

I have to admit to a bit of bias in support of Rick Spencer's claim that his bookstore, Gai-Pied, is committed to being a full-service resource for the gay male community. The evidence rests on the shelves of his store and with his deeds.

I first met Spencer in April 1996, while I was laid up in the hospital recuperating from a spinal cord injury. He had read about my accident in *Just Out* and came by to personally deliver something I had ordered from his store weeks before. Along with exhibiting a wonderful bedside manner, Spencer is exuberant when it comes to his dedication to going beyond being considered simply a bookseller.

Spencer is the owner of Gai-Pied (pronounced "gay pee-ay"), and makes his community presence known yearly with booths at both the Portland and Vancouver Pride celebrations. And in order to better serve the community, Gai-Pied has become a part of the information super-highway with its new Web site ([www.gaipied.com](http://www.gaipied.com)).

Spencer seems proud of building virtual bridges with gay men from places as near as rural Oregon to as far away as Mexico, a market that he says is rarely tapped. Spencer admits, however, that his main goals for Gai-Pied are to stay on top of the most recent book and gay-themed theatrical video releases and to secure his clients' special orders. (Such orders usually take three to seven days, depending on the publisher.)

While some of the materials available at Gai-Pied may appeal to a wider audience, Spencer is focused on serving the gay male community.

"I believe Gai-Pied will remain a men's store," he says. "There have been requests from some women to carry lesbian-oriented material, but I don't think so."

Spencer says he believes that bookstores in most cities try to combine lesbian and gay literature. But Portland, he says, is accustomed to separate stores.

"Men are more comfortable in an all-male space as a community setting," Spencer reasons. "My understanding is that years ago there was a store in Old Town that started as a men's bookstore, but eventually added lesbian-oriented material and ended up closing down. I like to focus on men only, to do justice to what is available."

## From one good book to others

Rick Spencer preaches community from a different kind of pulpit

BY RUPERT KINNARD

Spencer is very pleased with the support he's received from Holly Mulcahey, owner of It's My Pleasure, a Portland book and gift store that caters largely to a lesbian clientele.

Growing up in North Carolina as a right-wing Christian, Spencer even spent time behind a pulpit as an evangelist at age 17. But upon turning 21, he recalls, he began questioning everything.

In 1984 Spencer received a Christmas present that changed his life: a ticket to visit his

that coincided with stumbling across C.C. Slaughter's, a gay bar. During his third visit to the bar he met the man of his dreams, Allen Forbes, a hearing-impaired man who would become his lover for 10 years. Forbes passed away of AIDS-related-illness in March 1995.

Later that year, Spencer decided to start his own business. The decision to open a bookstore won out over the possibility of opening a coffee shop.

Though he had considered the Hawthorne area for his venture, Spencer says he feels for-

from the mayor's office stopped by to check out the new business and to offer support.

As further proof of his willingness to put extra energy into the service he provides, Spencer was able to turn the only ordeal he has faced since the store's opening into a positive experience. For a time there were problems with some street youth hanging out in front of the store and hassling customers. The police response was disappointingly slow, he says. Taking matters into his own hands, Spencer says he opened a dialogue with some of the youth and was able to answer questions they had about being gay. He reports that he's had very little trouble since.

Spencer says he was able to gain the kids' respect and impressed upon them that he "didn't choose to be gay." He finds his most rewarding conversations with them involve issues about accepting people for who they are.

