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local news

What's new at LCP

The failing organization is getting a shot in the arm from local activists and an Arkansas women's group

by Inga Sorensen

An effort is underway to breathe life back into the foundering Lesbian Community Project, a Portland-based organization currently saddled with a \$25,000 debt.

LCP board president Pam Monette says she recently hosted a gathering of several "community leaders," many of whom have some history with the 10-year-old group, to discuss LCP's precarious monetary and organizational condition.

"A lot of people didn't realize how bad things were," she says.

Over the past few months, LCP staff—including its executive director, LaVerne Lewis—have been laid off due to financial troubles.

According to Monette, LCP has been—like many nonprofits—dangerously grant dependent,

Pharr founded and has been on the staff of the Women's Project in Arkansas since 1981. For the past 15 years she has presented workshops on homophobia and internalized homophobia to social change organizations, schools and churches throughout the nation.

Pharr, who now lives in Oregon, has also authored books about homophobia and the right-wing movement.

According to Pharr, one of the Women's Project's purposes is to help selected struggling social change organizations get back on their feet.

LCP apparently fits the bill, and Pharr says the Women's Project, which promotes a multi-issue/multiracial philosophy, will fund her half-time position.

"Our initial plan will be to develop a new board, establish a leadership team and retire the



Suzanne Pharr

while at the same time unable to develop a viable community base of support.

To compound problems, board representation and support dwindled, forcing office hours to be dramatically slashed. (The chances of actually reaching someone at the group's Union Station headquarters became spotty at best.)

Monette says in mid-February she invited to her home several community members, including Kathleen Saadat, Marcy Westerling, Suzanne Pharr and Jack (formerly known as Linda Shirley), to discuss LCP's status and seek advice about what to do.

"I've said this before: Things are different than they were a decade ago. LCP used to be the only game in town. That's not the case anymore," Monette says, adding that one primary question pondered by the group was whether LCP should continue to exist at all.

"The resounding answer was yes," she says. And the wheels are already turning. Come April 1, longtime activist and author Suzanne Pharr will become an LCP staff member.

debt," she says, adding that young women and women of color in particular are being sought to fill board positions.

As for what happens after that, both Pharr and Monette say it's simply too early to know whether the direction of LCP, which historically has been a social and advocacy organization, will shift.

LCP's current mission, in part, is to "promote the well-being of the lesbian community through a grass-roots organization with an evolving multi-issue, multicultural perspective."

Over the years the group has sponsored 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; a newsletter; various dances and social activities; as well as lesbian dragon boat, softball and "Race for the Cure" teams.

For more information, contact LCP at 223-0071 or Monette at 284-0722.

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