June 2, 1995, to May 25 of this year.

He further says the department has received 19 citizen complaints about the club since the partnership agreement was signed four years ago. Prunk says those complaints came from club "patrons, parents of patrons" and neighboring businesses.

"We have gotten no complaints at all about the club," says Joleen Classen, 46, who heads up Neighbors-West Northwest, a neighborhood organization headquartered at Northwest 18th and Everett, a few blocks from The City.

Classen has known Swerdlow for nearly a decade, having first met him when she was a neighborhood crime prevention specialist.

"Law enforcement has a tradition of homophobia," says Classen, adding that she would not be surprised if anti-gay sentiment did play some role in The City Nightclub's current imbroglio. "It's getting better, but it's amazing how far we still have to go."

Classen, who has been invited by Swerdlow to The City, says: "These are just kids who may be a little harder around the edges, but they are still kids. You'd be harder around the edges too, if you came from some of the situations they have.... I also think some adults are startled by the kids' appearance, and maybe they are afraid. Some adults just don't understand."

As for alleged drug dealing at The City, Classen says: "There are drugs at all the clubs. There are clubs in the Northwest that are supermarkets for the stuff, and they're not getting slapped with the [drug house] ordinance. Now, why is that?"

When asked about alleged drug use and violence at other nightclubs, including the Quest, Prunk says the Police Bureau simply has "not received the same amount of complaints."

He also says the partnership agreement "is just that—an agreement, not a contract." Nonetheless, Prunk points to a paragraph in the agreement that states "if information is developed regarding criminal conduct of Mr. Swerdlow, or persons acting at his direction, the Police Bureau has no obligation to advise Mr. Swerdlow of said investigation, nor will it."

According to media accounts, Chief Charles Moose says he told Swerdlow a few years ago that he would not renew the agreement made between Swerdlow and then Chief Tom Potter.

Swerdlow swears that's an "outright lie." Moose did not respond to our phone calls before press time, and Prunk would only state that Moose and Swerdlow had a "private discussion."

Meanwhile, the Police Bureau's position that an "agreement is not a contract," and therefore not binding, has some people upset.

"We're very disturbed by the fact that the police seem to be saying that any police agreement is not binding. What's the point of doing it then?" says Classen, adding that neighborhood associations have partnership/community agreements addressing a host of concerns. "Does that mean these agreements are essentially worthless?" she asks.

Margaret Deirdre O'Hartigan, a transsexual rights activist, sent a letter to the Sexual Minorities Roundtable, an ongoing gathering between members of the sexual minorities community and police officials. The meeting was begun in 1994 with the signing of a partnership agreement calling for cooperation between police and the community.

"I am criticizing the Portland Police Bureau now, in relation to its evident bad faith regarding Mr. Swerdlow. I am also sounding an alarm to every participant in the Sexual Minorities Roundtable and gays, lesbians, bisexual and transpeople: If the Portland Police Bureau's disparaging treatment of the agreement reached with

Mr. Swerdlow teaches us anything, it is that the community agreement between members of the queer community and the Police Bureau will be breached when the bureau decides it is convenient and expeditious," she writes.

Prunk says Swerdlow had his chance—and blew it—to "clean up" The City Nightclub.

"He could have instructed employees to have [drug pushers, etc.] removed from the club. He could have put together an '86' list to get them out. That did not happen," says Prunk.

Just Out recently met with patrons at The City Nightclub, and many of them told us they had personally witnessed Swerdlow and club personnel removing troublemakers linked to drugs or violence. Many of the young people, who have battled drug and alcohol problems and are now clean, also said they *wanted* police to bust dealers and users in order to help keep the environment chemical-free.

"I started coming here seven years ago," says club patron Belinda Carroll. "Back then drugs were pretty rampant. It wouldn't be surprising for some acid to be slipped into whatever you were drinking. But it hasn't been that way for years. If Lanny sees something going on, those people are out of here. It's been that way for a very long time."

Carroll says prior to coming to The City, she was a "shy little fat girl" enveloped by insecurities and self-doubt. Today, at 20, she is articulate and lucid, possessing the strong vocal chords of the aspiring singer that she is. "I want to be singer," she tells me as we sit together at the club, "but right now I'm trying to save The City. That's my immediate goal. This place has been so positive for so many of us."

