

“As I grow older, I so appreciate that the present life is enriched more when you understand where we have come from,” comments Rupert Kinnard, who founded the Diversity Alliance in 1981. “It’s interesting for people now to get a sense of what it was like in the early 1980s.”

Ahh, the early 1980s: Ronald Reagan was beginning his eight-year reign as president, a few Portland police officers were under scrutiny for placing dead possums on the doorsteps of African Americans, gay men were being attacked in Laurelhurst Park, and the Portland Town Council was the prominent gay organization in town.

The PTC was like a one-stop shopping center. It lobbied the state legislature for gay rights, raised money for gay-friendly candidates and set up a foundation for social services and counseling.

“Basically, if you were going to do anything in town, you either had to be with them or you wouldn’t get anything done,” notes Susan Dobrof, a member of the Diversity Alliance.

While gay men and lesbians were part of the PTC, it wasn’t exactly a shining example of diversity. To some, it seemed too white and too male.

“I think that, at that time, the council had sort of been called to the carpet for not having really tried to get people of color or a more diverse group of people on the board,” remembers Kinnard.

But then Kinnard received a call from Jerry Weller, the executive director of the organization, asking him to join the board.

“I had been impressed with seeing Jerry on television representing the organization and thought, ‘That sounds like the kind of thing I wouldn’t mind doing,’” Kinnard recalls.

So he signed on.

After going to a few board meetings, Kinnard became frustrated because the council never seemed to respect the importance of addressing community diversity within the struggle for gay rights. When someone suggested that, as a board member, he could create a committee to address diversity, Kinnard was a bit offended.

“Why is it that I—as the person of color on the board—why should it only be my responsibility?” Kinnard asked himself. “Then I thought, ‘Well, it’s the only thing I want to do, so maybe

I need to get beyond being upset and just see what I can do.’”

And that’s how the Diversity Alliance started. It was for men, women, gays, straights, people of color and anyone else who wanted to recognize and celebrate diversity.

“The idea was to try and have a vehicle that women and people of color who were gay could come into the Portland Town Council,” notes Dobrof.

“The concept was wonderful. There was nothing else like it at that time,” recalls member David Kerr.

“Yet, it was weird being a white male in the group, because that was what people were

ALLEGIANCE TO DIVERSITY

Once upon a time, in the early '80s, diversity wasn't taken for granted by members of a unique alliance

by Pat Young

THE DIVERSITY ALLIANCE AND PORTLAND TOWN COUNCIL presents

**RACISM
SEXISM
HOMOPHOBIA**


HOW THEY ARE NOT ALIKE!

a talk by **RON HERNDON** co-chair of the Portland Black United Front

THURSDAY SEPT. 17th 8:00pm

Free 1300 E. Burnside Free

Dance Along With



THE DYKETONES

The Diversity Alliance and PTC present a benefit

THE DYKETONES
A 1960's Rock and Roll Dance Band

Advance Tickets \$4.00 Saturday June 27 1981 8:30-12:00 midnight \$5.00 at the door

at The Masonic Temple 1119 SW Park Ave. by the fine arts museum

Beer, Wine and munchies available

For Child care and work exchange information call PTC at 227-2785 in advance

the diversity alliance presents

A PANEL DISCUSSION

Jewish lesbian & gay community speak out!

MON. MARCH 15th 7:30
at M.C.C. NE. 24th and Broadway

THE DIVERSITY ALLIANCE presents

REPRESSION & EXPLOITATION: POVERTY TODAY
(Why the Greedy Take From the Needy)

Tuesday June 22nd, 1981 7:30pm

St. Andrews Community Center NE 9th & Alberta

Washcoat Available Children Available

Portland Town Council was like a one-stop shopping center. It lobbied the state legislature for gay rights, raised money

for gay-friendly candidates and set up a foundation for social services and counseling.

putting down. But I could take it,” he adds with a laugh.

A core group of about 10 members organized panel discussions, including “Repression and Exploitation” and “Jewish Lesbians and the Gay Community.” The one that generated the most heated discussion was “Racism, Sexism and Homophobia—How They Are Not Alike.” That forum drew a packed crowd.

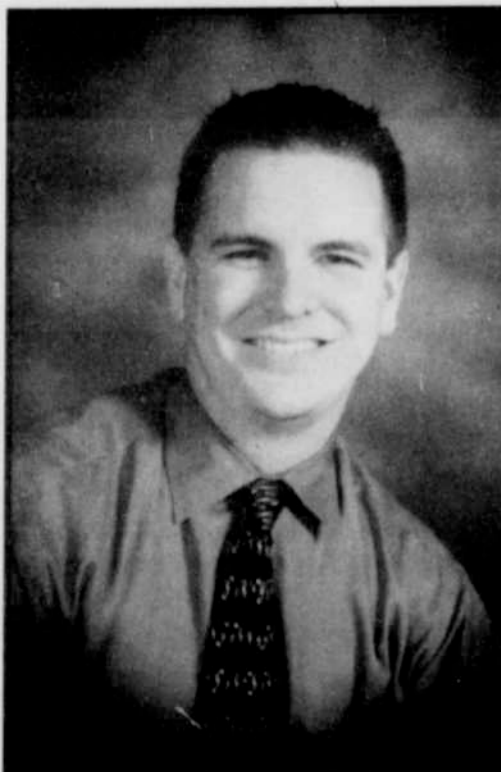
“It was an incredible, far-reaching forum to have,” notes Kinnard. “Racism, sexism and homophobia have unique qualities, and the goal was for each of us to respect the unique part of what we go through and what our experiences are.”

relationships.”

It was a different time. Perhaps one that won’t be repeated.

“When I think of today, one of the main reasons we tend to come together is because of a crisis—such as to fight the anti-gay ballot measures,” comments Kinnard. “But back then, it was just so interesting that we came together with our energy and the commitment to celebrate diversity.”

■ PAT YOUNG is a Portland-based free-lance writer and gay and lesbian historian. She is currently writing a book about Ballot Measure 9.



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