

POLITICAL SNAPSHOTS

TO MERGE OR COOPERATE: THAT IS THE QUESTION

Should Oregon's major lobbying organization, Right to Pride, merge with the more initiative-oriented, grass-roots-driven Basic Rights Oregon?

That's the question being floated by BRO head Jean Harris, who suggests the two organiza-



Jean Harris

tions—which share an ultimate goal of equal rights for gay men, lesbians and bisexuals—may function more efficiently by, at the very least, melding office space and staff.

Currently RTP is ensconced in downtown Portland, while BRO is up on Southeast Belmont. The two have separate staffs and boards. RTP's primary goal is to raise and endorse political candidates who support queer rights. BRO, which grew from 1994's No on 13 campaign, has focused on fighting anti-gay ballot initiatives, and most recently promoted the concept of going proactive in 1998 via a statewide initiative designed to prohibit employment discrimination based on sexual orientation.

That push, however, came to a grinding halt following the overwhelming defeat of a similar initiative in neighboring Washington last month. Harris says at this point BRO will likely drop back to its traditional role of countering anti-gay initiative campaigns.

The Washington loss, she adds, has her thinking more broadly about the gay and lesbian rights movement.

"What's important to gays and lesbians? What will motivate them? One of the reasons the initiative failed in Washington was that they couldn't really motivate the gay community," Harris says, adding a lack of motivation may translate into lackluster fund-raising as well. "No doubt about it, it's very difficult raising money in the gay and lesbian community now."

All the more reason, Harris suggests, that some form of BRO-RTP coupling occur: to minimize the competition for financial support.

"But I also think we can be more efficient working under an umbrella," she says. "Why have two administrative assistants? Why have two field organizers?"

She adds, "BRO has statewide phone and mailing lists, while RTP is more geared toward particular districts. They don't have the same kind of grass-roots network. If we were in the same office, [RTP executive director Barry Pack] could say, 'Hey Jean, we need to lobby so-and-so lawmaker, who locally is there to help?' That kind of thing."

Harris admits the idea is just that—an idea, and a fledgling one at that.

"Maybe it won't happen anytime soon. Maybe in a year. I don't know, but I certainly think we need to take a closer at the concept," she says.

Pack, meanwhile, says no merger is planned, at least in the foreseeable future.

He says, however, he would like to see increased cooperation between BRO and RTP in, for example, holding joint events, sharing voter and donor rolls and mailing lists.

Pack notes BRO has a 40,000-person donor and volunteer list plus another 40,000 names of voters who have been identified as gay-friendly.

He says that 80,000-person-strong list could be utilized as ammunition by RTP when it promotes its Employment Non-Discrimination Act and other bills in the Oregon Legislature.

"Cooperation is what I'm thinking—nothing more at this point," he says.

KICK-OFF TIME

RTP will host a December campaign kick-off dubbed "Take Back the State in 1998."

According to RTP field organizer Shannon Fields, the campaign is designed to ensure that gay-rights backers maintain two-thirds majority support for ENDA in the 60-member House, win three state Senate seats, and—in order to fund those goals—raise \$250,000 by the November 1998 election.

She says RTP is also seeking volunteers who are willing to pledge a few hours during the campaign season to help with any number of tasks.

"I know ballot measures can be sexier, but we can make a tremendous difference in our future by who we elect," she says. "Let's not allow the likes of [ultraconservative state legislators] Eileen Qutub and Marilyn Shannon to always control our destinies."

The free event will be held from 6 to 8 pm Tuesday, Dec. 16, at Froelick Adelhart Gallery, 817 SW Second Ave. For more information, call RTP at 228-5825.

PACK WINS STONEWALL AWARD

The Anderson Prize Foundation has awarded RTP's Barry Pack one of its four Stonewall Awards for 1997.

Recipients each receive an obligation-free cash award of \$25,000 in recognition of their work in a range of activities such as scientific research, education, social services, the arts and charities that affect the gay and lesbian community.

The awards are named for the 1969 Stonewall rebellion in New York, the first widely recognized act of collective defiance against repression that propelled the modern gay and lesbian rights movement forward.

The Anderson Prize Foundation funds and administers the awards. It was established in 1990 in Chicago as a not-for-profit charitable and educational organization designed to bolster the gay and lesbian community.

The late Paul A. Anderson, a futures trader in Chicago, provided the initial funding for the foundation as well as a bequest of \$1,125,000 to endow the prizes after his death.

Anderson died in 1992 at the age of 43 of AIDS-related complications. He was active in gay and lesbian causes as well as in the support of developmentally disabled children. His companion of 13 years, Allen Schuh, now heads the foundation.

The awards process starts when the Anderson Prize Foundation invites gay and lesbian leaders to anonymously nominate potential recipients.

A committee of foundation directors and previous winners selects four winners, one each from the northeast, south, midwest and west.

Pack says he plans to put his award toward the purchase of a house.

"This is a dream come true," he says.

Reported by Inga Sorensen



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