

Says Dave Christensen, a community health nurse and Gay Life member: "Gay men are sophisticated consumers who need up-to-date transmission and prevention information to assist them in making informed decisions about health."

And sometimes it may take Rimmo the Clown to transmit that information.

According to Gay Life, Portland State University's Grand Ballroom will be transformed into a three-ring circus "to provide gay-bi men an opportunity to have some laughs and learn the secrets to a healthy butthole."

Men will also learn, for example, why condoms can sometimes hurt and how to solve the problem.

"We like the circus theme," says Gay Life member Dean Sidwell, "because it's not exclusive or stodgy. It's very accessible to people."

The topic of sex, meanwhile, and man-on-man anal sex in particular, is clearly one of society's least accessible areas of discussion.

"I think for many people there's a lot of shame around it," Sidwell explains.

Shame that can lead to low self-esteem and uniformed and unhealthy behaviors.

Enter the *Tunnel of Love*, which brings butt sex into the open and lets guys hear from their peers in a nonthreatening environment.

Three years ago, a similar production was held that brought guys together to talk about dating.

In April 1997, a standing-room-only crowd of an estimated 300 people, mostly gay men, turned out for a production called *It's Raining Men*, which was hosted by Rose City personalities Poison Waters and Stephen Michael Rondel. It featured a gay-guy version of *The Dating Game* as well as a roving microphone that captured audience insights into "exploring the perils and promises of meeting and dating gay men in Portland."

Snappy video clips of local queer guys answering dating-related questions were shown.

During the event, held at the former Sunny-

Gay City—and now Gay Life—strives to focus on issues that are relevant to queer men's lives and is employing provocative promotional materials and events designed to draw large numbers of men who might not otherwise seek HIV prevention services.

The daring nature of all this may unnerve some people, even within the gay community.

The Oregon Citizens Alliance, for instance, is trying to qualify a new statewide anti-gay initiative for the November ballot, and some may feel an event such as *Tunnel of Love* provides more fodder for the OCA.

"Why not educate men about anal sex in a quieter, less extravagant and attention-grabbing manner?" critics may ask.

To that, Rose answers: "That's what we have been doing throughout the years. This could be a way to reach men we've never reached before. We saw that with *It's Raining Men*."

And while Rose says he understands the concerns, he says Gay Life is simply acknowledging the reality that anal sex exists, "and we want people to be safe."

As for whether Portland is prepared for *Tunnel of Love*, he says, "I'll guess we'll know after May 4."

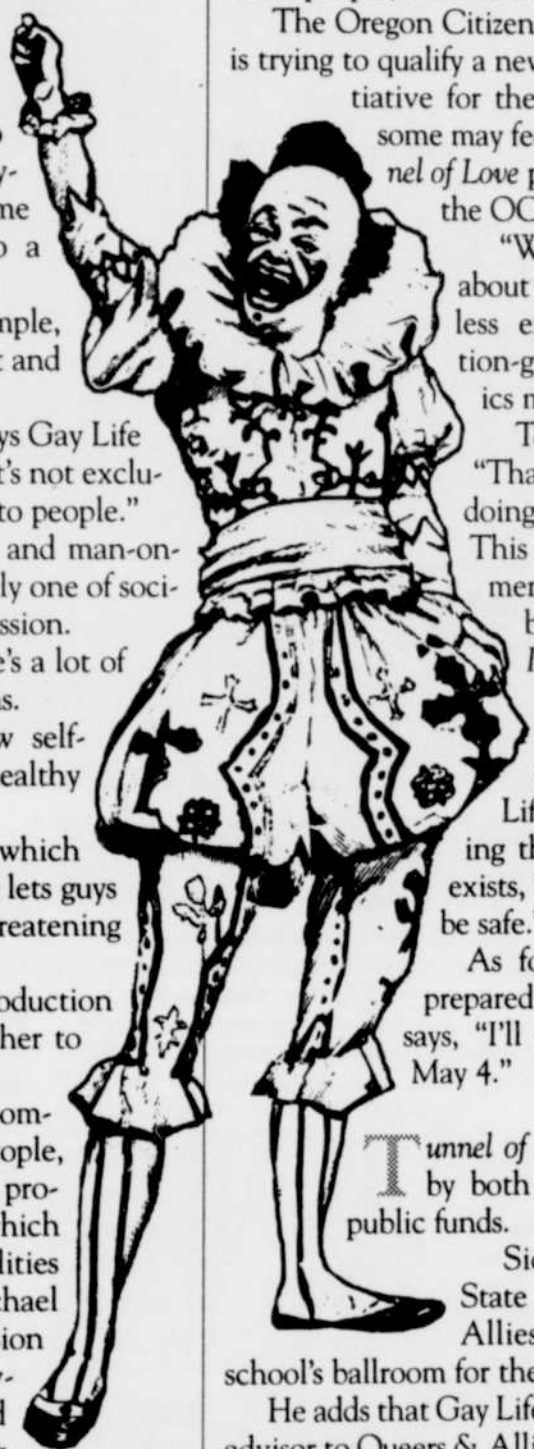
Tunnel of Love is being bolstered by both private donations and public funds.

Sidwell says Portland State University's Queers & Allies group secured the school's ballroom for the event.

He adds that Gay Life has met with a student advisor to Queers & Allies and presented a position paper outlining Gay Life's philosophy and the purpose of *Tunnel of Love*.

"We didn't want there to be any surprises for [PSU]," he says.

Eric Hildebrandt, community events produc-



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—Alan Rose

side Masonic Temple at Southeast 39th Avenue and Hawthorne Boulevard, participants were asked to fill out surveys that in part asked them for their reactions to the gathering.

"We got responses like, 'I never knew there were this many gay men in Portland,' to 'Get a bigger venue,'" Alan Rose told *Just Out* back then.

As with *Tunnel of Love*, that night was designed to generate a sense of community among gay and bi men, as well as begin the trek toward lower HIV transmission rates.

er for Seattle's Gay City, recommends guys attending Portland's event go and enjoy themselves—and maybe learn a thing or two.

"We've spent decades apologizing for who and what we are.... It's time to change that," he says.

■ **TUNNEL OF LOVE** is slated for May 4 at Portland State University's Grand Ballroom on the third floor of Smith Memorial Center, 1825 S.W. Broadway. The forum starts at 7:30 p.m.



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