

One surefire way of knowing Jaime Balboa is a newcomer to Oregon is his pronunciation of the name—Or-uh-gahn, rather than the preferred and fiercely protected Or-uh-ghin.

"I'll have to work on that," laughs the gay man, who on April 24 begins his stint as the new executive director of Basic Rights Oregon, the state's largest gay and lesbian political organization.

Balboa most recently served as director of public education for the San Francisco-based International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission.

The nonprofit responds to human rights violations around the world through documentation, advocacy, coalition building, public education and technical assistance. Its overarching commitment is to "defend the rights of people worldwide to define their own sexualities and gender identities."

BRO, meanwhile, was spawned from the No on 9 and No on 13 campaigns of the early 1990s. The group claims more than 125,000 donors, supporters and volunteers "who are ready to take action to defend gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans rights."

Although IGLHRC takes a global approach to queer issues, while BRO maintains a statewide focus, Balboa says many of the skills he applied at IGLHRC are transferable to BRO—skills like "working in coalition with others, working with the grass roots, and developing relationships."

Balboa was born in Michigan 31 years ago, the fifth of six children. Coming out was a process—and not always easy, given that Balboa hailed from a family of conservative Catholics, one in which the word gay didn't "ring well to their ears," he says.

Like many families, they eventually adapted and remain close-knit.

When Balboa's mother was dying of cancer a few years ago, Balboa and his life partner, Todd Presner, moved home to take care of her. Before she passed away in 1994, she told her son she was sorry she had once expressed homophobic feelings.

"I cherish her sharing that with me," he says.

Balboa first became active in queer issues as a student at Adrian College in Adrian, Mich., where he eventually earned a bachelor's degree in English.

As an undergrad, he was involved in ACT UP-Ann Arbor, the raucous AIDS activist group that, in part, protested law enforcement's inequitable treatment of cruisers in public parks.

According to Balboa, gay guys were getting busted while straight guys doing the same

HELLO, JAIME

Just Out checks in with the incoming executive director of Basic Rights Oregon

by Inga Sorensen

thing—except with opposite-sex partners—were not subjected to similar punishments.

Balboa later headed to North Carolina to attend Duke University, where he earned a master's in theological studies, graduating magna cum laude.

At Duke, he served on the president's task force on sexual minority issues, and met and fell in love with Presner, who was an undergraduate at the time.

"I guess you could say I was robbing the cradle!" Balboa kids. (Presner is five years younger.)

The men were the first same-sex couple given access to the graduate school's housing units for couples.

Balboa is presently a doctoral candidate at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, Calif.

His scholarly publications include *Church Dogmatics*, *Natural Theology and the Slippery Slope of Geschlecht: A Constructivist-Gay Liberationist Reading of Barth*, and *Gustavo Gutierrez in Poststructuralist Critique: Toward a Postmodern Liberation*.

When we spoke with Balboa in late March, he was working on his dissertation, which

QUEER CONFERENCE ON THE WAY

The Northwest Regional Queer Conference is drawing near. NWRQC 2000 will be held at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Wash.

This year's NWRQC is being planned and hosted by the Whitman College Coalition Against Homophobia, which was formed seven years ago to promote acceptance of all sexualities.

The theme of the fourth annual event, slated for April 21 through 23, is "Crossroads: Celebrating Our Unity While Recognizing Our Diversity." Scheduled keynote speakers are Anthony Rapp, who starred in the musical *Rent*, and Magdalen Hsu-Li, a professional lecturer and musician.

The gathering is designed for students, faculty and staff of colleges and universities, as well as high school students and community members across the Pacific Northwest. It is described as an opportunity for folks in the region's queer and questioning communities to network, socialize and educate.

For registration and lodging information, visit the conference Internet page at go.to/nwrqc2000.

