

THE MOST UNEXPECTED PLACES

A tiny enclave in eastern Oregon has a new—and openly gay—member of its city council by Inga Sorensen

Richland, Ore., lies 39 miles east of Baker City on Highway 86, at the "Gateway to Hells Canyon."

A few folks are peppered across the open expanse of high desert, among them David Silva and his partner of 12 years, Zach Hill.

"We love it out here. People know you in a small town," says Silva, who in the mid-1970s dumped a desk job in San Diego, opting instead to milk cows in Oregon.

"I had always wanted to do that," recounts Silva, who was married at the time and raising three kids.

The years would roll by, and with them, changes. Silva would eventually come out as gay, get divorced, meet Hill, and swap milking cows for cooking 'em up on the grill.

"We own a neat little dinner house out here, the Longbranch Grille & Dinner House," Silva, 57, explains.

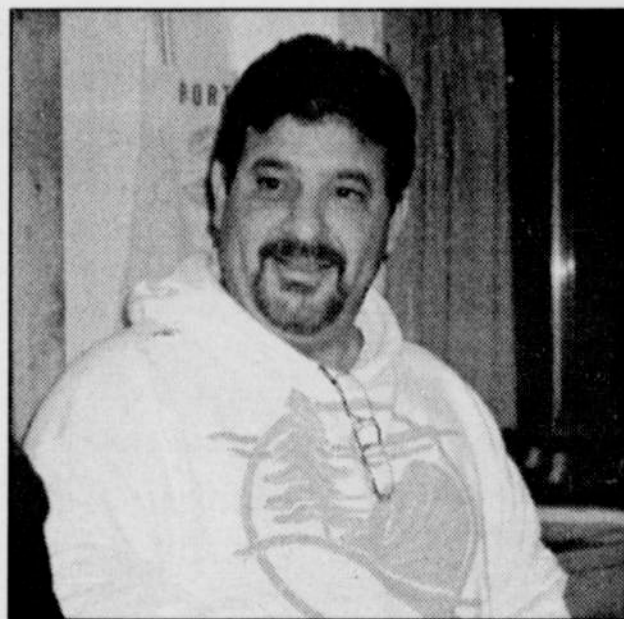
Patrons from Richland, population 161, and passers-through pop in to chow on steak and lobster. A rainbow sticker adorns the door.

In Queerville, USA, rural enclaves such as Richland are often the focus of disdain and ridicule. After all, such places are supposedly loaded with intolerance and small-mindedness, right?

Silva unlatches a big "no." "This town knows we're gay and we are treated very well. We are an integral part of the community," Silva says.

Indeed. On April 12, Silva was appointed to fill a vacancy on the Richland City Council, sans brouhaha or hoopla.

In fact, the Hells Canyon



Richland City Councilman David Silva; below: scenic Richland in the high desert

Journal reported Silva's appointment as just another nugget among other meeting goings-on (e.g., one local business owner had informed the council she "planned to add 16 flavors of ice cream cones and canned pop" at her second-hand store).

Says Silva: "It's too much work hiding who you are."

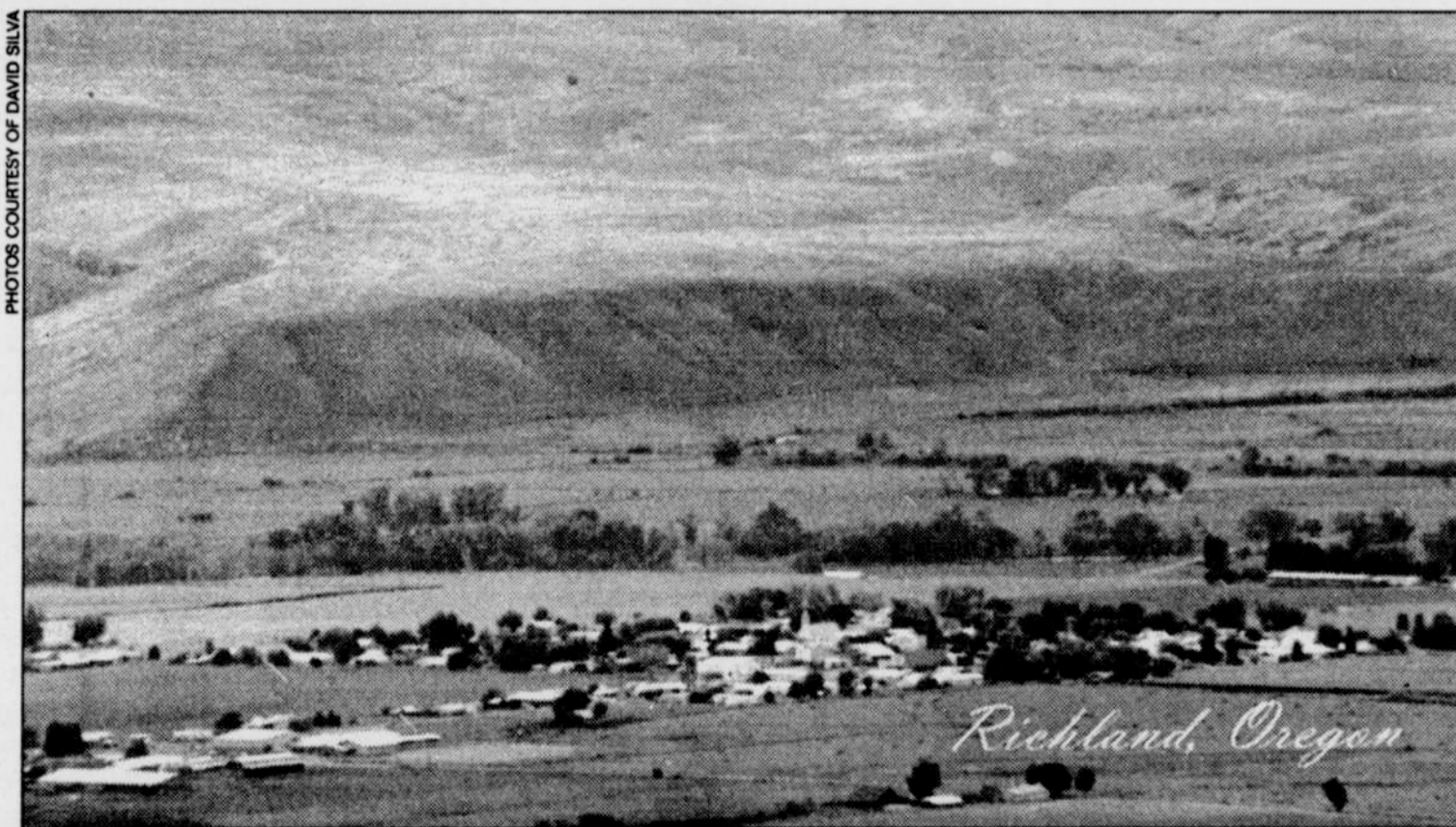
So he doesn't.

