

INEXHAUSTIBLE ASPEN

A committed community activist takes on new role... but only for a little while by T.K. Mantese

Lesbian. Feminist. Musician. Activist. Auto mechanic. These are just a few words to describe Kristan Aspen. Bundled up in long sleeves and an insulated vest, Aspen reclines on a donated couch in the Lesbian Community Project's spacious, chilly office to talk about her most recent incarnation: LCP interim staff organizer.

Aspen, 51, graduated from Oberlin College in 1970. Fluent in Spanish, she spent her junior year in Colombia and, after graduation, six weeks doing manual farm labor in Cuba. While traveling with a Venceremos Brigade solidarity delegation to Cuba, Aspen met lesbians for the first time.

During her time in Cuba, Aspen hung out with one lesbian in particular who was unabashedly candid about her sexuality. As if a light bulb had been turned on, Aspen says, her sexual nature suddenly became clear to her.

In 1971 Aspen moved to Portland. She has been active in the women's community ever since. In the early 1970s, she taught women auto mechanic skills at the First Unitarian Church in downtown Portland. They worked on their cars in the church parking lot.

"It was very daring then," she laughs.

Aspen was part of the collective household that founded the Portland Feminist Women's Health Clinic and Bradley-Angle House (then known as Prescott House), which assists women escaping violence.

She most recently served for five years on the board of Pride Northwest, the force behind Portland's pride parade and festival.

According to Norm Costa, Pride Northwest's vice chair, Aspen donated countless hours and her own money to the group and its cause.

"Kristan is still a valued advisor to Pride," he says.

Though Aspen is no longer involved with the nitty-gritty details of the parade and festival, she will continue to devote time to Pride Northwest's 3-year-old Conversations Project, which is designed to generate dialogue among various constituencies within the broader sexual minorities community.

Though Aspen has loftier goals, much of her time at LCP will be occupied with the ordinary: managing the office, supporting the board and committees, maintaining an activities calendar, and organizing and supporting volunteer recruitment and development.

Following two years of turmoil and dissension within LCP, Aspen sees the transition continuing with opportunities for more change.

"Part of my role here will be to try to keep the lines of communication open or re-establish them if they've been closed," Aspen says.

"I am interested in hearing from all sides of

the discussion, though I understand not everybody is ready to do that," she adds.

"We really didn't consider anyone else," LCP board member Sally Cohn says.

The board felt pressed for time, and Aspen's capabilities and commitment are proven. She was LCP's temporary administrator in the early 1990s and has been involved in the lesbian community for 30 years.

Plunging into work, Aspen and the board have identified three major ideas to create dialogue among the various voices of the LCP community.

First, beginning Jan. 30, LCP will hold an open house at its East Burnside Street office every other Sunday.

"We want to invite people to come by—individuals, groups—everyone is welcome," Aspen says.

The informal afternoon gathering is from 4 to 6 p.m.

Also in the works is the reinstatement of the lesbian forum, but with a new name.

Explaining the forum's fresh title, Aspen says the organization is "working hard not to accentuate the differences" among all who are identified with LCP.

Each forum will focus on a different topic; the first, on disabilities and accessibility, is scheduled for Feb. 18.

The third item LCP will tackle is the development of a venue for dialogue in the same vein as Pride Northwest's Conversations Project.

Aspen wants to establish a safe, comfortable place for folks to explore feelings and share experiences with one other.

"I would like to see a conversation between those who identify as feminists and those who don't, and see how far apart we are," she explains.

The part-time staff organizer position suits Aspen just fine. Her lifestyle demands multiple small jobs that are compatible with her work as a musician. She and her partner of 20 years, Janna MacAuslan, form the flute-guitar duo Musica Femina, which toured nationally from 1984 to 1996 and has released two CDs.

The interim position expires in three months. The board plans to hire a permanent staff organizer by April.

■ **LESBIAN COMMUNITY PROJECT** welcomes all to call and share their ideas, or to drop in. The office is located at 1001 E. Burnside St. in Portland; approximate hours are Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., and Monday and Friday from noon to 5 p.m. Space is available to small groups during and after office hours. For more information, call (503) 233-3913, or visit the Internet site at www.europa.com/~lcpdx.

T.K. MANTESE is a Portland-based free-lance writer and proofreader.



PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

Kristan Aspen, LCP's interim staff organizer

"Part of my role here will be to try to keep the lines of communication open or re-establish them if they've been closed."

SEE US FOR ALL YOUR COLLISION REPAIR NEEDS

Ferguson
AUTOBODY

(503) 232-3600

2454 E. BURNSIDE
PORTLAND, OR 97214

Family Owned & Operated Since 1952

ICR GOLD CLASS PROFESSIONALS

Drive with Pride

Schedule your appointment today with:

Christina Sigwart
503-256-3700

REY REECE DEALERSHIPS
OLDS-ISUZU-VOLKSWAGEN-USED

clsigwart@hotmail.com
122nd & East Burnside
www.vwcity.com

MUSIC MILLENNIUM
RECORDS, TAPES AND CD'S SINCE 1969

NW Portland
23rd & NW Johnson
(503) 248-0163

East Portland
32nd & E Burnside
(503) 231-8926

Rock • Folk • Jazz • Country • Soundtracks • Soul • Gospel • New Age • World • Bluegrass • Blues • Easy Listening • Oldies • Local • Cajun/Zydeco • Lounge • Rap • Broadway Cast • Classical and Much More!

Man's Best Friend

A BOUTIQUE FOR DOGS & THOSE WHO LOVE THEM.

Now offering Petsitting & Dog Walking.
Call for details about the "Howiday Inn."

3445 SE Hawthorne Blvd., Portland, OR
In the heart of the Hawthorne District
Open Mon-Sat: 10-6 ♦ Sun: 11-5
503-230-0237
www.citysearch.com/pdx/mansbestfriend

IS DISCRIMINATION DUE TO GENDER IDENTITY OR SEXUAL ORIENTATION A PROBLEM FOR YOU?

The City of Portland is fighting this discrimination.

Help is available to resolve conflicts or problems at work, in housing, or public accommodation. Confidential consultation and mediation services are free of charge.

For more information call:
Mediation Pilot Program
274-9886 or TTY
1-800-735-2900

Presents of Mind

Cool and Wonderful

*Cards * Jewelry * Home Decor*

2623 SE Hawthorne - 230-7740 - Open Every Day