

Going to the Millennium March on Washington in April? No? Rubber bullets sting like the dickens, you say? And tear gas makes you retch? Yo, doodle, not Washington state—Washington, D.C., where Clinton lives. That's right!

Launched by the Human Rights Campaign and the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches in early 1998, this year's Millennium March on Washington for Equality hasn't struck much of a chord with Portland activists, or Oregonians in general.

The absence of statewide support for the march is sobering, given that the 1993 queer rights march in the nation's capital galvanized the community.

The fourth national celebration for gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans civil rights is slated for April 28 through 30. The weekend includes myriad events for people with all sorts of interests, including a Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays biannual national conference, a gay and lesbian media summit, and a symposium on the persecution of queers during the Holocaust.

On the lighter side, MMOW organizers have arranged numerous dances; "The Wedding," which UFMCC officials say will be the world's largest demonstration celebrating same-sex unions; the march to and the rally on the National Mall; and the Human Rights Campaign's Equality Rocks concert at Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium.

Ron Glanville, the HRC coordinator for Oregon, says there most likely hasn't been a lot of march participation in the state because there is no leadership forum in the Northwest.

Though HRC and UFMCC conceived the idea of the march and continue as sponsors, an independent board and organization are running the show.

According to the MMOW Internet site, the Millennium March Leadership Council includes: a representative from each local, state and national organization that officially endorses the Millennium March in writing; two members from each state and Puerto Rico; and five members from the District of Columbia.

Council members will help the Millennium March board develop the march platform and plan events; organize activities within their respective organizations and states in support of the march; and update individuals in their respective organizations and states on all march activities.

The MMOW Internet site lists one person from Oregon as a council member: Jean Harris, former director of Basic Rights Oregon, the state's largest gay rights organization.

Harris doesn't even live in Oregon anymore.



PHOTO BY RENEE JACOBS

Basic Rights Oregon did sign on as a sponsor back in the infancy of the march but is not involved in any way with its promotion.

The state of Washington isn't on the list at all. Montana has one member; California has 25.

BRO's Maura Roche says her group has a lot on the plate at the state level. BRO's priorities include a counterattack against the Oregon Citizens Alliance, which is promoting another anti-gay ballot measure. Additionally, precious reserves of resources are to be utilized for the upcoming May primaries and the November election.

BRO's many supporters are plugged into issues on which the organization is concentrating, Roche says. To her knowledge, folks aren't talking about the national march, and she is not aware of any organizations around the state that are associated with the upcoming D.C. gathering.

At the Metropolitan Community Church of Portland, the Rev. Roy Cole says of his congregation's participation in the march: "I'm going to the march, but no one else is."

He adds, "It has great importance, politically, but organizers haven't been able to create a buzz."

The UFMCC reports that thousands of couples plan to take vows at "The Wedding: Now More Than Ever." The Rev. Elder Troy D. Perry, founder and moderator of UFMCC and a member of the MMOW board, anticipates that more than 5,000 couples will take part in the nonsecular ceremony.

Posters announcing the march have been displayed at the Portland church, says Cole, but

MARCH MADNESS? DON'T THINK SO!

Survey of Oregon activists turns up little interest in upcoming national gay rights march

by T.K. Mantese



apparently no one from the congregation is interested in going clear across the continent for a march—or a wedding.

Why are folks so disinterested in this year's march, whereas everyone was so pumped up about the march on Washington in 1993?

"People are pretty much post-OCA, they're feeling pretty comfortable," Cole assesses.

He says he isn't sure what the organizers should be doing to attract Oregonians, adding: "I feel badly. I'm hoping something will surface nationally in the next couple months."

Rural Organizing Project works with human dignity groups around the state. Marcy Westerling, the project's field director, says the level of interest in the march is "low within [the ROP] network of organizations—and we have a lot of queer-identified and queer-supportive organizations."

There has been very little information circulating about the event, Westerling says, adding that she has "no compelling answer for why people should go to the march."

The 1993 march was an "incredible priority," and months before that march, she notes, "we had made the commitment to recruit. It was such a given that we would all be in D.C."

Westerling says: "There's been an enormous disconnect between national and local. Oregon's lack of participation in this national effort shouldn't be misconstrued. I feel like there's great queer energy in this state. It speaks more to a lack of investment by national groups in Oregon."

Oregon contingent at 1993 national queer rights march

Critics of the march would agree that there is a disconnect. *The Washington Blade* reported that the most vocal critic of the march, the grass-roots Ad Hoc Committee for an Open Process, requested information twice last year about the MMOW's projected income, expenses, contractual arrangements and corporate sponsorships.

Initially reluctant to release the financial reports, the MMOW complied last month.

After reviewing the financial summary, Ad Hoc Committee member Leslie Cagan responded in a Feb. 2 statement: "This is a ragged collection of vague and generalized projections, and as such is useless. If they believe this satisfies the request for financial data they are once again showing how out of touch they are with the LGBT activist community."

The Ad Hoc Committee has criticized MMOW organizers for promoting the march as an event to empower the sexual minorities community, while ignoring serious questions about how money is being raised and spent "in our name."

It appears that outreach by MMOW to queer organizations in Oregon has been minimal to nonexistent.

HRC's Ron Glanville is going to the march with about 15 others. He says no one from the MMOW board has ever contacted him.

He says the lack of outreach indicates MMOW doesn't have enough resources.

HRC, the nation's largest gay rights organization, is sponsoring the Equality Rocks concert, which features k.d. lang, Melissa Etheridge, Garth Brooks, Ellen DeGeneres and Anne Heche. Proceeds from the concert benefit the educational arm of HRC, the HRC Foundation, which in turn will provide a major grant to the MMOW organization.

Donna Saffir of Portland's PFLAG chapter says some of the group's members are going to the PFLAG national conference. Beyond that, she is not aware of any plans around the march.

■ For more information about the MILLENNIUM MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR EQUALITY, check out the Internet at www.mmow.org.

For more information or to register for "THE WEDDING: NOW MORE THAN EVER," visit the site at www.ufmcc.com/wedding1.htm.

To find out more about the EQUALITY ROCKS concert, go to www.hrc.org.

Are you going to the national march? Why or why not? Is the march a community-building exercise or a misdirected action? Let Just Out know what you think. Send a letter to the editor at P.O. Box 14400, Portland, OR 97293-0400; e-mail to justout@justout.com; fax to (503) 236-1257; or submit your letter online at www.justout.com.

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