

Some queer activists are trying to jump-start the Sexual Minorities Roundtable, which once was treated like a shiny new Christmas toy but has, like the gift, lost its ability to captivate.

"For the past year or so, we have been trying to figure out what we're all about," says the Rev. Roy Cole, pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church of Portland and one of the few roundtable regulars. "We had been spinning our wheels for quite some time. There wasn't much substantive dialogue occurring and community interest was really waning."

The Sexual Minorities Roundtable, established in the early 1990s, is a monthly gathering of sexual minorities and members of the Portland Police Bureau.

Its purpose is to allow participants the chance to exchange information and share concerns about law enforcement interaction with sexual minorities.

Similar bureau roundtables exist for other constituencies, such as Asians and Hispanics.

In 1994, the queer roundtable crafted a partnership agreement that was signed on Oct. 11, National Coming Out Day. Though dozens of similar agreements between the police and citizen groups existed, this particular document was hailed as landmark because so few law enforcement agencies nationwide had taken such a queer-affirming action.

The agreement called upon bureau and community members to continue meeting on a regular basis and asked them to "work to increase personal safety." In addition, the agreement included a commitment by police to recruit and retain sexual minorities.

"There was a lot of energy and enthusiasm at that time," says Cole, who speculates involvement has been tepid of late because all appears relatively calm on the queer front.

"For many months, there just hasn't been a hot-button issue like a ballot measure that might bring people out," he says. "In one way that's good because it means there isn't a crisis. However, we have to remember that things change and we shouldn't assume the climate is going to remain quiet."

Portland Police Assistant Chief David

PUMP IT UP

Advocates and law enforcement work together to breathe new life into Sexual Minorities Roundtable by Inga Sorensen

Butzer says the Sexual Minorities Roundtable isn't the only bureau-community entity grappling with apathy.

"A number of our committees have been struggling with attendance and interest," says Butzer, adding that Sexual Minorities Roundtable participants were already pondering the "Who are we?" and "What next?" questions when he came on board as the official community liaison in September.

However, Butzer nudged the discussion along with a January memo sent to participants which said, in part: "There has been a suggestion from the chief's office to merge all the existing groups

says, adding, "I think it has since been demonstrated that the community feels like this is an important conduit which should remain up and running."

Up and running, but with procedural differences approved in March that are designed to spawn greater efficiency and interest.

Previously, participants were expected to follow a loosely-knit list of ground rules that included dictates like "communicating with each other respectfully" and "listening to each

Buckwalter, who helped draft the changes, membership will be determined by one's attendance record or an invitation from existing membership. Members of the Portland Police Bureau who are designated or appointed to the roundtable are accorded status equivalent to community members.

Members may vote on roundtable resolutions or recommendations, serve on subcommittees or be appointed to representative positions.

Nonvoting attendees may be heard in meetings in times of general discussion but "are not qualified to vote on resolutions or serve in leadership positions."

The changes also call for "parity of responsibility and representation" between the bureau and queer community "so that actions and resolutions of [the roundtable] will be seen as representative of a consensus of official and community interests. Leadership roles, such as chairpersons, should be held in parity as well."

Several committees are being established, including a Grievance Committee, which aims to process complaints in an orderly manner.

"This is an advisory committee. We want advice," says Butzer, speaking for the bureau.

Often times, he says, the roundtable has served as a debriefing site, a place where police representatives would give community members updates on hate crimes or a particular bias case.

"That needs to continue," he says, "but I would like to see us go beyond incidents and begin to address policy issues."

