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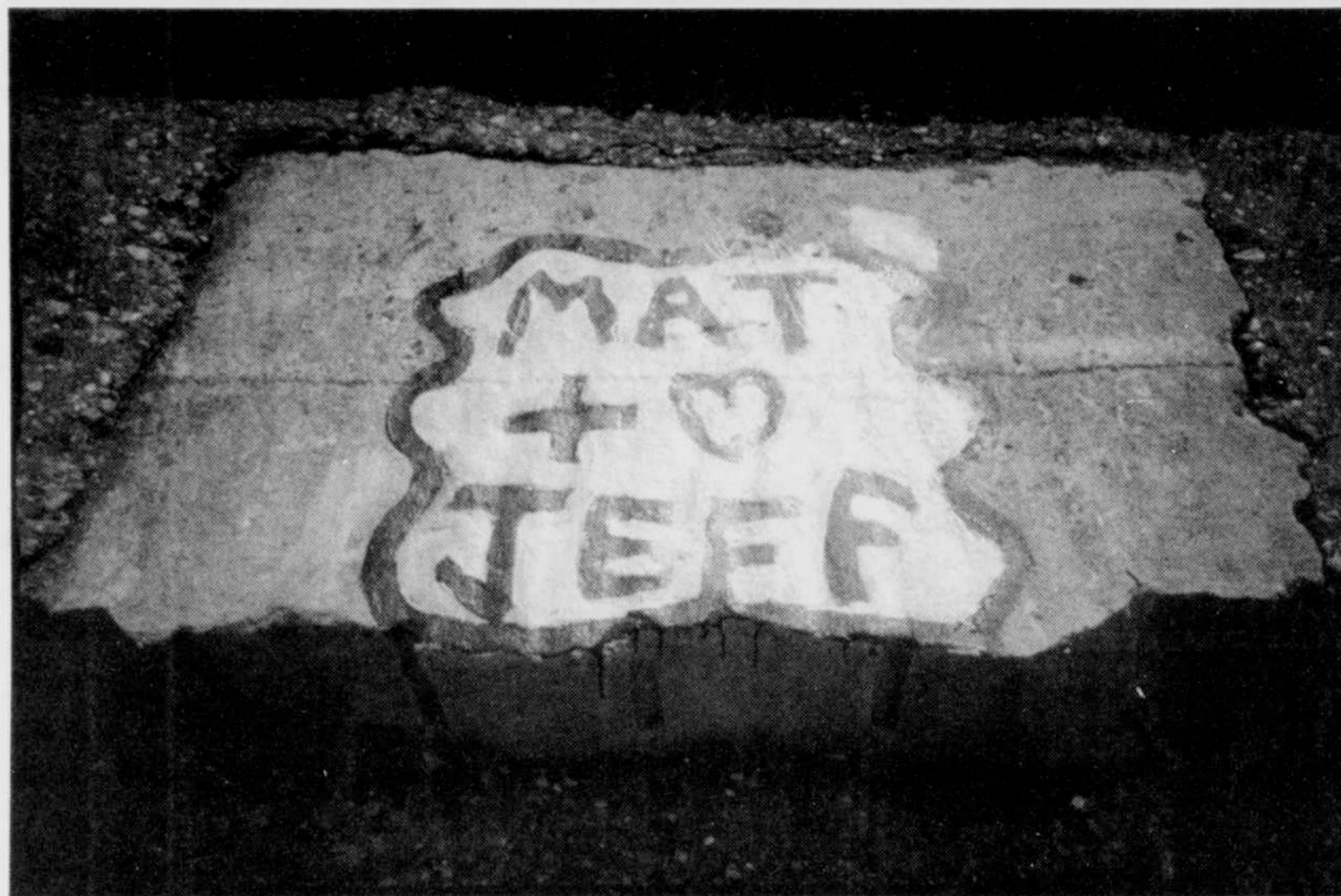


PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER

guest editorial

Any cinemaphiles out there?

Lackluster attendance at this year's Oregon Gay and Lesbian Film Festival threatens its future

by C. Jay Wilson, Jr.

What's to be the fate of the Oregon Gay and Lesbian Film Festival? Will Portland audiences support such a festival, and, if so, will that support translate into enough dollars to sustain the group or individual interested in orchestrating the event? I would hope that the meager support of this year's festival is not indicative of Portland's future interest in Gay and Lesbian films.

Advocates for Gay and Lesbian Equality, a local gay and lesbian service organization, assisted in producing and co-sponsoring the film festival the past three years of its eight year history in hopes of eventually accepting the sole responsibility for the festival.

After a rather disappointing 1996 Oregon Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, with about a 50 percent drop in attendance from last year's festival, the group has abdicated their organizational role. It appears that the festival's future is uncertain.

The film festival has been dropped completely into the lap of Cinema 21 owner, Tom Ranieri, and will remain there until another gay and lesbian organization emerges to shoulder some of the responsibility. Currently, the festival is safe in Ranieri's hands as he has pledged to keep it going, but as a non-gay man, it really isn't in his interest, and if audiences continue to significantly drop off as they did this year, it may even be counter-productive for him to continue the festival at his venue.

What comes first: an energetic group capable of putting

together a festival, or an interested community willing to support such an event? I would like to believe that the answer lies in finding the right set of dedicated, energetic individuals who all share the same vision of a thriving festival that can rival any other on the west coast.

Should such an organization emerge, it should be established with the express mission of putting together a film festival, pouring its energy into raising money and mustering excitement to help build bigger and better future festivals. An opening night benefit should be an event that ignites enthusiasm in the rest of the festival and should be one of the "see and be seen" events of the year.

Perhaps the festival should be moved to another time period. This year's opening was in direct competition with Lesbian and Gay Pride activities. But while this may have affected the attendance of opening weekend, it doesn't account for the lackluster attendance at the rest of the festival. Given the fact that Portland summers are ephemeral at best, June is perhaps not the ideal month in which to present an indoor film festival.

It certainly takes a lot of time and energy to plan and present a film festival, and Advocates for Gay and Lesbian Equality should be commended for understanding its significance and willingly accepting the challenge. It is a shame that, whatever the reason, the gay and lesbian film festival is not being supported. Is there anyone out there willing to give it some energy?

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