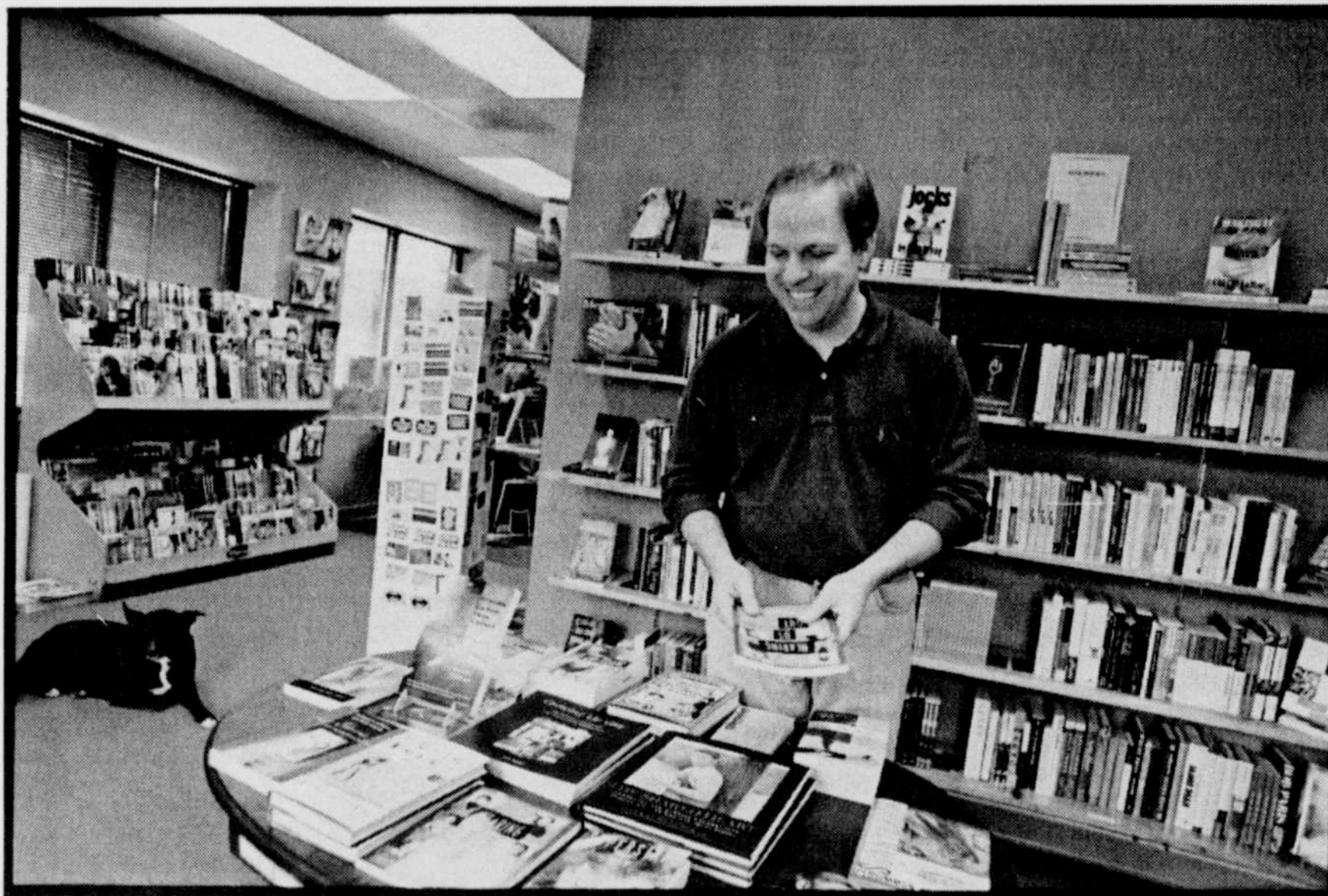
He is currently working with two fledgling groups for queer youth, trying to stock relevant materials, and often talks to young people who wander into the store.

Though Spencer presently lives in Vancouver, he says he would like to move to a neighborhood closer to Gai-Pied. Always looking to improve his store, Spencer hopes to add on that coffee shop and has developed a club for frequent book buyers.

"If you buy 12 books over time, you get the 13th free," he explains. "And we're the only store in the area that offers hardcover book rentals."

Gai-Pied also welcomes trade-ins for credit and is working on a video-rental discount program.

Spencer confesses a belief in trying to use his business to make a difference in the community. He says the point he stresses to young people is "What good is life if you only choose to work for money?" And he continues to make sure his actions speak louder



Rick Spencer fine tunes a display table under Sam's watchful eye

sister in Portland. That visit, scheduled to last two weeks, has never ended. Spencer loves Portland so much that he's never returned to North Carolina, where his 81-year-old, staunchly conservative Christian father keeps the home fires burning.

About a year after settling in the Rose City, Spencer says, he came to grips with the possibility of his being gay. A realization, he says,

tunate to have opened Gay-Pied at a crucial time in the development of the small business corridor on Northeast Broadway between 20th and 28th avenues. With the Metropolitan Community Church of Portland and a number of gay- and lesbian-owned businesses nearby, the area is welcoming to gay folks. Another plus: parking is plentiful. Within two or three months of Gay-Pied's grand opening, a liaison

than his words.

■ Author and former Portlander TOM NUSSBAUM will read from and sign copies of his new book, *Completing the Course*, from 1 to 2:30 pm Saturday, April 18, at Gai-Pied Bookstore, 2544 NE Broadway. For more information, call 331-1125 or e-mail [books@gaipied.com](mailto:books@gaipied.com).

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