

## local news

I think I'll take a little time and visit my parents in Palm Springs," says Lanny Swerdlow, 50, the controversial owner of The City Nightclub, an alcohol-free Portland dance club catering largely to sexual minority youth.

First, however, Swerdlow must find a qualified buyer to take over ownership of The City Nightclub, an establishment he has owned and operated since 1983. If Swerdlow fails to sell the club by Jan. 30, it will permanently close.

That tough dictate comes from a stipulated agreement between Swerdlow and the City of Portland, who have been locked in a legal battle for several months.

On Oct. 28—just a week before their scheduled trial date—Swerdlow and city officials agreed to a settlement which mandates that Swerdlow sell The City Nightclub by Jan. 30 and have no future association with it.

Additionally, the agreement calls for the implementation of several "security measures," including the installation of a video camera and posting of uniformed security guards within the club, increased lighting, a decrease in the music's volume and the monitoring of entertainment.

Club patrons will have to pay a \$2 re-entry fee (up from \$1), and will only be allowed to re-enter the club twice per visit. Only one person will be allowed into a bathroom stall. Police may also inspect the club at will while it is open, and club staff must be trained to monitor and detect any potentially illegal activity.

The agreement was prompted by a civil suit filed last December by Nancy E. Ayres, senior deputy city attorney, against the building's owners, ADS Investment Limited Partnership, which is controlled by the Schnitzer family.

The suit maintained that the club violated the city's Specified Crime Property Ordinance, which bars the use of a building for the distribution of a controlled substance.

Bolstering the city's contention were affidavits from Portland police officers who say they investigated the club from April to October of last year.

According to published reports, Portland police officer Robert Hollins, via his affidavit, maintained he observed "what appeared to be drug transactions and possible prostitution activity" while working undercover. He further stated that he purchased drugs at the club and encountered more than a dozen drug dealers there.

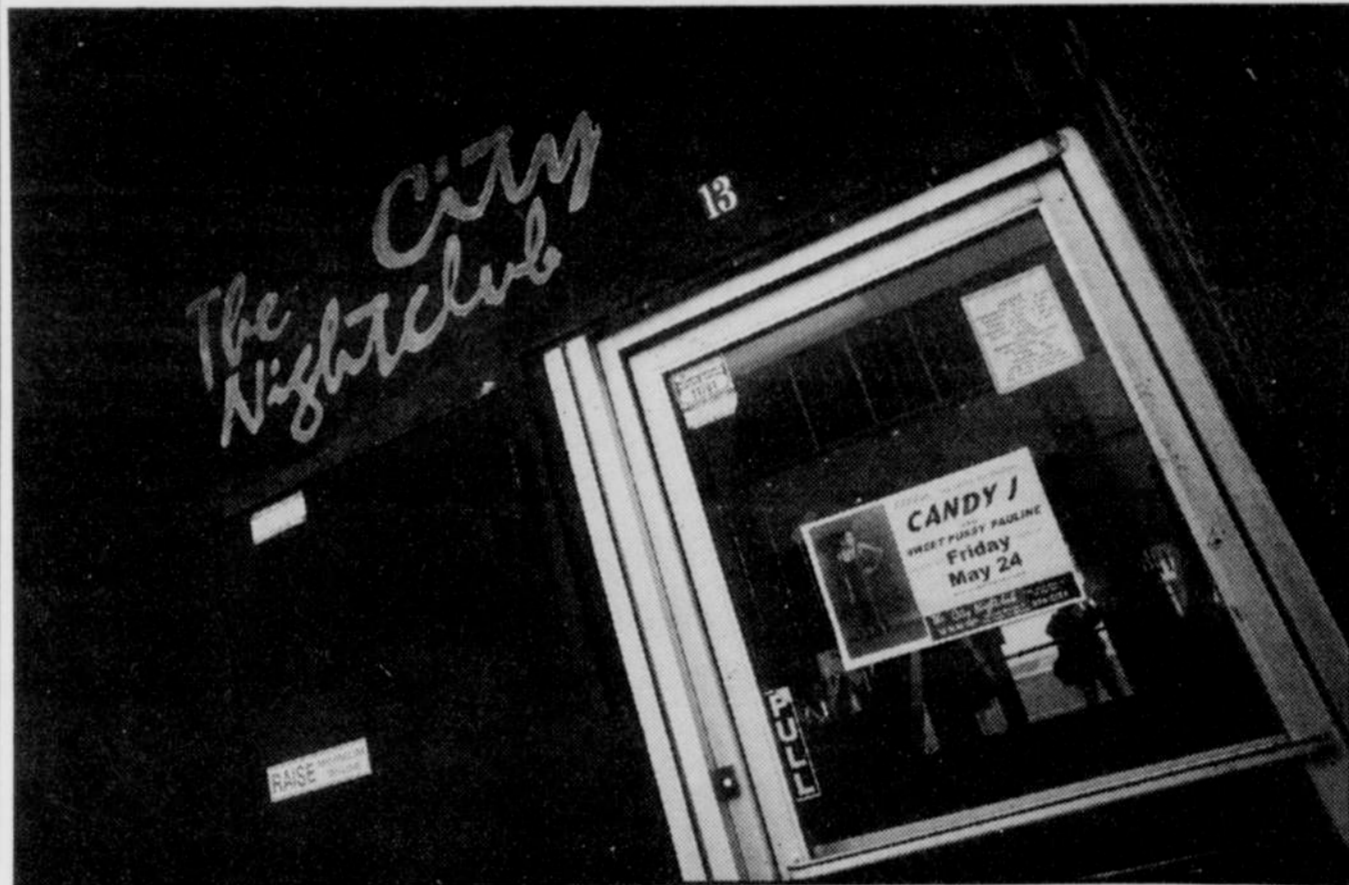
"I think the most important thing people should know is that Lanny Swerdlow, in this agreement, admitted he was in violation of the ordinance. I think that's significant," says Ayres, who wrote many of the operating conditions listed in the agreement. She says those conditions must be met by Swerdlow during his remaining tenure as owner, as well as by the new proprietor, if one is found.

