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local news Making change

Equity Foundation fuels a network of projects that strengthen the queer community and the community at large

by Inga Sorensen

hen you're planning your estate, don't forget about us.

That is both the advice and hope of Karen Keeney, a board member of Equity Foundation, which works to build communities that embrace the dignity and worth of all people.

Over the years Equity Foundation, which was established in 1989 by a group of Oregon gay men and lesbians—including Keeney—has distributed more than \$430,000 in grants and scholarships throughout Oregon, supporting community education, health and social services, youth and family programs, and arts and culture.

During its second cycle for 1996 grants, Equity disbursed a total of \$46,092 to a slew of nonprofit organizations to support human rights projects statewide.

The recipients included Janus Youth Programs, which received a \$7,000 grant to support Camp Odyssey, a statewide diversity education and leadership program for Oregon youth ages 15 to 17;

\$1,000 to Clergy and Laity Concerned in Eugene, to help fund youth and justice antihomophobia activities; \$4,000 to the Lambda Community Center Association in Ashland to support a newsletter and organizational workshop to help sustain the new Abdill-Ellis Community Center; and \$5,000 to Portland Area Camp Fire for its Diversity Education and Leadership Training Project, which teaches sixth through ninth graders leadership skills and ways to motivate other youth to challenge their attitudes and stereotypes.

Equity distributed nearly \$90,000 to nonprofits last year. The organization also awarded \$16,500 in scholarships, through the three scholarship funds that it administers.

"There are many ways you can go about changing the world," says Keeney, a Portland attorney. "Equity is one

way of doing that, and it certainly meshes with my vision of making lasting change.... You can have all the laws in the world but that may not touch people on that human level. The projects we support do."

In January, Equity exceeded the \$1 million mark for total dollars raised, a particularly notable feat given that it was a mostly volunteer-driven effort.

Much of the money now raised comes via an annual workplace-giving campaign. Equity has become increasingly visible in that effort, appearing alongside United Way and other mainstream nonprofits that are involved in federal, state and local campaigns. (Equity reached more than 82,000 Oregon public employees through workplace giving campaigns last fall. The donations often come in \$5 and \$10 amounts.)

In December, meanwhile, Equity received its largest gift to date, valued at \$104,000, and expects that a significant portion of that amount will be given out as grants this year.

At the request of the donors, the gift was used to establish the Gary R. Maffei and Marcus R. Litner Fund, a new donor-advised fund of Equity Foundation.

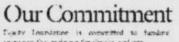
Maffei, a longtime supporter of civic projects and philanthropic fund raising in Portland, currently serves as vice president of the Merlo Foundation and chairs the annual Fabric of Life event and Our House of Portland, both of which support the AIDS community. Litner is an interior designer and artist.

According to Equity board member Curt Jantz the gift means a great deal, especially because it comes from someone who is highly familiar with charitable giving and knowledgeable about foundations.

"Gary Maffei is very civic minded," says Jantz. "This gift is a strong endorsement of Equity in light of his long history of broad-based community involvement."

Equity's permanent endowment fund, meanwhile, has topped \$200,000. The foundation hopes to increase the fund to \$1 million in three years.

Equity is also moving beyond the sexual minorities community in building partnerships, fund raising and awarding grants.



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PHOTOS BY LINDA KLIEWER



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Board member Carole Morse spearheaded the effort to gather donations from the corporate sector—an area new to Equity—which has since received substantial gifts from Portland General Electric, Legacy Portland Hospitals and Fred Meyer. Some of the funds went toward diversity training for teachers and teenagers.

"Equity's goal is to be good stewards, to serve the sexual minority community as well as take an active role in the entire community," says Jo Durand, a past Equity co-chair. "It's natural to interact with the larger community and build healthy relationships with others."

And while things seem to be rolling along quite well for Equity, Keeney asks that people remember the foundation when they are planning their estates.

"Some very forward-thinking people have left bequests to Equity," she says. "They realized that there were other options with respect to their estate and charitable giving.... It can be a lasting legacy."

To learn more about Equity Foundation, call 220-0628 or write to Equity Foundation, PO Box 5696, Portland, OR 97228.