

In the wee hours of May 23, fire ripped through the Lovejoy Surgicenter, a health care facility snuggled on a semi-quiet street in Northwest Portland. The center also happens to be Oregon's largest provider of abortion services.

Behind the building, located at 933 NW 25th Ave., sat a metal drum, which hovered near a junky-looking blue Chevrolet Citation parked next to Lovejoy's rear door. A hose journeyed from drum to building.

By the time the final spark went dead, an estimated \$425,000 in damage was inflicted. Emotionally speaking, staff appeared shaken and angry—though it certainly wasn't the first time the center had shouldered the brunt of violence.

Anti-abortion rights activists have long made their presence felt at Lovejoy Surgicenter, via pickets and other protests.

Eight years ago Lovejoy garnered \$8.2 million after successfully suing Advocates for Life, an anti-abortion organization often described as ultra-extremist.

The building was also set ablaze five years ago. Grants Pass resident Rachelle "Shelley" Shannon, a radical anti-abortion activist, was eventually convicted of a slew of arsons, Lovejoy's among them, involving health care facilities throughout the West that offer abortion services. Shannon was later sentenced to 20 years in prison.

This time the attack occurred just days after bomb threats had been phoned into clinics that provide abortion services in Portland, Eugene and Yakima, Wash. Again, Lovejoy was on the list.

The stew of history blended with the evidence in this most recent case almost immediately led federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearm officials to deem the fire an arson. The investigation into the person or people behind the crime continues.

A few days after the fire, meanwhile, demonstrators gathered in Northwest Portland to condemn the act of aggression.

"When the right wing attacks any group—gays and lesbians, immigrants, unions—we need to visibly stand against that siege," says Radical Women member Marjie Sandoz, who helped orchestrate the demonstration, which featured an array of socialist organizations including Radical Women, Socialist Action, International Socialist Organization and the Freedom Socialist Party.

Sandoz urges people to remember how effective it was when various communities joined together to help defeat the extremely divisive anti-gay rights ballot initiatives, measures 9 and 13.

"It took the whole community to come out to

Fire rocks clinic

Arson levels extensive damage on Northwest Portland's Lovejoy Surgicenter, but work goes on undaunted

by Inga Sorensen

beat those," she says. "Not just one segment—all of us. That's what we must do in the face of this campaign against women. But the key is to be multi-issue—to stand up for immigrants, to defend women on welfare, to back those with disabilities. We cannot afford to be single-issue."

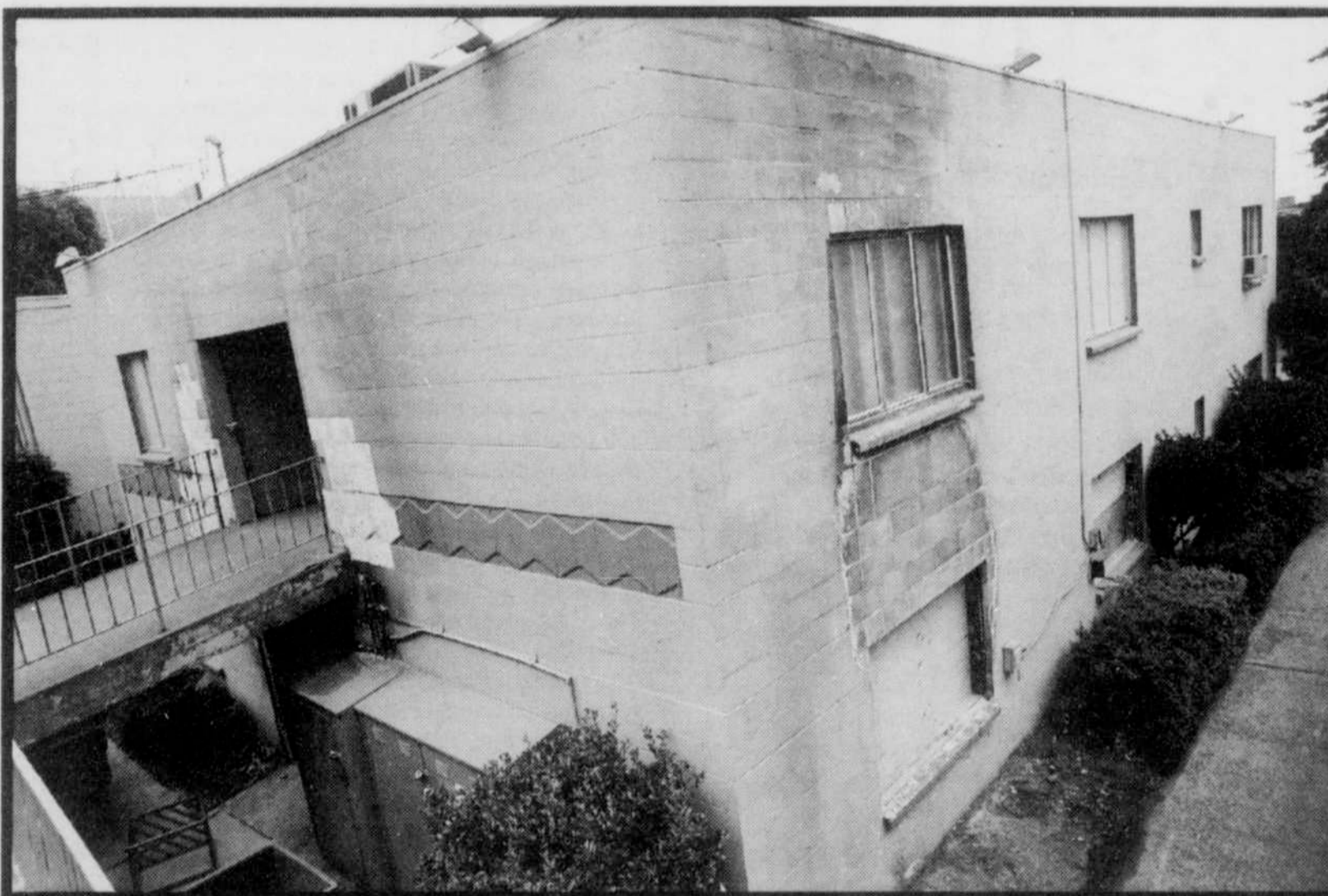
Carye Ortman, who has been Lovejoy Surgicenter's director for the past four years, says the show of support makes a difference.