According to Ayres, Portland police will conduct background checks of—and have the right to

## The short goodbye

Lanny Swerdlow, owner of The City Nightclub, has just two and a half months to find a buyer—or the club will close for good

by Inga Sorensen



approve or deny the sale to—any potential buyers. She also says Swerdlow was forced to post \$10,000 cash, which the city will keep if he is caught violating any terms of the agreement.

"This process has been an appalling waste of taxpayers' money," says Swerdlow's attorney, Jenny Cooke, who blasts the city's campaign to close The City Nightclub.

"If the city had told Lanny from the very beginning what they wanted him to do, he would have done it," she says. "Instead they've dragged everyone through this process needlessly."

Cooke says she and her client agreed to the stipulated judgment "when it became apparent that the city would never leave Lanny alone."

Swerdlow, a longtime neighborhood and community activist, has been operating for-profit social venues geared toward gay and lesbian youth since the 1970s.

In 1977, Swerdlow opened a no-alcohol club called Mildred's Palace, at 918 SW Yamhill St.

"Hundreds of gay and lesbian young people used to hang every weekend night near Third and Southwest Yamhill simply because there was no place for them to go," Swerdlow told us for our June 7 cover story about the club's woes.

Swerdlow added that the hangout was known as Camp, and its presence was unsettling to surrounding businesses and city officials.

"[Mildred's] got rid of the problem of all the kids hanging around at Third and Yamhill. The kids finally had a place where they could go. Everyone was grateful," he says.

Mildred's Palace eventually closed, and Swerdlow opened Metropolis at Southwest Third Avenue and Burnside. It too closed, but in the summer of 1983, Swerdlow and his LanMarc Business Corporation opened The City Nightclub, a place supporters have hailed as a lifeline to queer youth, in particular those who come from difficult circumstances.

Detractors—including Portland city officials and the Portland Police Bureau—have long maintained that the site was a nest for unrestrained drug activity and prostitution.

Swerdlow, meanwhile, claims Portland police have harassed him and his establishments over the years due largely to homophobia. He says he was beaten by Portland police in 1980, and in 1989 he says The City Nightclub was "illegally raided" by a band of public officials from the city's police bureau, fire marshal's office, Bureau of Buildings and Oregon Liquor Control Commission.

During a Sept. 10 meeting of the Metropolitan Human Rights Commission, Swerdlow reiterated that charge, saying Portland police, as well as city and county officials, had "systematically harassed,

deceived and perpetuated falsehoods about The City Nightclub in their attempts to close the club because of the sexual orientation of the majority of the club's clientele."

