



# PRIMARY PRIMER

Just Out's endorsements for the May 19 primary elections, an out candidates crib sheet and a closer look at some intriguing races

Rick Brissette watched many friends succumb to AIDS complications. That's why last year, after being visited by one too many underprivileged people with AIDS who were using his small, privately-run food bank, Brissette became fed up and investigated why the local health department seemed to be faltering when it came serving those in need.

The Lincoln County Samaritan tracked where the county's share of federal Ryan White money (designated as "funds of last resort" for those living with HIV) was going. He discovered that an alarming percentage of the dollars was ending up in health department employees' pockets for case management.

"There was one guy who was homeless and had pneumonia," Brissette says. "When we took him to the hospital in Salem, he needed to be transfused with six pints of blood. We called the case manager and there was no response and then the paperwork was lost. We hit brick wall after brick wall. The system is not working and it's way out of touch with the infected population."

Exasperated, Brissette decided to rock the boat. He showed up with 40 local HIV-positive people at a Lincoln County Commission meeting to make commissioners aware of what the group viewed as a dire mismanagement of Ryan White and other funds.

It was a painful process, but the system has improved vastly, he contends, adding that now much of the money is going to the targeted audience.

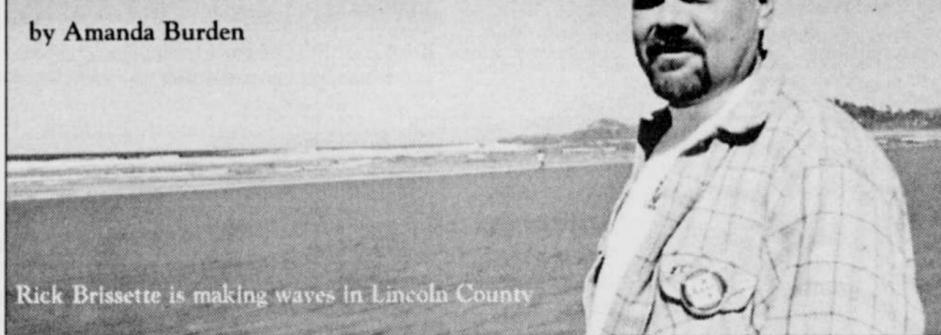
But, Brissette notes, Lincoln County is far from running efficiently. He decided that in order to institute changes in his local government, he must become a policy maker.

"When you're chipping away at the bureaucracy from the outside, there's only so much you can do," Brissette says.

Since March 11, Brissette has forged an active campaign for Lincoln County Commission Position 3.

## OPENLY GAY MAN VIES FOR RURAL OREGON COAST POSITION

by Amanda Burden



Rick Brissette is making waves in Lincoln County

The 42-year-old Brissette shares the race with five other candidates in the May 19 primary.

His bid is particularly significant for Lincoln County because he is an openly gay man. This is a pioneering notion, considering that a large faction of conservative Republican residents dwell in rural Lincoln County.

Despite that fact, Brissette is optimistic about his endeavor. He estimates that approximately 400 gay men and lesbians make their homes in Lincoln County.

The election might be close, but Brissette believes he has a good chance of nabbing the four-year, full-time job—and not just for his stance on HIV funding. If elected, he points to a long list of concerns he wishes to tackle with fervor.

His top issues include: promoting responsible development, particularly as it relates to increased inaccessibility of the coast's greatest asset, the beach; working to quell domestic violence and substance abuse, problems which

Brissette views as extensive in coastal communities; improving access to county services (all public services are located in Newport, which is about an hour away from some areas of the county); and promoting a living-wage economy, in part by attracting light industry to give residents opportunities beyond the minimum-wage tourism jobs now available.

This is Brissette's first attempt at seeking political office. But the native Oregonian, who has lived in Lincoln County for eight years, is not new to political activism.

He is one of the founders of the Coastal AIDS Network, a group that clothes, feeds and advocates for those with AIDS. He is co-chair of the Gay Health Advisory Committee and helped coordinate efforts to defeat the anti-gay rights ballot measures 9 and 13.

Last year during World AIDS Day, he and a small group of people opened a resource center in Lincoln City called the HIVE—the Oregon coast's only such center—which contains a food

and clothing bank, and meeting space, among other attributes.

As a county commissioner, Brissette says he would seek to "unshackle county employees and empower them to do what they want to do."

