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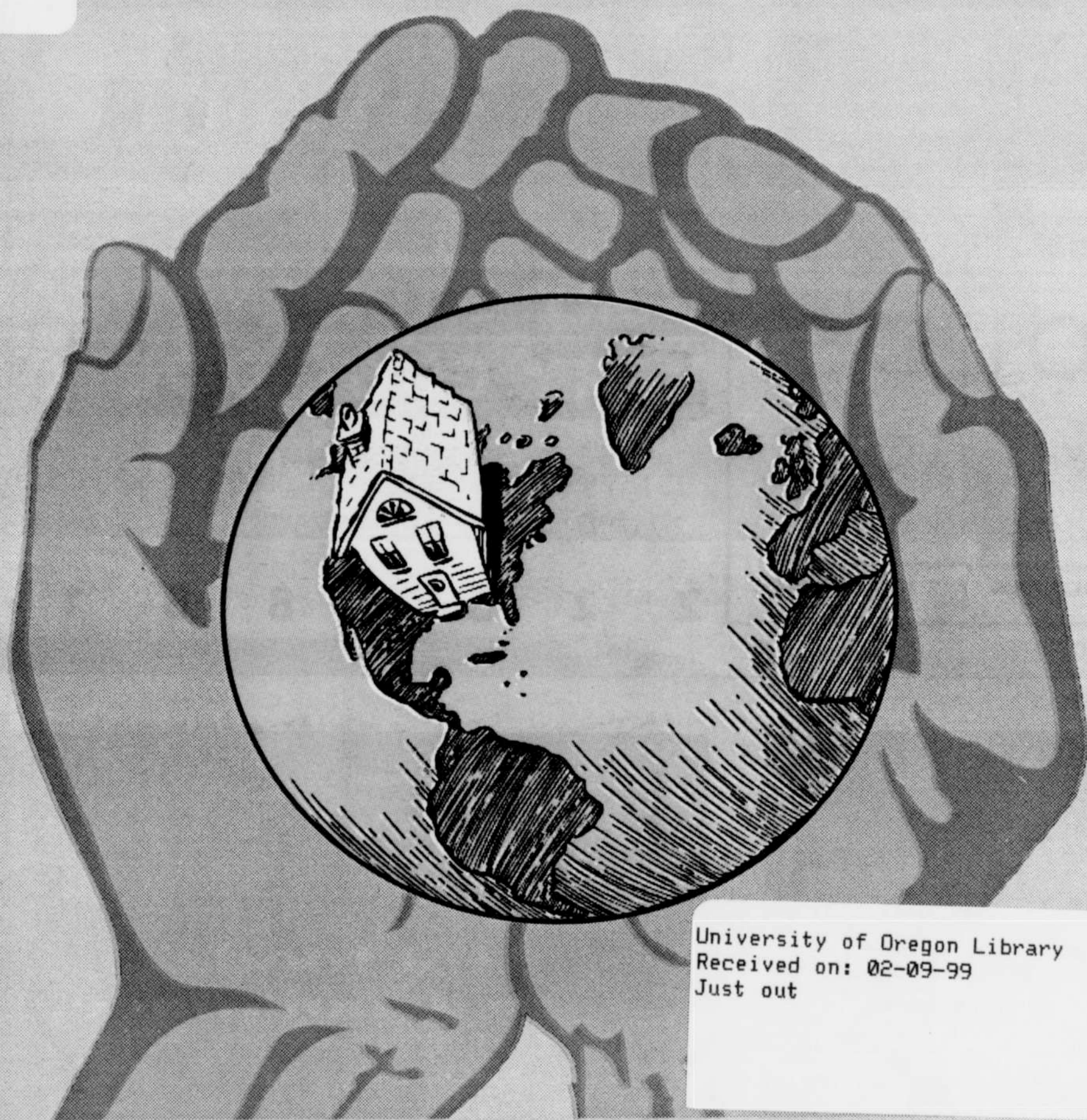


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A PLACE OF OUR OWN?

Is a Portland gay and lesbian community center
a far-fetched fantasy or a reality on the verge?

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Legislative Lip Service

Oregon's lawmakers had vowed to focus on issues like education and transportation, but quickly changed their tune

BY INGA SORENSEN

"So much for a kinder, gentler Legislature!" laments Jean Harris, executive director of Basic Rights Oregon, a state-wide organization that promotes lesbian and gay rights.

Harris is surveying a dismal assortment of bills introduced by state lawmakers within what feels like minutes of the 1999 legislative session's commencement.

OK, maybe it wasn't minutes, but it was a matter of several hours.

"Within a couple of days they were on the attack!"

says Harris, whose group is making its first major foray into the land of state legislative lobbying—often unpredictable territory that requires a vigilant eye.

"You've got to keep track of what's going on every hour. You just don't know what they'll try and do," says Harris.

For 15 years, Right to Pride (formerly Right to Privacy) orchestrated the efforts in Salem, but of late the group has assumed a more low-key role, with BRO taking the lead.

Since the Oregon Legislature convened Jan. 11, Harris and company have been kept busy. Just a few days into the session, Reps. Bill Witt, R-Beaverton, and Kevin Mannix, R-Salem, let loose with three measures designed to undo a recent appellate court ruling that granted some rights to gay and lesbian people.

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