

PHOTO BY INGA SORENSEN



# OFFICIAL WELCOME

The Rose City's top cop meets and greets the Sexual Minorities Roundtable by Inga Sorensen

Portland Police Chief Mark Kroeker (left) met with Sexual Minorities Roundtable members, including co-chair Lori Buckwalter (right)

For the most part, Portland's new police chief, Mark Kroeker, sits quietly soaking in the scene, only once or twice dispensing questions of his own.

It is Kroeker's first visit with the Sexual Minorities Roundtable, a gathering of queers and cops who congregate monthly high above the city in a 15th-floor Justice Center conference room.

On this day, gray skies threaten snow. There are little more than a half-dozen law enforcement personnel on hand, and about the same amount of community folks representing groups like Pride Northwest, which orchestrates Portland's pride parade, and Outside In, a social service agency that offers assistance to homeless youths. Individuals from the leather and sex-worker communities are on hand, as is Lori

Buckwalter, a trans activist and roundtable co-chair poised at the head of the long, oval table with Kroeker to her right.

"I admit I've never seen anything quite like [the roundtable]," notes Kroeker, who spent more than 30 years with the Los Angeles Police Department before retiring in 1997 after rising to the rank of deputy chief.

The 55-year-old born-again Christian was tapped by Portland Mayor Vera Katz in December to fill the post left vacant by former Chief Charles Moose, who resigned last July.

When *Just Out* first reported on Kroeker in the Dec. 17 issue, Mitch Grobeson, a gay former Los Angeles police sergeant who worked with the man, said: "It's definitely critical that the gay and lesbian community of Portland establish a foothold early on in terms of their relationship

with Kroeker. He needs to hear that the gay and lesbian community has a strong voice in Portland."

Grobeson urged gay men and lesbians to be attuned to any upsurge in vice operations, harassment around gay establishments and "entrapment" of cruisers.

A gay City of Angels esquire chimed: "Watch what [Kroeker] does, not what he says."

On this day, Kroeker doesn't speak much. Instead, he listens as roundtable attendees share the latest updates on bias crimes, a fledgling queer citizens foot patrol aimed at Old Town and Southwest Stark Street, and the Sexual Minorities Crisis Response Team.

He asks whether the Crisis Response Team is gay-specific and is informed there are a number of teams assisting a variety of populations.

During the gathering, a young woman involved in the sex industry speaks of the harassment she and others in the trade encounter from police, and she wants to know what will be done about it.

A man who works with street youths notes that young people often feel they are "viewed as the harassers and in fact feel they're the ones being harassed."

There is talk of a safety survey that generated little community response, and discussion about attracting more diversity to the roundtable.

In introducing himself, Kroeker

shares an insight gleaned from his time in violence-ravaged Bosnia-Herzegovina, where he served as deputy commissioner of the International Police Task Force under the United Nations mission there a few years ago.

Kroeker recounts the ethnic hatred he witnessed while there—Croats, Muslims and Serbs who had once coexisted as neighbors and friends but became bitter enemies.

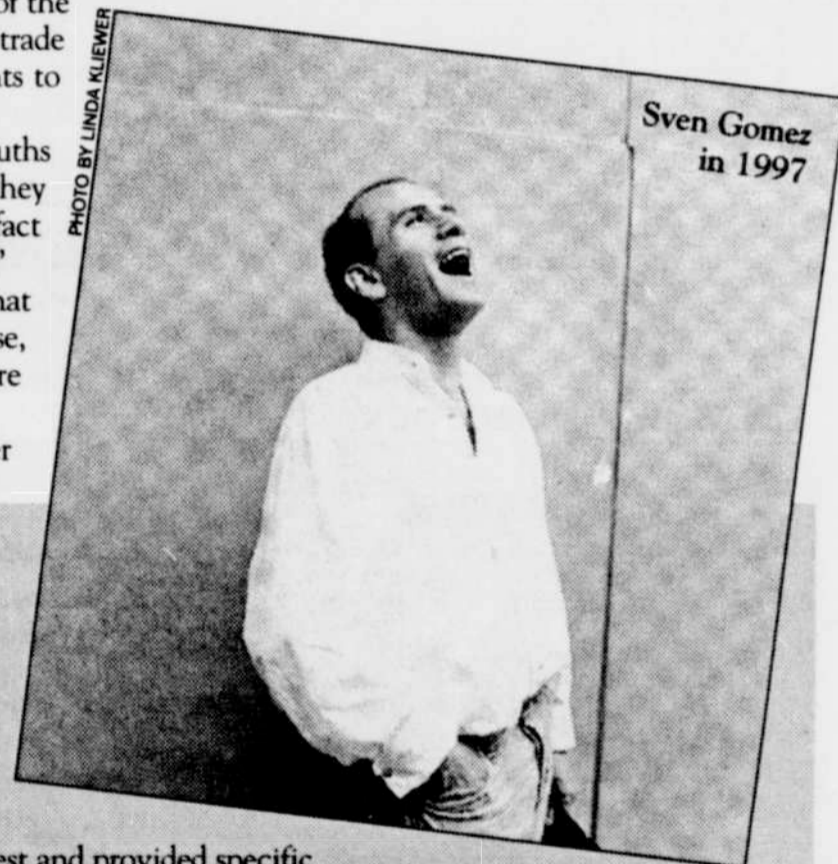
At the time, he pondered whether such potent divisiveness could shred his own country.

"And then I get back and hear of an incident of a certain African American man [James Byrd] being dragged to his death from behind a pickup truck...and of the brutal murder of a gay person [Matthew Shepard]," Kroeker recalls.

