

It started following the death of a beloved Foxy Lady.

Sharon Hambleton, an avid athlete in her younger years, also a member of the Foxy Ladies of '42 (an informal social group comprising her friends who were all born in the same year), passed away in March 1997 after battling ovarian cancer for three years.

In 1998, her longtime partner, Lorie Hansen, and several close friends devised a way to have Hambleton's name live on while they contributed a service to the community as well.

They started the Hambleton Project, a Portland-based network for lesbians with cancer. The project is modeled after the Mautner Project in Washington, D.C., an organization that helped Hambleton herself during her 19 trips back east to the National Cancer Institute in Maryland.

The mission statement for the Portland group reads: "The Hambleton Project is a non-profit organization that provides education and support to lesbians with cancer. The project invites lesbians, their partners, friends and families to call us for assistance."

In June 1998, the project got its first call. Since then, it's been growing, forming, networking and making a name for itself in the Portland area. This year, the project boasts a team of 40 volunteers and helps nearly 30 lesbians with cancer.

"Lesbians our age tend to be more closeted, and it's harder for them to reach out. Most of them don't have the circle of friends younger lesbians have," says Barb Morris, the project's treasurer and also one of Hambleton's longtime friends.

The project runs three support groups, networks with other lesbian and health care groups,



Barb Morris (left) and Jan Dillon

distributes a newsletter, and serves as a contact for out-of-town patients coming to Portland for treatment.

On a day-to-day basis, the members and volunteers mostly help out women around the house. They provide transportation to doctor appointments, do shopping, help with housework and yardwork.

GAINING MOMENTUM

The Hambleton Project, a 2-year-old network for lesbians with cancer, improves visibility, seeks office space by Katy Davidson

"The women get exhausted," Morris says. "We're really willing to do anything that will help their quality of life."

Despite the project's steady success, it's still officeless—a state of affairs that is a little off-putting for Morris and Jan Dillon, the project's chairwoman.

"Our biggest need right now is an office space," Morris says. "We're scattered. I think we could focus better if we were in one place."

Though neither Dillon nor Morris is battling cancer, both became involved with the project as a result of their close friendships with Hambleton. Both are retired; Dillon was a teacher, and Morris used to work for Henderson House, a domestic violence shelter.

"We mostly do a lot of organizational things," Morris says.

The memory of Hambleton is what keeps Dillon involved.

"That's the fire that keeps me going," she says. "I don't like to use the word *death*, but it's life-altering to be around."

Right now, the board holds meetings in members' homes and holds volunteer trainings at Friendly House, a community center in

Northwest Portland. Morris says one household receives phone calls, another one receives incoming mail, and another houses all the newsletter materials.

The project is also in perpetual search of new volunteers, and the board will hold its next volunteer training June 27. The training will be more of an emotional-assurance workshop than a hands-on session, according to Dillon.

"We'll tell people what gifts they have, work on how to listen, how not to project your own feelings toward the situation, how to feel more comfortable around someone who's dying," she says.

Morris adds: "We don't just toss people out to sink or swim. Going into a stranger's house can be a little intimidating."

Considering its status as a nonprofit organization, the project is always in search of funds as well. Recently, the Hambleton Project was awarded three grants and held its first fundraising event, a banquet at Starky's, but the board is looking for a way to maintain enough income to cover the cost of an office space.

To support the project's visibility campaign, members of the Hambleton Project will march in the Portland pride parade on June 18.

■ For more information about the HAMBLETON PROJECT, call (503) 672-1007.

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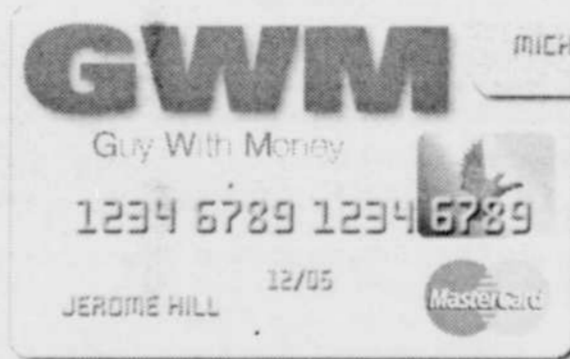
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