

**LOCAL news**

# CENTER CENTRAL

**Ashland's gay and lesbian center settles into new home; idea for Portland center is on the back burner** by Inga Sorensen

**Y**ou're our very first incoming call," says Joan Haukom, sounding a bit exhausted.

It's early July and Haukom et al. have been laboring to move the innards of the Abdill-Ellis Lambda Community Center from one locale to another.

"Quite honestly, it's taken us away from the work we really need to be doing," she says.

Like educating the public on gay and lesbian issues and advocating tolerance—worthy causes that sometimes get stalled by tedious roadblocks such as moving.

"We're still in boxes here," says Haukom, the center's director. Previously situated at 56 Third St. in Ashland—the only city in Oregon to have a full-fledged gay and lesbian community center—the facility has shifted to a nearby spot at 281 Fourth St., still in the heart of downtown.

The Abdill-Ellis Lambda Community Center is named for two local community members, longtime couple Michelle Abdill and Roxanne Ellis, who were murdered in 1995.

The killings prompted an outpouring of support from people across the country who sent checks ranging from \$5 to \$1,500 to memorialize the women, who had been very involved in church, civic and political activities.

haunt began. It was a search that went on for months.

"Rents in Ashland are very high," notes Haukom.

Finally, however, a new home was secured.

According to Haukom, the current site—which previously served as a film studio—is larger than the last, allowing for meetings and dances and all sorts of goings-on.

For now, however, the goal is to get the sign up and the boxes unpacked.

"So we can do what we're here to do," she says.

**S**peaking of gay and lesbian community centers, a few months back *Just Out* ran a feature story that pondered the notion of a establishing one in Portland.

Several cities nationwide have queer community centers. Five cities—New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Diego and Santa Barbara, Calif.—have gay centers with budgets exceeding a million dollars. (The L.A. facility has a budget of nearly \$30 million.)

Sources in the story mulled the pros and cons, and raised questions like: Is a center needed in Portland? Does it have the financial backing? Would fund raising for a center suck donations from existing groups? Would the space be used for social or political purposes, or both? Who benefits? Who loses?

Bob Mensel of the Portland Gay Men's Chorus was one of those touting the idea, saying a center would demonstrate "that there are other avenues of camaraderie besides ballot measures."

At the time he told *Just Out* he felt participating groups would benefit from a reduction in scheduling conflicts and a big boost in visibility and outreach.

Mensel has continued to float the concept, and *Just Out* checked in with him in July to find out what's up.

"In talking with others I've found that there doesn't even seem to be a

sense of community much of the time, so I think maybe the first thing to do is try and create community," he says.

Mensel suggests the formation of a community council—a gathering of folks (both individuals and representatives from interested organizations) who meet regularly to let one other know what's going on.

"There are so many groups and lots of us simply don't know what the others are up to," he says. "Perhaps that would be a good place to find out about each other and talk about things like whether we need a community center."

Mensel says he's currently chatting with people about the community council idea.

"Maybe we should just do it!" he says.

■ To contact the ABDILL-ELLIS LAMBDA COMMUNITY CENTER, drop a letter to P.O. Box 927, Ashland, OR 97520; or call (541) 488-6990.



Faced with community ambivalence about the creation of a queer center in Portland, Bob Mensel is pursuing the idea of forming a less formal "community council"

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