That sentiment is clearly shared by many queer youth (and was repeatedly voiced during our interviews with young people). Several weeks ago, Swerdlow and dozens of City Nightclub patrons spoke their mind during a forum featuring candidates for Portland City Council.

Not long after, an estimated 500 youth held a march and candlelight vigil at City Hall to protest the civil suit.

Swerdlow says Mayor Vera Katz received more than 300 personal, handwritten letters from youth, copies of which were supplied to *Just Out*, pleading that the club be kept open. He says she did not respond to any of their letters, and also ignored his written requests for a meeting.

Elisa Dozono, Katz's communications manager, says: "The mayor is concerned about the teenagers. She did receive several letters, but they didn't have addresses, so she couldn't respond."

Some letters did have addresses as well as phone numbers.

Dozono says the mayor "is always willing to meet with people to discuss issues," and says Katz has been to The City Nightclub, though she didn't know when or under what circumstances.

"[Katz] sees the kids at [Pioneer Courthouse] Square. She's listened to their concerns and has spoken with them directly," says Dozono.

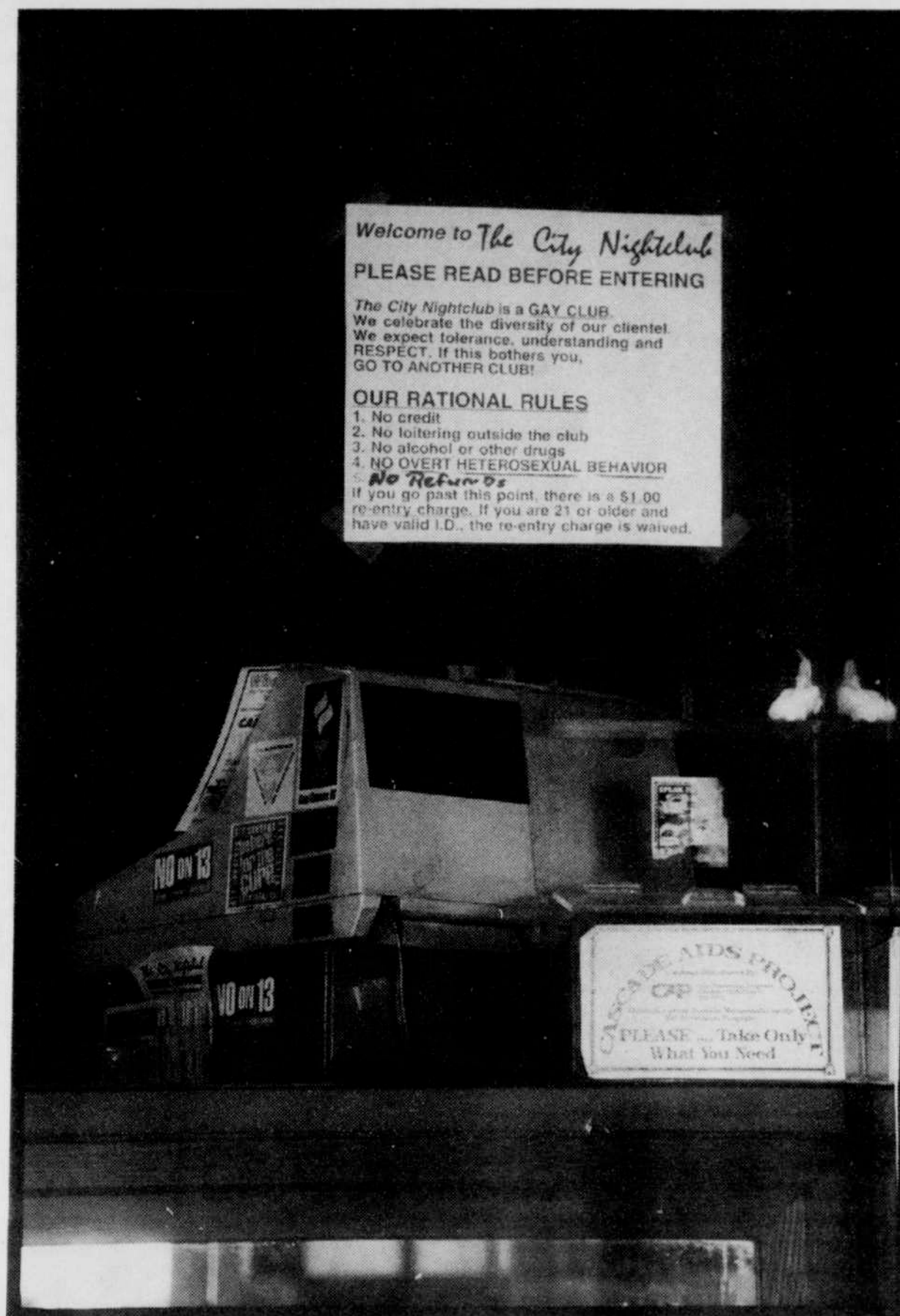
Ironically, when Katz was a state representative, she sent a letter to the OLCC supporting Swerdlow's request for a liquor license.