"Radical Women put together the march a

matic—but at the same time, we did not let this interfere with our work."

According to Ortman, Lovejoy did not have to cancel any of its procedures, because the facility was scheduled to be closed the day the fire occurred anyway. Additionally, she says other health care providers made their facilities available to Lovejoy staff so appointments could go on as planned.

"Whoever did this must be disappointed," she says.



A view of the damage at Lovejoy Surgicenter

week after the fire and even though it was downpouring, 50 to 75 people were there," she says. "It was very uplifting. Also, a great group of men from CAP[Cascade AIDS Project] and Our House came over to help with clean-up...and we received 150 faxes from other clinics across the country telling us to hang in there."

Ortman says that sense of camaraderie has been vital in helping center employees through this ordeal. "We've even had counselors come in to meet with staff," she says. "It's very trau-

"America is facing a campaign of terror," says Lisa Horowitz, executive director of the Oregon chapter of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League.

According to Horowitz, attacks nationally against clinics that provide abortion services have escalated in 1997 compared to 1996, which saw a decline from previous years.

She says she's not exactly sure of the reasons behind the activity, but feels it must be counteracted—on all levels.

"We're seeing an upsurge in violence, and we continue to see anti-choice legislators try and tear away at women's legal right to abortion," says Horowitz.

A handful of bills that could hinder access to abortion in Oregon have been introduced this session in the state Legislature. Among them is House Bill 3532, sponsored by Rep. Ron Sunseri (R-Gresham), which would require that a "parent, guardian or conservator of minor female be notified before performance of abortion, with specified exceptions." The measure would punish failure to give notice by a maximum 30 days' imprisonment, \$1,000 fine, or both.

Senate Bill 1132, sponsored by Sen. Marilyn Shannon (R-Brooks), and cosponsored in part by Republican Reps. Charles Starr of Hillsboro, Sunseri, and John Minnis of Wood Village, would make it a crime to "perform an unlawful partial birth abortion" punishable by imprisonment, a

fine or both.

Sen. Eileen Qutub (R-Beaverton), has also introduced a potpourri of bills that could chip away at access.

Shannon, you may recall, is the chief sponsor of the so-called Defense of Marriage Act, which would block same-gender couples from attaining equal marriage rights in Oregon.

Shannon, Sunseri, Qutub, Starr and Minnis (among others) are known for their resistance, at best, to gay rights and their strident and effective opposition, at worst, to the acquisition of those rights.

Both Sandoz and Horowitz say it's important to note the links between those who oppose sexual minority and abortion rights.

Horowitz, meanwhile, says she doesn't expect any of the anti-abortion rights bills to clear the Legislature this session.

Despite that, she says their very existence poses a threat.

"Abortion and abortion rights may be yesterday's story for the media, and I think the public is tired of the divisiveness, but the fact remains that women's reproductive rights are continually under attack and we need to stand against that," she says.

Lovejoy Surgicenter is seeking donations to assist with building repair and upgrade.

Those wishing to help may send checks to Lovejoy Surgicenter, 933 NW 25th Ave., Portland, OR 97210. Specify on the check that the money is to be used for that purpose.


The facility also uses volunteer escorts for clients when necessary. For more information about becoming an escort, contact Karen Perry at 221-1870.

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