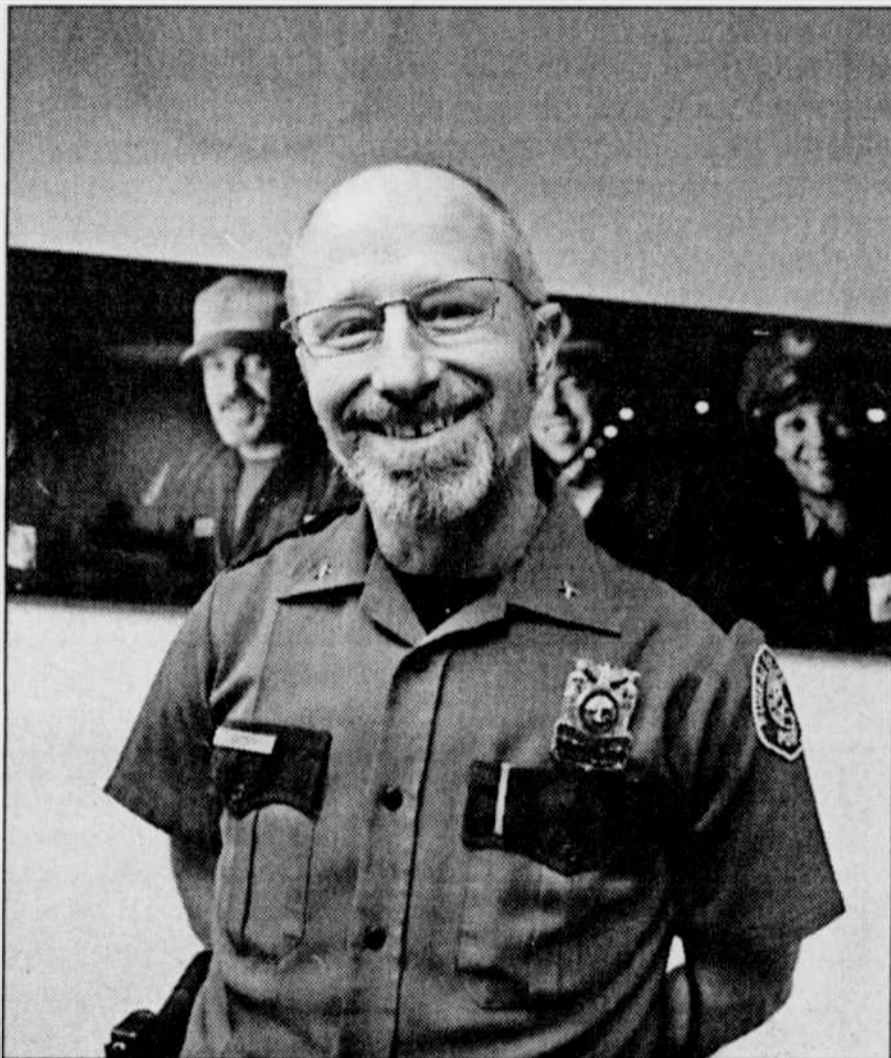
Issues like whether the bureau should transition to stronger firepower.

Butzer says, "I would like to be able to go to the roundtable and say, 'Hey, what do you think about this?'"

Cole, meanwhile, says the roundtable is planning to hold a "reaffirmation of the partnership agreement" sometime in June.

"With this new structure in place, it seemed like a good time to do it," he says.

■ The SEXUAL MINORITIES ROUNDTABLE meets on the second Tuesday of the month from noon to 1:30 pm in the chief's office conference room at the Portland Police Bureau, 1111 SW Second Ave. in Portland. The meetings are open to the public.



Assistant Chief David Butzer

into one. The meetings would be with all the chiefs and representatives from all existing groups. If this occurs, the Sexual Minorities Roundtable would no longer be autonomous but would be a part of a merged advisory council."

Butzer then asked roundtable participants for their input on whether they wished to keep the Sexual Minorities Roundtable intact, or dissolve it into a merged advisory group.

"The letter sparked enough interest to attract more people to the next meeting," he



Officers and civilians signed a partnership agreement in 1994

other with an open mind." There was no formal membership and the roundtable essentially operated on a drop-in basis.

"In the past, the roundtable was a totally fluid group. You never knew who was going to show up. There wasn't a lot of continuity," says Bonnie Tinker of Love Makes a Family Inc., a group which advocates for lesbian and gay families. "Sometimes you felt like not much was getting accomplished."

Rather than working on a drop-in basis, the roundtable has now become more membership-oriented.

According to community activist Lori

to be able to go to the roundtable and say, 'Hey, what do you think about this?'"

"Completing the Course" Book reading and signing with local author Tom Nussbaum

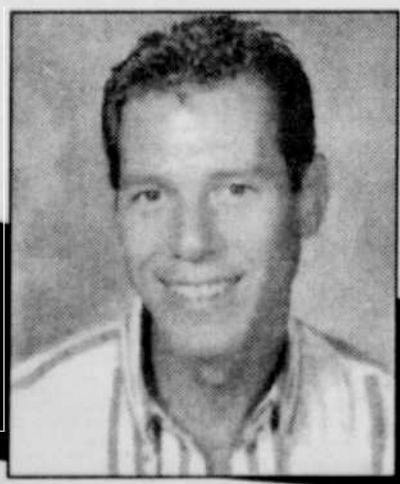
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