"I have known Lanny Swerdlow since he operated Mildred's Palace in downtown Portland, prior to the establishment of the Metropolis...in addition to providing evening entertainment, both of these businesses have provided viable entertainment options for young people in Portland during late afternoon and evening hours," said the letter, dated July 14, 1981.

In that same document, Katz described Swerdlow as a "conscientious businessman who operates a responsible establishment."

Needless to say, that feeling is not shared by everyone.

In fact, mention The City Nightclub to



social service providers who work with youth—especially street and queer youth—and the name evokes a potpourri of responses, but most typically, ambivalence.

One of Swerdlow's more outspoken critics is Peter Rosenblatt, 33, clinical supervisor for Harry's Mother, a program of Janus Youth Programs Inc. Among other things, Harry's Mother provides services to runaway youth and sponsors a youth group called Awakenings.

"I know that kids exaggerate, but the stories I have heard over the years from hundreds of kids are consistent, and I want to stress that in many cases these are young people who don't know each other," says Rosenblatt, who years earlier socialized at The City. He estimates the last time he was there was about four years ago.

The stories Rosenblatt is referring to mirror the Police Bureau's assertions that the club is a haven for drug dealing, prostitution and trolling.

"For many kids, The City Nightclub is a safe place for them to kick back and be themselves, however, for another group of kids—runaways, street youth, homeless kids, kids on drugs—it can be a dangerous place," he says. "Many times I hear kids say that if it's late and you need a place to stay, all you have to do is go to The City and someone will offer you a place to stay for the night. However, in exchange, a [youth] must perform a sexual act."

Rosenblatt adds: "What always disgusted me was the older gay men and younger gay boys—men in their 40s there ogling these kids."

Already existing concerns about seedy—and by implication, nonconsensual—scenarios involving older men and minor boys are further in-

flamed by Swerdlow's response.

In the June issue of the *Northwest Examiner*, a neighborhood newspaper, Swerdlow writes in a letter to the editor: "I am not going to condemn or condone people who are under 18 who want to have sex with people over 18."

It is that attitude that has many social service providers upset, and perhaps less willing to stand up for Swerdlow in his time of need.

Additionally, some alarming situations involving club personnel and patrons have occurred over the past few years. Two months ago, a 33-year-old registered sex offender was found dead, his throat slashed allegedly by three street youth he met outside The City Nightclub. Those teens are awaiting trial on murder charges and attempted robbery.

This past fall, a chicken was purposely killed onstage by a club patron as part of a live performance at The City.

In 1992 The City's then-manager, Richard O. Ready, was charged with possessing child pornography. A deputy district attorney said the pornography comprised eight tapes that showed sexual activity between boys ranging from pre-adolescents to young teenagers. Ready was eventually convicted and sentenced to 18 months probation and 15 days of jail with work-release privileges. Ready is still employed at the club.

"If you really want to create an intergenerational experience, you have to make the experience appeal to people of varying ages, not just teens and men who are 45," says Rosenblatt, who cites *Queer Night* at LaLuna as a positive example of intergenerational mixing.

Rosenblatt says LaLuna is physically more

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