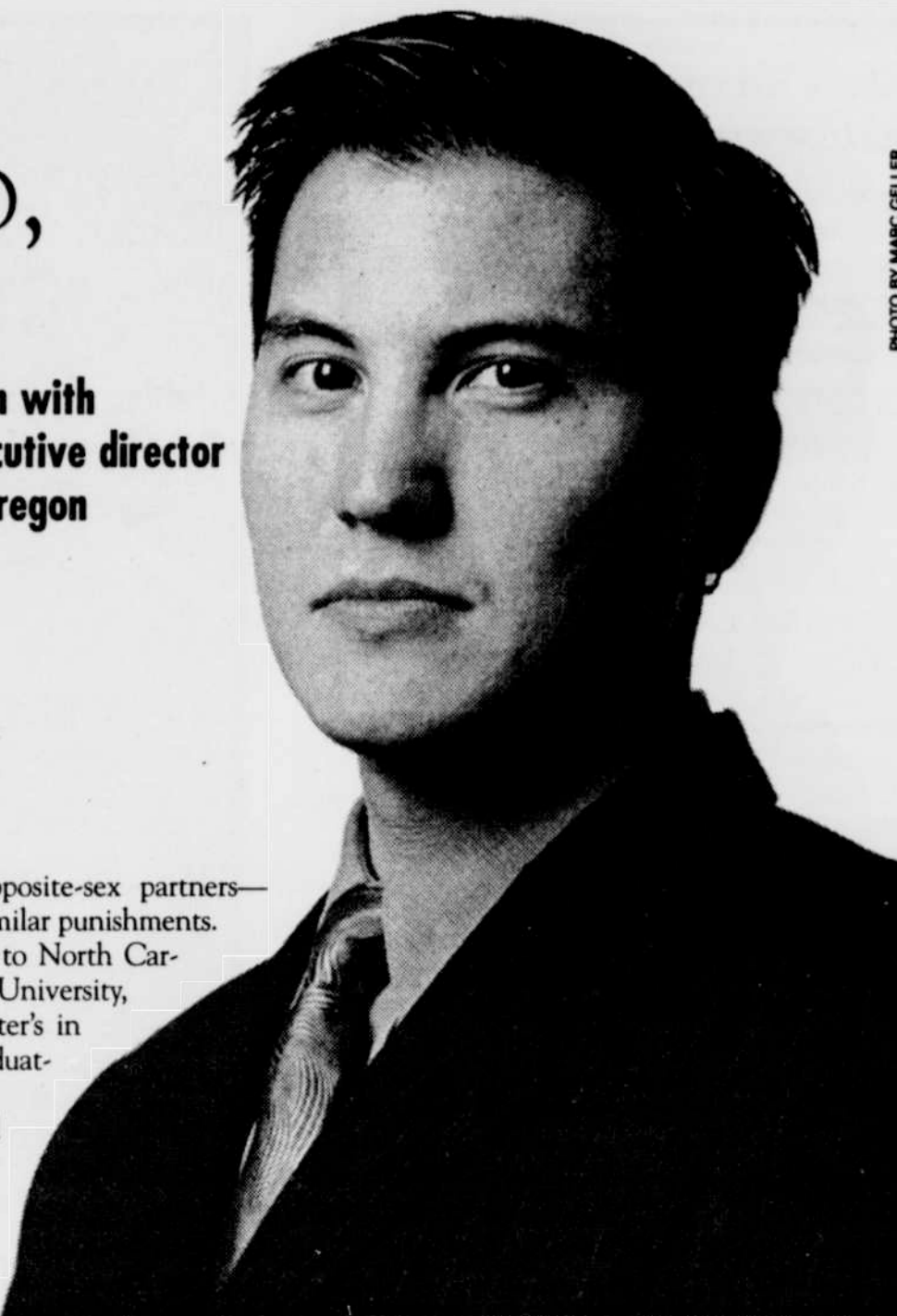


PHOTO BY MARC GELLER

involves constructing a gay and lesbian liberation theology.

He was also in the midst of packing up, finding a place to live in the Portland area, and learning the ins and outs of Or-uh-ghin.

"I'm very excited about this, and very much admire the work BRO has done," he says.

BRO is the point organization when it comes to lobbying state lawmakers on gay-related bills, promoting gay-friendly political candidates and fighting anti-gay ballot initiatives.

Last session, BRO successfully lobbied against nine bills introduced in the Oregon Legislature attacking gay rights.

BRO is currently orchestrating a highly organized activist network with goals and objectives and a year-round presence. As reported in the March 17 issue of *Just Out*, the group has been in touch with activists statewide to see if they are interested in participating in the network, which will be composed of Area Action Teams throughout Oregon. The teams will fall under BRO's purview and be committed to lesbian and gay rights in general. They will, however, set goals relevant to their particular locales.

Tops on Balboa's agenda is to work with the board and campaign team to develop and implement a strategy to defeat the OCA's so-called "Student Protection Act," which could qualify for the November ballot.

According to BRO, the measure "would endorse the firing of gay and lesbian teachers and potentially eliminate student counseling and support services that address the needs of gay youth."

As the new head of BRO, Balboa will also oversee the organization's 5-year-old Fair Workplace Project, which works with corporations to secure voluntary anti-discrimination policies.

The organization launched a nationwide search for a new executive director following the November departure of Jean Harris.

"We are excited to begin working with Jaime. We had a great search committee that assisted us in identifying and screening applicants that resulted in an exceptional slate of candidates," says Laura Dellinger, BRO's board co-chair. "Each one offered us something different. In the end, the board agreed unanimously that Jaime offered us both the leadership and vision BRO needs to continue our important work."

Says Balboa: "What motivates me is the passion for the work, and I'm eager to apply that passion in Oregon."

■ To get involved with BASIC RIGHTS OREGON, call (503) 222-6151. BRO's endorsements for the May 16 primary will be posted on its Internet site, www.basicrights.org, starting April 7.

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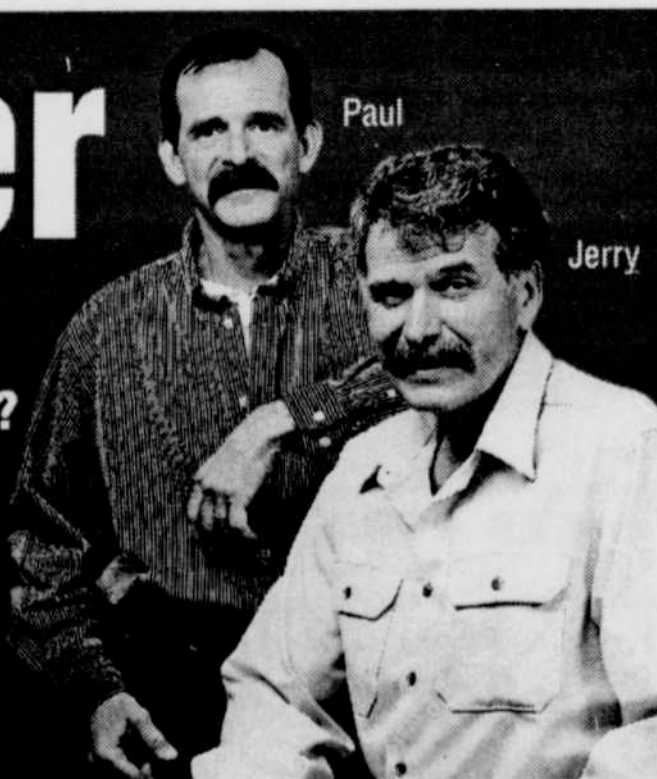
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