



Country mice (from left) Teija Heikkila, Peggy Barron and Alan Rose

believe the project could help organize a gay and lesbian community in rural enclaves.

When the twosome made their project proposal to the class, Heikkila says, there "was just silence."

Since then, the class has become a little more responsive. Heikkila and Rose have been approached by a few volunteers to help get the work done.

During the rest of April and the beginning of May, the small group will divide the project's tasks. By telephone, they'll ask local churches if gay and lesbian people are welcomed as full members in the congregations; they'll ask businesses if they have anti-discrimination policies that include sexual orientation; and they'll ask school counselors if they know of any enrolled sexual minority youths and whether there are resources for them.

They'll also try to reach queers directly by distributing the written section of the survey to as many community-related venues as possible. Copies of *Just Out* will be sent up to the two rural counties as well, and the group will insert surveys with instructions on how to fill them out and return them confidentially.

"We're trying to get a snapshot of what gay and lesbian life is like here," Rose explains.

The problem lies in getting queers in the picture at all. The group has printed 200 surveys and realistically hopes to get 50 back.

Says Heikkila: "I'm sure there are more gays

and lesbians out there, we just need them to fill out our survey."

All the surveys must be completed and returned by May 5; the group must present its results by May 17.

Heikkila and Rose believe the results of the survey could change the way gay men and lesbians interact in rural areas. For example, after the duo's project is completed, they will hold a queer-only social for those who filled out the survey.

Heikkila and Rose also believe their survey might serve as a model for organizing sexual minorities in other rural parts of the nation.

One of the most important aspects of the project, Rose says, is that he and Heikkila are conducting it together.

"We want to set that tone from the start, so the group we hope to create would be a place where gay men and lesbians could build a community together," Rose says. "I would be very disappointed if we found the kind of separatism that one often finds in urban settings."

■ For more information or to request a SURVEY, call (360) 425-3430. Surveys must be completed and returned by May 5.

KATY DAVIDSON is a *Just Out* staff writer who grew up in rural Arizona, literally hundreds of miles from the nearest lesbian bar.

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