Additionally, he wants to make administrators who work under the commissioner more accountable, which becomes more important as resources shrink.

Brissette has received support from his community and beyond. For example, he gained endorsements from the Oregon Public Employees Union's Lincoln County chapter, as well as Nancy Leonard, the Lincoln County Commission incumbent resigning from the seat he seeks. He has obtained support from the Rural Organizing Project and former Gov. Barbara Roberts. His many family and friends back his efforts as well, including his partner of eight years, Dan Beck.

But, Brissette says he could use more support. His Pick Rick campaign committee has raised approximately half of its \$10,000 spending goal.

After seeking help to increase this figure, he's surprised by the lack of attention he is receiving from local and national lesbian and gay political advocacy groups, like Right to Pride in Portland, and the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund based in Washington, D.C.

Calls to Right to Pride were not returned as of press time.

"It was a real disappointment," Brissette says. "At least a word of encouragement would have been nice. They left my community hanging. The people here deserve more respect."

While he awaits word on the results of the primary election and gears up for the general in November, Brissette runs a quaint retail store along Highway 101 called the Little Antique Shop, next door to the HIVE.

He invites passers-by to stop in anytime to sip coffee and chat about county politics.

■ Call (541) 994-8572 for more information about the RICK BRISSETTE campaign.

## RIGHT TRIES RATTLING CHUCK CARPENTER

by Bob Roehr

This is a race we can't afford to lose," says Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund Executive Director Brian Bond. "Every time Oregon's religious political extremists have tried to use the legislative process against us, Chuck Carpenter has stood firm on our behalf. Now we must do the same for him."

The only national organization whose mission is to elect qualified openly gay and lesbian officials, the Washington, D.C.-based Victory Fund has mobilized its donor network to support Carpenter's campaign and has urged community members and organizations to do the same.

The District 7 state House member is the nation's only openly gay Republican state legislator.

Carpenter, who is from Beaverton, has also been targeted by the more conservative faction of his party in the May 19 primary, in large part for his active role in promoting non-discrimination legislation.

Last year, as chief sponsor of a statewide employment non-discrimination bill, Carpenter stood up to his caucus and forced the House to a standstill until the Republican leadership granted his bill a hearing.

Under his guidance, the measure eventually cleared the House by a margin of 40 to 20. Carpenter continued his advocacy in the Senate, falling one vote short of a majority, but



Chuck Carpenter (right) canvassing the community

bringing Oregon closer to passing ENDA than ever in its history.

He seemed to be cruising to re-election with no Republican opponent in the primary nor Democratic foe in the fall. Then, on March 10, literally minutes before the filing deadline, Bill Witt turned in nominating petitions to challenge Carpenter in the GOP primary.

Witt is a champion of the far right who has

twice waged losing races for the larger congressional district that includes Carpenter's state House seat, so Witt has both name recognition and a campaign organization. And he was willing to pour his substantial personal wealth into those previous campaigns.

Witt is a founding member of the Oregon Christian Coalition and a major donor to Lon Mabon's anti-gay rights Oregon Citizens Alliance.

Carpenter says he had "heard rumblings" of Witt's interest in the race, so he wasn't surprised when Witt officially stepped forward to take him on.

Oregon's Republican U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith quickly called Carpenter to pledge his support.

The representative has also signed up a top-notch campaign staff, and he recently received the endorsement of the Oregonian.

"We have represented this district very well on issues that are of concern to Republicans—first and foremost education funding," Carpenter says. "If Bill Witt wants to come after me because of my sexual orientation and because we have tried to prevent discrimination against gays and lesbians in the workplace, then that is fine. But we have represented this district very well on a broad range of issues."

Kevin Ivers of Log Cabin Republicans says, "The key right now for Carpenter is to pull together his base and raise lots of money. We've pledged to support him in any way that he feels is most beneficial. We hope that the gay community in Oregon is going to rally behind him as well."

Carpenter calls this "a bellwether test for Republicans on whether this is a party which is inclusive, broad-minded, and can handle a diversity of ideas and people, or whether it truly is going to be a party that is going to be the bastion of the right-wing radicals."

Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund political director Kathleen DeBold echoes the thought: "This is a battle for the soul of the Republican Party. This is much more than a race for the Oregon House."

■ To contact the CHUCK CARPENTER campaign, call 645-5789.