

CRUISING CONTROL

Cops and community dialogue on public sex, discrimination and the search for a new chief by Inga Sorensen

The summer heat seems to have spawned a surge of public sex incidents and raised concerns among Portland police.

According to Greg Clark, commander of the Portland Police Bureau's North Precinct, this appears particularly true for Kelley Point Park, a popular picnicking site in North Portland where the Willamette and Columbia rivers converge.

"We've had complaints about same-sex folks engaged in sexual contact in view of others," Clark tells *Just Out*.

He expresses concerns about families with children who might be exposed to such "inappropriate behavior."

According to police, at least 11 cases of public indecency have been reported this year at Mount Tabor Park in Southeast Portland. Most recently, on July 19, a 59-year-old man was arrested and charged with public indecency after a female bicyclist reported seeing him masturbating inside a vehicle.

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Both Clark and Costa note that cruisers may become the targets of gay bashings or robberies.

"They're vulnerable because a lot of them won't report the crime because of what they were doing when it happened," Costa explains. "It's a problem waiting to happen."

Clark urges people to be aware of their surroundings—and as for sexual activity, he says: "Don't do it in a public place."

In related news, a survey crafted by the Portland Police Bureau and Sexual Minorities Roundtable is being distributed at various businesses with a large queer clientele.

The responses "will be confidential and used only for purposes of reporting the nature and prevalence of discriminatory incidents involving [an] individual's gender identity or expression."

Its purpose is to help paint a portrait of the scope of bias-related incidents against sexual

minorities, including where and how the incidents happen. It is believed that many bias incidents go unreported for a variety of reasons, thus making it harder to get an accurate depiction of how pervasive and serious the problem may be.

Costa, meanwhile, says he hopes the Portland Police Bureau continues connecting with the sexual

minorities community when a new chief is brought on board.

He recently served on a focus group that discussed the attributes citizens would like to see in the city's next police chief.

Mayor Vera Katz launched a series of such groups in July in response to Charles Moose's decision to leave the bureau to become chief of the Montgomery County Police Department in Rockville, Md.

Moose departed Portland at the end of July. Applications for the post are currently being accepted, and the city hopes to make a final job offer by Nov. 1.

Costa hopes the new chief is committed to community policing and able to interact with diverse populations.

"I went to the focus group as a gay man," he says, adding that he discussed issues important to the sexual minorities community.

"It's vital to me that the sexual minorities community continue to have a voice," Costa says.

He'd also like to see the city promote someone from within the bureau.

Assistant chiefs Bruce Prunk and Mark Paresi have indicated their interest in the post. Both men have worked closely with the sexual minorities community.

"There are candidates like Bruce Prunk and Mark Paresi who have demonstrated their dedication to diversity," says Costa. "I think that's very important."



Clark, meanwhile, brought his concerns about male sexual activity at Kelley Point Park to a recent gathering of the Sexual Minorities Roundtable.

The roundtable, established in the early 1990s, is a monthly gathering of sexual minorities and members of the Portland Police Bureau. It's designed in part to give participants the chance to exchange information and share concerns about law enforcement interaction with sexual minorities.

Similar bureau roundtables exist for other constituencies, including Asians and Hispanics.

"We feel it's good to use the roundtable as a problem-solving tool," Clark says.

He adds that it's the "least confrontational" way to handle the problem.

"We find that if we make people aware of the problem it can make a difference," Clark says.

Longtime gay activist Norm Costa, vice chair of Pride Northwest Inc. and a regular roundtable attendee, says he's pleased police have brought their concerns to the roundtable.

"To me, this is an example of community policing," he says.

Many law enforcement agencies nationwide launch stings to snag cruisers without any forewarning. The traps may be prompted by incidents of indecent exposure or people having sex in the underbrush, among other goings-on.

"In the old days [the Portland police] would have put people out there to entrap cruisers," maintains the 71-year-old Costa. "Now they're

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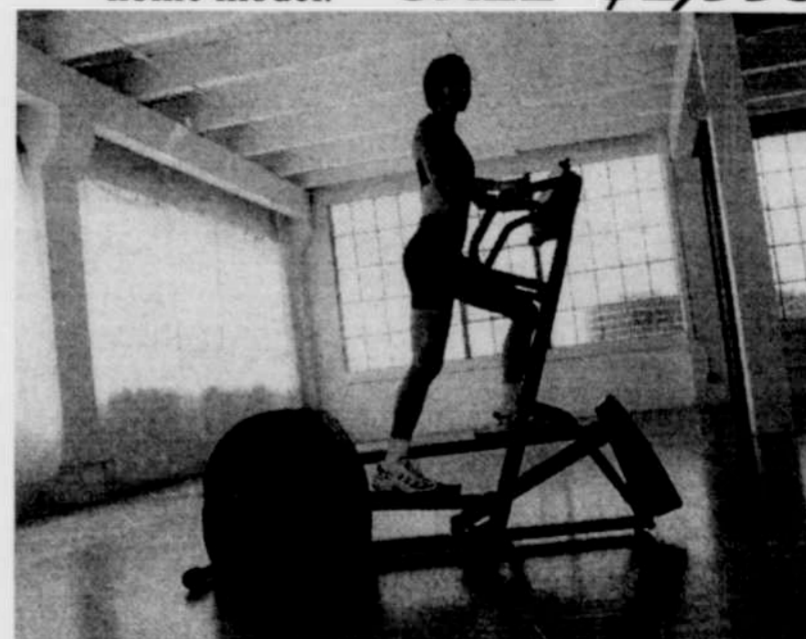
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