

**LOCAL news**

**W**e approached this with the philosophy of 'Let's do this as if we had all the money in the world,' explains Lesbian Avenger Mashinda Hedgmon. "In reality, we've got high hopes and no budget."

High hopes seem to be enough, though, to transform an idea into a tangible reality: The Portland Lesbian Avengers are hosting *Loud Women Always Achieve Their Goals*, a national gathering of Avengers being held July 3 to 5 in Portland.

Not long ago, there was still a question mark

# AVENGERS CONVERGE

**Portland may be in for a wild ride as a national gathering of Lesbian Avengers gets underway** by Inga Sorensen

symbolism stems from the 1992 deaths of Hattie Mae Cohens and Brian Mock, a lesbian and gay man whose home in Salem, Ore., was fire-bombed by a group of young people linked with the white supremacist skinhead movement. The first Lesbian Avenger group purportedly started

the feisty Dyke March held annually on the eve of the pride parade.

As for how and why this national gathering landed in the Rose City, Alexander says, "Because it was our idea."

She adds, "We were talking a few months ago about how we don't really network with other Avenger groups. We were wondering how other Avengers do things, so we thought 'Why not have a big party?'"

According to Alexander, the Portland group formed an organizing committee, which includes Hedgmon and some other Avengers. They picked a date and circulated word of the conference through the Internet and a proverbial favorite, word of mouth.

Activists from as far away as Florida, Illinois, Washington, D.C., New York and Maryland are expected to take part in the conference, which features an array of workshops dealing with issues like how to avoid burnout and fat oppression.

Avengers, like everyone, face challenges, Alexander says. One such challenge is figuring out how a group can run

been viewed as young, overeducated white women who were slumming," says Hedgmon, 25, who is African American. "That really hasn't been true for the [Portland] group."

Still, Hedgmon would like to see more women of color involved in the Avengers, and talks with friends about the group's goings-on and "how they can make the Avengers be what they want it to be."

"This is not about others saying, 'I can do this for you.' It's about what you can do if you get involved," says Hedgmon, who will conduct a workshop addressing race and activism.

Diana Courvant is a trans activist who has been involved with both the Portland and Corvallis Lesbian Avengers. She plans to do a radical gender theory workshop, which is designed to prompt participants to ponder how they construct and consider gender.

"I think this conference is a fabulous idea," she says. "It's a time of sharing. You meet so many women who take different approaches to the same scenario. That's really interesting."

There's a good chance, however, those myriad approaches will be on or near the cutting edge.

"I think we have a reputation of being bad ass," says Alexander. "We can get in people's faces... We have a lot of freedom to do that because most of us don't have a lot of stuff, so we don't have much to lose."

Stuff may be in short supply; chutzpah, however, is not.

"It's like eating fire. I'm afraid of fire," says Alexander. "It took me three or four times before I got comfortable."

■ **LOUD WOMEN ALWAYS ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS** is slated for July 4 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Metropolitan Community Church of Portland, 2400 N.E. Broadway. Location of July 5 workshops to be announced. Sliding-scale donations are requested, but no one will be turned away for lack of funds.

A welcoming dinner will be held July 3 from 6 to 9 p.m. at Counter Culture, 3000 N.E. Killingsworth St. The evening's speaker will be artist Roberta Gregory.

For more information, call the Portland Lesbian Avengers hot line at 452-5408.



Fire eating is an Avenger trademark

as to where the event would actually occur after initial plans for the venue fell through.

"If you know of any place, let us know," requested Portland Lesbian Avenger Julia Alexander, 23, in an easy tone. Panic was nowhere to be found

"As Avengers, we can improvise. Why waste time worrying about it? We always have a tent we can put up in someone's back yard," she added.

Welcome to the paradoxically flexible yet come-hell-or-high-water world of the Lesbian Avengers, who, according to their handbook, employ "grass-roots activism to fight for the survival and visibility of lesbians, bi women and trans dykes."

With chapters nationwide, Avengers utilize dyke power and vision to ignite bold, sexy and saucy actions. They have a bomblike logo, their slogan is "We Recruit," and they eat fire.

According to Avenger history, the fire-eating

shortly after in New York City, which in turn spawned the formation of other chapters in this country and abroad.

"Avenger Philosophy 101" instructs us that direct action, girl gangs, humor and theatrics, and flaming flamboyance are "in." Making things happen, rather than simply griping about them—that's what these girls are about. The "out" list, meanwhile, includes endless discussion, processing, nice girls don't..., and getting permission.

In Portland, Avengers have, among other tasks, handed out lollipops tagged with queer-friendly messages at area high schools, and protested the likes of the less-than-queer-affirming Portland Fellowship and Promise Keepers. The group also orchestrates



The Lesbian Avengers banner headed up the Dyke March

smoothly minus consensus or leadership models. "We don't use either," she says.

Avenger recruitment also comes up on occasion.

"I know the Lesbian Avengers have typically

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