

If you can't answer Mr. Rogers' oft-sung question, "Who are the people in your neighborhood?" David Lane is working to correct that.

Lane is the head of the city of Portland's Office of Neighborhood Involvement. He's also an out gay man with an impressive background in community organizing.

His current mission is to bring neighbors together—before they've locked horns over parking, noise or marauding dogs.

"It really is a small world," Lane says, "so we have to work one neighbor at a time."

Lane himself has lived in a lot of different neighborhoods. Born in Massachusetts, he lived in Paris, France, when young. For the most part he grew up in Minnesota. As a college student, Lane spent a semester in Israel; between college and Oregon, Lane has lived in Florida, Mississippi and Oklahoma.

One at a time, Portland's neighbors add up. Lane's department of 50 staffers boasts a \$4 million budget and is responsible for 95 different neighborhood organizations, each of which is required to have a nondiscrimination policy that includes sexual orientation.

"I think that it's important," Lane says, "to put a face on our community at the neighborhood level."

The face Lane adds is not that of some bland bureaucrat. He radiates a natural warmth and cheer, especially when the talk turns to his three sons.

Once upon a time, Lane was married to a woman and teaching educational psychology at Oklahoma State University. When his sons were ranging in age from 3 to 9, he came out. So did his wife. They did the sensible thing: They moved to the same neighborhood in Portland.

"Being a good parent is hard," Lane says. "You have to work at it no matter who you are."

Proudly listing his sons' academic accomplishments, he doesn't sound the least bit resentful of that work.

"One of the earliest memories I have is wanting to be a dad," he beams. "It drives my life. I've really been blessed. They're all wonderful kids."

Lane points out that his path as a gay dad has been smoothed in many ways by the fact that his sons' mother is also queer.

"It's just part of their lives," he says, adding that the boys went to their mother's commitment ceremony and come to pride celebrations as well.

Lane has been active in Portland's gay community as a member of the Portland Gay Men's Chorus. The chorus recently conferred upon him an honorary lifetime membership.

Lane now focuses more on chorus administration than performing, but he vividly recalls one incident from his singing days. In 1992,

