

The shimmying at Phoenix Rising Foundation continues.

The Rev. Roy Cole, pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church of Portland, has been named board president, taking over for Margie Paulson, who resigned in March.

Other new additions to the board include Kathy Oliver, executive director of Outside In; Jerry Weller, a gay activist who was a mainstay in the Portland-area political scene of two decades ago—he also was, according to Cole, Phoenix Rising's first executive director; and Michael Kennedy of Bank of America.

Cole, Oliver and Weller have agreed to six-month stints on the board as it tackles its toughest challenge—survival. (Kennedy is on for the regular two-year term.)

Incorporated as a nonprofit agency in 1978, Phoenix Rising Foundation promotes "the common interests and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual people through mental health, education and other support services."

The agency provides an assortment of adult, youth and HIV counseling services, and runs the Sexual Minority Youth Recreation Center, a Portland drop-in facility for queer kids.

As reported in previous issues of *Just Out*, Phoenix Rising was nearly sunk by some unscrupulous goings-on, including allegations that a former employee embezzled funds and failed to pay the necessary bills and payroll taxes, eventually plunging the agency into debt and forcing it to devour its reserves.

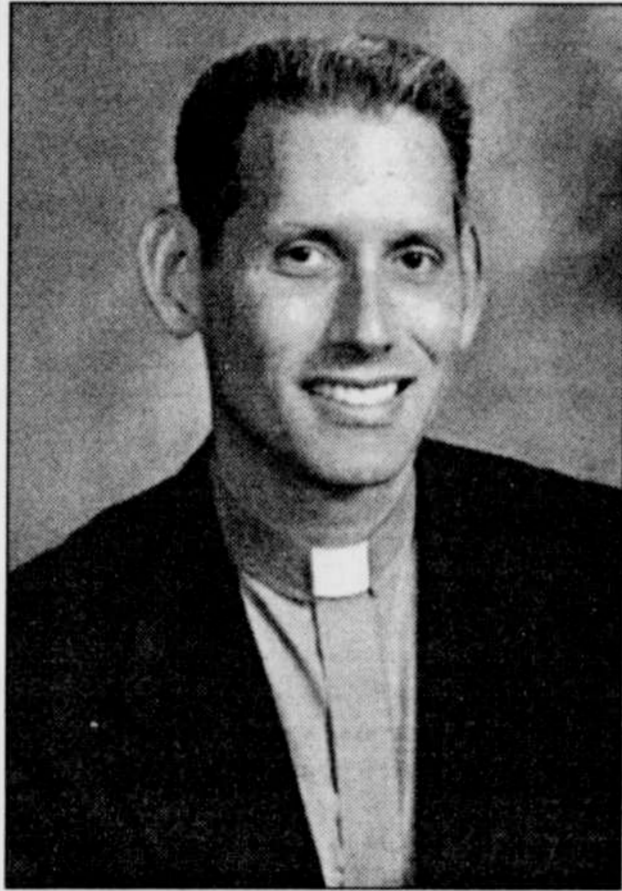
The morass led to the resignation of Paulson and Allanya Guenther, who served as executive director for much of the 1990s.

Guenther, who left the agency in March, has been slammed for shoddy managerial oversight and, according to some critics, concealing the dilemma from the queer community until the last possible moment.

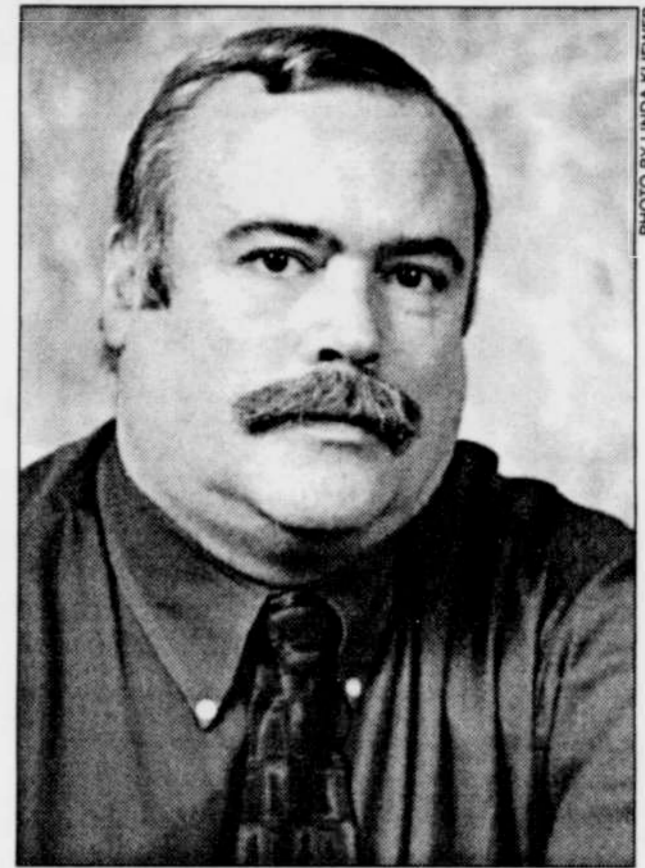
Guenther was replaced by Judy Watson, who has experience as a clinician and administrator in behavioral health operations. Watson, who is serving as interim executive director of Phoenix Rising, works for Network Behavioral Health-Care Inc., a nonprofit agency that provides an array of mental health services.