"And it's OK," says Silva, adding that Portland's Darcelle XV, that most out of queers, along with her troupe of female impersonators, will be in Richland to perform May 7.

"She likes it out here, too," he laughs.

Silva says he's looking forward to his stint on the City Council and is already pondering a future bid for mayor.

Another aspiration? "I'd like to own an RV park one day," he says. "That would be great."



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DAVID SILVA

Richland, Oregon

HAPPY ENDING

Lawsuit involving an anti-gay demonstrator and gay moviegoer is dropped by Inga Sorensen

Relief.

That's what the Rev. James Dancing Trout is feeling these days.

Dancing Trout was the target of a \$180,000 lawsuit recently filed by Daniel John Lee of Portland ["Lawsuits for Jesus," April 7].

In late September, Dancing Trout had gone to Cinema 21 to catch *Edge of Seventeen*, a gay coming-of-age flick. Outside the theater, he encountered Lee among a group of demonstrators protesting the movie.

Lee and Dancing Trout, who is gay, engaged in a dialogue that ended in Lee's arrest.

In March, Lee—who has described himself as a "preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ... preaching against the sexual sins of adultery, fornication and homosexuality"—filed a suit in Multnomah County Circuit Court against Dancing Trout, claiming false arrest, battery and malicious prosecution.

In the suit Lee said he was forced to take



The Rev. Jim Dancing Trout

PHOTO BY INGA SORENSEN

time from work to go his scheduled arraignment. (The Multnomah County district attorney dismissed the charges.)

He also said he "suffered loss of opportunity" to engage in free speech and exercise his freedom of religion, and claimed Dancing Trout, without probable cause, initiated criminal proceedings against Lee.

The Portland law firm Bennett Hartman & Reynolds agreed to represent Dancing Trout pro bono and shot off a letter to Lee, in turn prompting Lee to abandon his suit.

In an e-mail message to the firm, Lee wrote,

in part: "Because my work has carried me to the Midwest and I may be relocating to Ohio, I have decided I do not have the time necessary to devote myself to this case. It seems that Dancing Trout won't try to unjustly arrest me again and so I think it is best if I just dismiss the case. I apologize for any time or inconvenience I may have caused you."

Dancing Trout's attorney, Greg Hartman, says: "If you hang around the courts a lot, you see 'agenda' cases, and this one happened to be one of them."

In April, Hartman told *Just Out*: "[Lee] seems to be promoting a heavy agenda in court," which the lawyer considers inappropriate.

"We're certainly pleased," Hartman says of the apparent resolution.

Dancing Trout, meanwhile, says he harbors no ill will toward Lee.

"I feel pity for him...and I feel that his calling himself a Christian is a stretch," Dancing Trout says, adding that the next time he runs into anti-gay demonstrators he'll "probably just ignore them."

"But that doesn't mean I'm sorry for what I did. I'm not," he says.

As for the support from witnesses and from Bennett Hartman & Reynolds, Dancing Trout says: "I want to thank them all for what they did."

Fire-Grilled N.Y. Steak

Ale House Jambalaya • Wood Oven Fired Pizzas • Figs Marinated • And More! We're a Non-Smoking Establishment • Lunch • Dinner • Seven Days a Week! See our review at www.citysearch.com

BRIDGEPORT ALE HOUSE

A unique dining experience of BridgePort's "Great Firkin Beer" paired with Ale House Specialties like Cedar Roasted Salmon • Grilled Chicken Penne • Avian Spinach Salad • Jerk Chicken

Join us for a Great Lunch while Shopping in the Hawthorne District!

Not your typical brewpub . . .

BRIDGEPORT ALE HOUSE
3632 SE Hawthorne Blvd.
www.bridgeportbrew.com