Swerdlow also told MHRC that when problems involving gang violence have arisen at the Quest, an all-ages Portland club with a primarily heterosexual clientele, "police worked with management to bring the problems under control."

"The police are willing to help the management of a straight club," said Swerdlow, "but will not work with the management of a gay club. It is pure and simple discrimination based on the sexual orientation of the club's owner and clientele. This type of discrimination has been outlawed by the Portland City Council and I am asking you to look into my allegations."

In response, MHRC, which is funded by both the city and Multnomah County, created a sexual minority youth task force to explore issues pertaining to queer youth.

"The city wouldn't tell me a year ago what they wanted me to do," says a post-agreement Swerdlow in a resigned tone. "Now they can tell me. Interesting, isn't it?"

City officials and police personnel aren't the only Swerdlow critics. Several social service providers who work with youth have also voiced concern about the club.

At best, they express serious doubts about whether the club provides a healthy environment for queer youth. At worst, critics in the social services industry have blasted the club as a dangerous and seedy site that places kids at risk.

At the same time, however, they have had to concede that The City Nightclub attracts huge numbers of young people, many of whom clearly hold the club dear.

"The kids who go to The City Nightclub obviously have a real sense of ownership. They view it as their space. I think it's important we listen to them," says Bonnie Tinker, executive director of Love Makes a Family Inc., a gay and lesbian family organization. "My own daughter [who is now 25] used to go there as a teenager."

She adds, "I know there have been problems, but that's the case with all underage places, including our schools."

Tinker and others also question the city's selective application of the Specified Crime Property Ordinance: "Why use it against this club but not others?" she asks.

For his part, Swerdlow says he's ready to move on.

"But I really don't know what I'm going to do at this point," he says. "What I do know is that I hope the new owner will keep this a club for gay and lesbian young people. They just don't have any place else—the thought of them having nowhere to go and be themselves, now that concerns me."

He adds, "After all, The City Nightclub has always been a place where we just don't tolerate diversity, we celebrate it."

### Ainsworth church embraces sexual minorities

Ainsworth United Church of Christ declared itself an "open and affirming" church to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people during an Oct. 20 congregational meeting.

In 1985 the United Church of Christ called for its churches to become "open and affirming." The Ainsworth church, located at 2941 NE Ainsworth St., began the process in 1993 but never completed it. When the church's new pastor, the Rev. Lynn Lopez, came on board in the spring, congregation members urged her to re-start the process.

A congregation committee planned a five-week educational process to lead the church to the "open and affirming" stance, recommending the decision be made by consensus rather than a vote.

The educational campaign included a panel consisting of representatives from the Lesbian

Community Project, Brother to Brother and Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, all of whom shared their experiences with coming out and other relevant issues. The congregation also viewed a video, *All God's Children*, which explored the experiences of gay and lesbian African American Christians.

### Youth advisory board forms

Thirty youth from across Multnomah County—from public and private high schools, alternative schools and youth organizations—are part of a landmark Youth Advisory Board.

The board is the brainchild the Multnomah County Commission of Children and Families. Its purpose is to provide a youth perspective to plans, programs, policies and projects involving or affecting youth in Multnomah County.

There are at least three sexual minority youth on the board.

### Booklet available on police and youth

Portland police and young people have come together to create *Working Together*, a resource handbook designed to help law enforcement and youth "better understand and interact with each other."

Some of the topics addressed in the booklet include problems youth identify with police (and vice versa) and how youth can solve problems with police.

The booklet also includes phone listings for youth shelters, a variety of hot lines, community centers, and teenage parenting, child care and health resources.

Additionally, *Working Together* describes laws most violated by youth, as well the details of Measure 11, a law which calls for tough penalties for those 15 and older who commit certain crimes.

The booklet was published by the Portland House of Umoja and Portland Police Bureau.

### Outside In clinic to close

Citing budgetary problems, Outside In says it will close its medical clinic come Dec. 1.

The agency's clinic, situated in downtown Portland, provides medical care to low-income people and homeless youth up to 21 years old. Founded in 1968, Outside In provides a range of services, with the clinic's closure those services will primarily be for homeless youth.

Several months ago agency officials announced they would have to close the medical clinic unless they were able to raise \$50,000 by June 30.

Outside In received a \$10,000 anonymous gift that enabled the agency to keep its clinic open during the past five months.

Compiled by Inga Sorensen