Bosnia, he says, hammered home the notion that animosity can lead to unbridled brutality "unless we take steps to come together and prevent it."

He adds: "I just wanted to share my heart a little bit with you."

■ The SEXUAL MINORITIES ROUNDTABLE meets from noon to 1:30 p.m. on the second Tuesday of each month. For more information about the gathering, call (503) 823-0000.



## DON'T FORGET SVEN

It's been nearly a year since Sven Gomez, 42, was found dead in his Northwest Portland apartment.

Gomez, an amiable and outgoing gay man, was discovered March 25, 1999, dead of asphyxia.

All along, Portland police detectives have said Gomez's death was "being investigated as though it were a homicide," but it still has not been officially classified as such.

Nonetheless, detectives say the death is "highly suspicious," and investigators believe Gomez may have been with another person at the time of his death.

Gomez was a native of Colombia who came to the United States in 1990. In Portland he supported himself through various means, from interpreting to housecleaning to bussing tables. He most recently worked at Il Fornaio, a trendy Italian bistro a few blocks from his apartment.

Gomez also enjoyed assisting those living with HIV/AIDS and had volunteered for various causes.

Detective Jon Rhodes tells *Just Out* the case remains open. He notes that sometimes a useful tip may come in "the next day, or five years, 10 years or never."

Just last month—more than 10 years after his disappearance—police recovered the remains of Todd Alexander Asay, a k a Lindsey Alexander, a female impersonator who worked at the popular Old Town cabaret club Darcelle XV.

Asay was last seen alive May 26, 1989, in front of Silverado, a gay bar on Southwest Stark Street in Portland.

Portland police believe Brian David Hill, 36, shot and killed Asay in 1989 and buried the 25-year-old in the back yard of the Southeast Portland home where Hill used to live.

Hill was recently charged with shooting to death his ex-wife. He was arrested Dec. 19 and charged with murdering Anna Lee Hill.

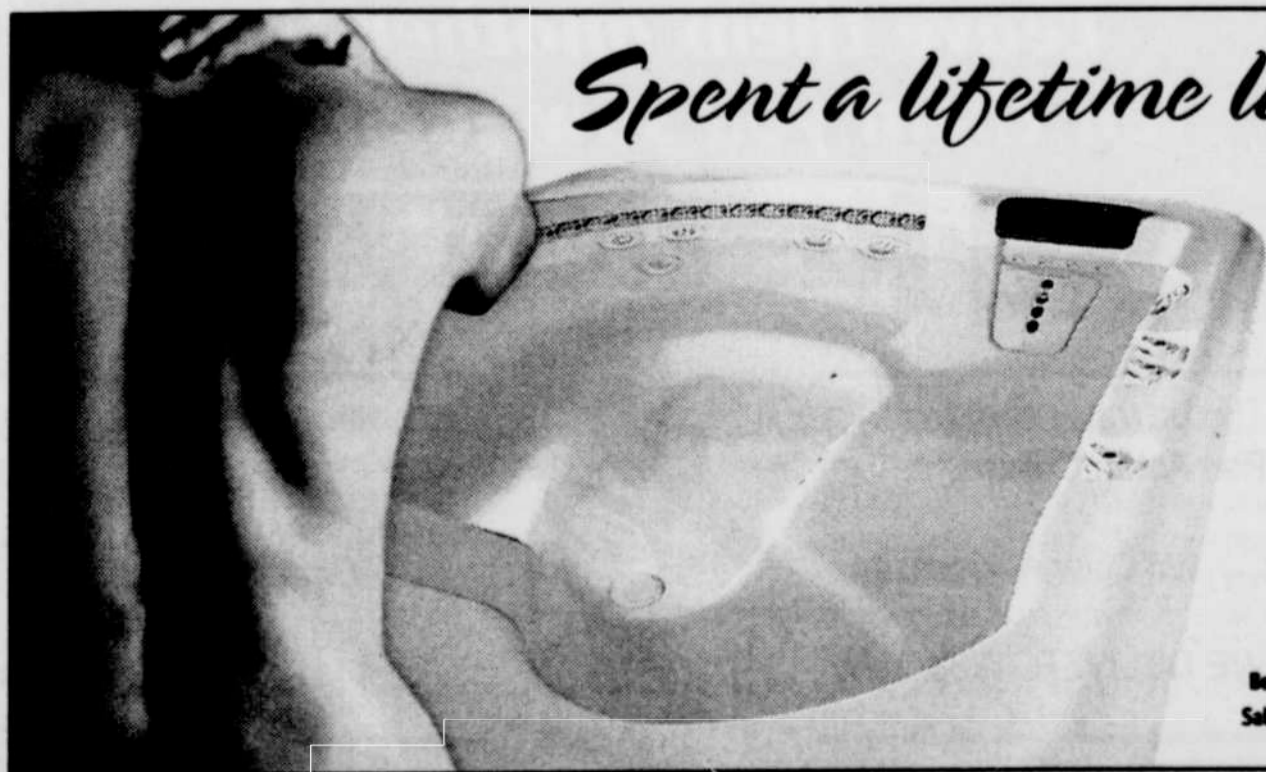
According to police, someone came forward following Hill's

arrest and provided specific information about where Asay's body was buried.

Speaking of the Gomez case, Rhodes says: "Someone may come forward with information. Who knows what may trigger it."

■ Anyone with information about the Gomez case is asked to contact the Portland Police Bureau at (503) 823-0479.

Reported by INGA SORENSEN



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