SHUFFLE BOARD

At Phoenix Rising Foundation, some new board members are trying to breathe life into an injured institution by Inga Sorensen



As a gay activist, Jerry Weller was a mainstay in the Portland-area political scene of two decades ago



The Rev. Roy Cole has always been a supporter of Phoenix Rising Foundation, saying its mission is an important one. He agreed to serve on the board because he wants to give the organization a fighting chance

When word of the quagmire was made public several weeks ago, it became clear many within the gay community felt betrayed, angry and disappointed. Confidence in the institution was severely undermined.

Cole, however, has always been a solid supporter of Phoenix Rising, saying its mission is an important one. He agreed to serve on the board because he wants to give the organization a fighting chance.

"And we want to hear from the community," he says.

To that end, the board hopes to host a community meeting in the near future in an effort to gauge what queer folks are feeling about

Phoenix Rising's future, which is precarious right now.

The board has contracted with Network to handle managerial tasks, and is exploring the possibility becoming a subsidiary of Network.

It could also remain an independent agency, but Cole says to do that, Phoenix Rising "would require a great deal of support from the community." It could move away from providing adult clinical services and instead focus more on youth support programs. Or it could simply close.

Despite the flux, Cole stresses that life at Phoenix Rising goes on. "I want everyone to know that clients are being served. We're still receiving clients," he says.

But it seems clients won't be served much longer at Phoenix Rising's offices situated at 620 S.W. Fifth Ave. in downtown Portland. In an effort to cut costs, Cole says, the agency will likely be moved out of that site by April's end.

"We're looking at several properties" that are less expensive to rent, he says.

In related news, Portland police say their investigation into possible misdeeds at Phoenix Rising is continuing.

Detective John Brighton notes such investigations are time-consuming and complex.

"But we want people to know we are on this," he tells *Just Out*.

SALEM IN THE AFTERMATH

The mayor of Salem, Mike Swaim, says he is "truly saddened to have to address such a matter as the attack on Chuck French," referring to Redemer "Chuck" French, a 25-year-old gay man whose March 29 beating by an acquaintance resulted in a concussion and more than two dozen stitches near his right ear.

As reported in the April 2 issue of *Just Out*, witnesses say the attacker shouted anti-gay epithets at French during the assault. A 38-year-old suspect, William Antone Hirni Jr., has been arrested and charged with misdemeanor assault. Police did not charge Hirni with intimidation, but a spokesman says the case will go before a grand jury and additional charges could be brought.

Swaim, meanwhile, sent out an e-mail addressing French's beating, as well as some controversy involving the Salem Police Department's response.

Prior to Hirni's arrest, Salem Police Lt. Bill Kohlmeier told the *Statesman Journal*: "This particular case, while it's a bias crime, is still a relatively minor assault in the large scheme of things. We didn't get the impression from the report that the subject is out there randomly targeting gays.... I'm confident in saying this case is not going to be the No. 1 priority for this detective."

The officer's attitude angered many, including gay rights activists and the mayor, who wrote: "Contrary to the expression

of our police department's information officer, as reported in the *Statesman Journal*, I take such matters very seriously. I have already spoken with Mr. French's partner, asked him to put into writing what happened with our police (which he promptly did and faxed to me), and I shall be taking a copy of that to a meet-

"I have been working hard to make our city a more equitable place for all of us—free from racism, sexism, and bigotry driven by homophobia. I know I have a lot of work remaining before me, and this was another reminder of that fact. I will not back down on these basic issues of civil and human rights." —Mike Swaim, Mayor of Salem

ing with my city manager.... I was in touch with the manager as soon as I read that article—which I found insulting, to say the least. I am also forwarding on to the manager the various e-mails that I received, so he can read firsthand the outrage that this has spawned."

He added: "The city of Salem is better than that, and I have been working hard to make our city a more equitable place for all of us—free from racism, sexism, and bigotry driven by homophobia. I know I have a lot of work remaining before me, and this was another reminder of that fact. I will not back down on these basic issues of civil and human rights."

Swaim did not respond to *Just Out's* inquiry. However, the officer whose remark prompted so much dissension did.

"We do take bias crimes very seriously," says Kohlmeier, who believes the *Journal* quoted him out of context.

He says the detective slated to get the case was swamped with other investigations including rapes, sexual assaults and a murder, to name a few. In other words, it was a matter of prioritization, he says, not a matter of disregard.

"There was no indication that [Hirni] was out targeting gay people randomly," Kohlmeier says, adding he spent two full days on the phone trying to explain his publicized remark to concerned citizens.

"It was a stupid comment," he concedes.

Still, Kohlmeier doesn't believe Salem police need a designated bias crimes unit such as the one run by the Portland Police Bureau. He says bias crime reports are assigned to detectives who follow up on each claim, which works well enough.

Last year, Salem police received reports of 46 bias crimes, including several based on sexual orientation.

■ The Salem Police Department is hosting a community meeting at 7 p.m. April 20 at Loucks Auditorium at the Salem Public Library, 555 Liberty St. S.E.

Reported by INGA SORENSEN