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Cory Howard

local news

Not immune

In an era of belt-tightening and changing funding strategies, LCP is leaner, but still strong

by Inga Sorensen

Transitions can be difficult, but sometimes they are necessary. Just ask LaVerne Lewis.

"It's true. It definitely can be tough, but sometimes there really isn't a choice," says Lewis, the executive director of the Lesbian Community Project, a decade-old organization whose mission is to "promote the well-being of the lesbian community through a grass-roots organization with an evolving multi-issue, multicultural perspective."

LCP recently launched a \$10,000 major donor campaign, its second in as many years.

According to Lewis, for many years LCP relied almost exclusively on grant funding to keep its doors open. Just a couple of years back, the group, which touts an estimated 850-person membership, was 70 percent grant dependent, and its

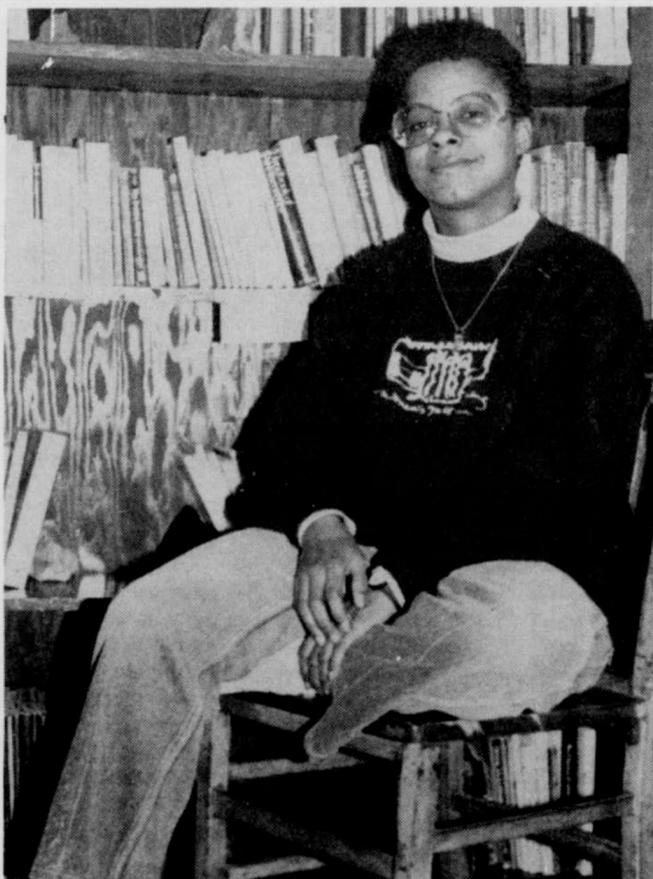
campaign in August 1995, pulling in \$9,000.

Shifting its emphasis a year ago was fortuitous, says Lewis, given the fact that this year one of LCP's longtime grantors, the Ms. Foundation, rejected a \$10,000 grant proposal. Lewis says that was "mainly due to their funding decrease and focus on abortion rights issues, the new and improved target of the far right."

At the same time, other funding, including an \$11,900 grant from the federal Department of Justice, was recently issued to LCP to support its Anti-Violence Project.

"Funding is tighter all the way around, but that's the way it is for everyone," says Lewis. "We're making the adjustments that need to be made."

In addition to increasing its fund-raising, LCP has scaled back its annual budget from \$100,000



LCP Executive Director LaVerne Lewis

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"It's very dangerous to become that grant dependent," says Lewis. "If you lose your major grants and have no other source of funding, the organization's future is clearly in jeopardy."

In 1993, LCP received a grant from McKenzie River Gathering to implement a BluePrint Project, whose purpose was to craft a five-year internal strategic plan for the board of directors to implement and maintain. Not surprisingly, a key element of the plan dealt with LCP's long-term economic development base.

According to Lewis, organizational fund-raising is one of the elements foundations look at when deciding whether to issue a grant. Community involvement in a group is another.

In May 1995, the board decided to move the organization away from being so grant dependent toward increased self-sufficiency. Lewis says "after long hours of learning to fund raise," the board kicked off its first annual major donor

to \$80,000, with cuts in payroll and overhead.

LCP continues to sponsor a number of projects, including its Anti-Violence Project, which documents reported bias and hate crimes against sexual minorities; a Lesbian Health Project, which includes support groups for lesbians with breast cancer and other diseases; a speakers' bureau; newsletter; various dances and social activities; as well as lesbian dragon boat, softball and Race for the Cure teams.

"Things aren't the same as they were 10 years ago," says Lewis. "Now there are more gay and lesbian groups and causes. But LCP has always been here. That won't change, but the way we operate is changing."

Donations to LCP are tax-deductible if checks are made out to its Community Education Project; mail donations to LCP, PO Box 5931, Portland, OR 97228. Membership fees are sliding scale. For more information about LCP and its upcoming events, call 223-0071.