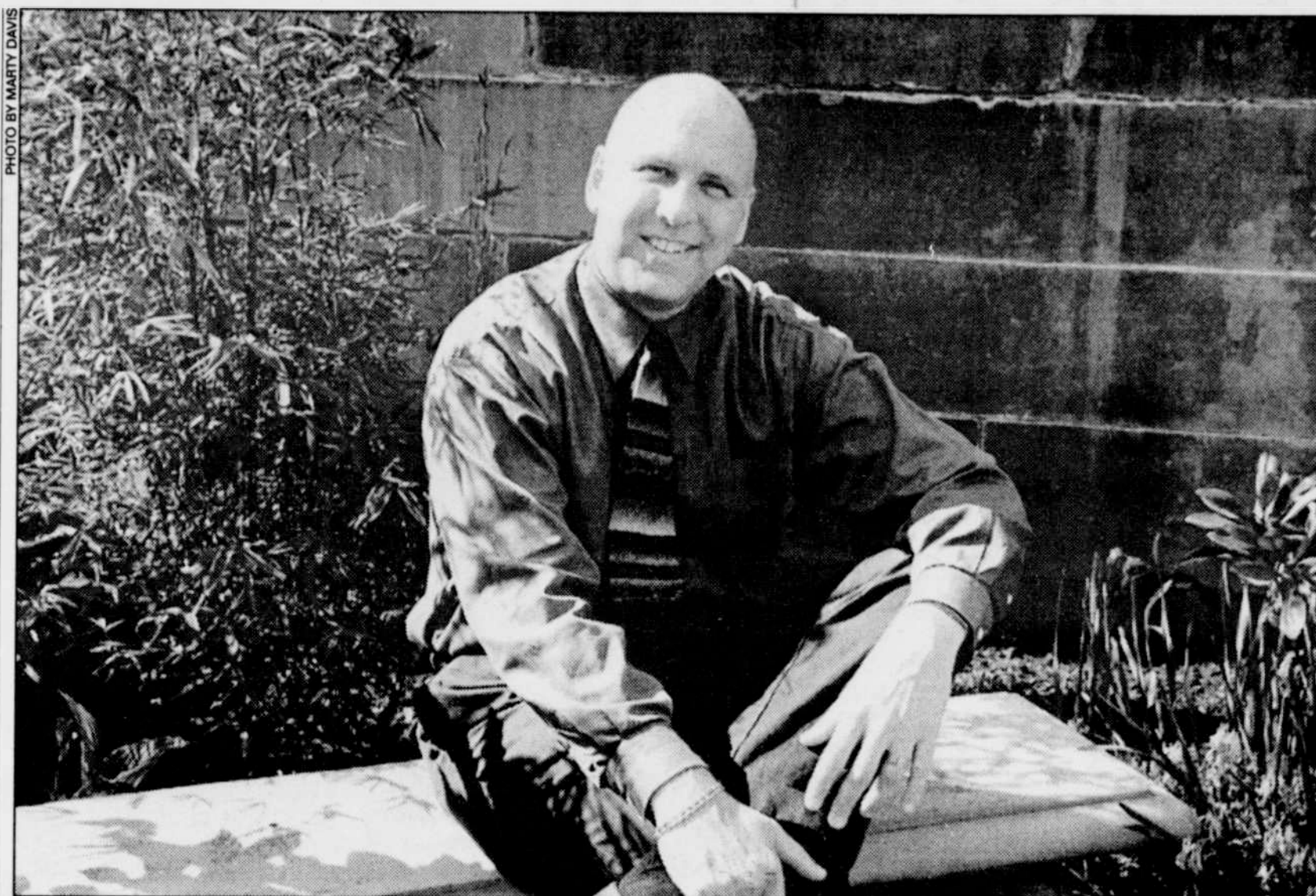


PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

David Lane in the Keeston Lowery Meditation Garden outside City Hall

EVERYBODY'S NEIGHBOR

As head of Portland's Office of Neighborhood Involvement, David Lane is in the business of building bridges by Irene K. Hislop

PGMC was touring the state at the height of the Oregon Citizens Alliance's anti-gay Measure 9 campaign. In Klamath Falls, an OCA member protesting at the concert set down the group's fliers to listen.

"Music can be a bridge to the human spirit," Lane says. "I know we changed a lot of attitudes."

That show in Klamath Falls drew about 300 people; that enthusiasm for social change—one person or neighborhood at a time—fuels Lane's work with the city.

"I really can instigate programs with wonderful partners and change how people around the city interact with their neighbors," Lane explains. "We have probably the most liberal city government in the country. That's something we can celebrate in our city."

Over the next several months, the Office of Neighborhood Involvement will be focusing on encouraging participation by a broader group of

neighbors, especially queers and people of color.

ONI includes the Metropolitan Human Rights Center and the immigration and refugee program.

This month, Lane will address a meeting of the Portland Area Business Association. On June 13, City Commissioner Dan Saltzman will host a dialogue for queer communities. While Lane expects to hear some concerns specific to sexual minorities at the meeting, he also anticipates broader issues, such as traffic, will come up.

Saltzman oversees the ONI, and Lane reports that he is very supportive of queer issues. Lane's partner, Jonathan Kessler, is invited to functions, and Saltzman has no problems whatsoever working with an out gay man.

Lane started his position at the ONI last year after spending eight years doing HIV prevention and awareness work with the state health department. He had coordinated community-based groups around the state. Under his guid-

ance, the number of such groups nearly doubled, increasing from eight to 15.

Lane also pushed to bring a broader, more general health care message to queers.

"Being closeted is the biggest risk factor," he comments, "so having social events is a health and prevention activity."

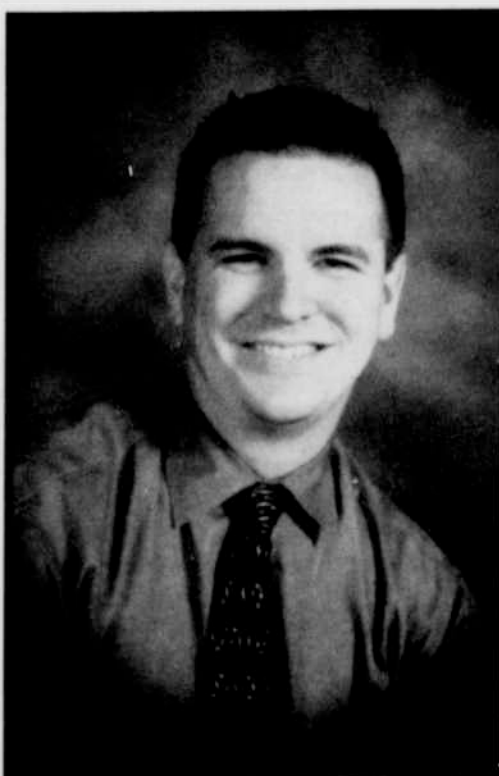
Lane also managed the teen prevention program Students Today Aren't Ready for Sex, or STARS. For Lane, it was a way to empower youths to make healthy choices. While he was working with the program, he says, a lot of gay and lesbian youths told him they had been promiscuous to hide or deny their orientation.

So does he see himself as a role model? "I hope so," he says. "I take that possibility very seriously."

When feeling less serious, Lane enjoys relaxing with his partner in their garden. This summer, Lane's three sons plan to help the couple build a waterfall and pond there.

Even gardening is a way to have a positive impact. Lane and Kessler's garden boasts a variety of native plants but no resource-draining grass. Lane pauses during this explanation to point out that the ONI coordinates the city's downspout disconnection program.

■ IRENE K. HISLOP is a free-lance writer who recently moved to Montpellier, France.



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