

SWALLOWING THEIR PRIDE

Nonprofit responds to allegations from former board members

by Jonathan Kipp

Officials from Pride Northwest recently responded to allegations of unfair election practices by two former board members, Tamara Swan and Janna MacAuslan. At the center of the controversy are the organization's bylaws and two elections earlier this summer in which the women were not re-elected.

They claim foul play, saying the elections were illegal and served to remove them from the board without due process. Pride Northwest Inc., a 501(c)3 nonprofit, produces Portland's annual gay pride parade and festival.

Officials insist both elections were not only legal but were ethical and democratic. In fact, Carmella Ettinger, the board's current chair, says neither Swan nor MacAuslan actually was "removed."

Attorney Brad Woodworth—who was retained by Pride Northwest to review a 14-page letter sent to the board from more than 40 community members including Swan and MacAuslan—addressed their 13 complaints in a response obtained by *Just Out*. Although he recommends several amendments to the bylaws for clarity, he finds no wrongdoing.

Swan, who was appointed as a temporary member of Pride Northwest's board, asked for an election June 8 to make her a regular member when her term neared its end. The board complied with her request, but she did not receive the two-thirds majority she needed to remain on the board.

Woodworth suggests future temporary board members be given full one-year terms.

MacAuslan wasn't "removed" either, Ettinger says. The entire board underwent an election July 8. MacAuslan was the only board member who failed to garner the needed votes. Ettinger says she asked for early elections this summer so Pride Northwest could get a head start on next year's event.

Typically, the board forms during an early autumn retreat. Ettinger says no one present voiced any objection to the early election.

But MacAuslan says she did object and expressed that the election was highly unusual and planned without any notice. In recent years, board members only have declared whether they wanted to continue to serve and were not elected at all, she explains.

MacAuslan says elections never have been done. Dana Rosenlund, also on the board, says she objected as well.

"I tore up my ballot. This has never been done before," she recalls saying.

MacAuslan suspects the special election was planned to remove her from the board because of long-running personality conflicts and unresolved issues that had festered throughout the year.

But Ettinger disagrees. She says that the board might have not cast ballots at the previous fall retreat but that it did vote on individual members.

She says that this year's election was announced ahead of time and that all board members were present. Woodworth says the board acted within its power and abided by the bylaws.

Although the election might have been unprecedented, it apparently was above-board. Pride Northwest's bylaws specify a one-year term



Carmella Ettinger works on site setup for this year's event.

for members with no limitation on the number of terms they can serve.

The bylaws also require board members to receive an approving two-thirds vote. They do not specify when elections are to be held.

Ettinger thinks that most of the community is happy with the work the organization does and that Pride 2000 was the most successful event to date, with record attendance, volunteers, booths and parade entries. She says this is the first year it "came out in the black."

"We have addressed the community," she says. "We are trying to move ahead and produce an event."

Jack Keegan, Pride Northwest's vice chair and last year's chair, says: "We had an election, we made some decisions, and we are sticking by them. We can't revisit every decision that we've made."

Ettinger insists Pride Northwest is answerable to the community about the event but not the board's internal issues. Starting in September, public comments will be accepted during evening meetings usually held the first Wednesday of each month at Portland State University's Smith Hall.

In the meantime, Swan, MacAuslan and their supporters will continue to strategize. They have scheduled a community meeting for Aug. 23 to address the elections and a lengthy list of additional concerns and complaints.

The citizen group is expected to request formally the resignation of the entire Pride Northwest board. Members say their objections are all out of concern for an event they truly care about—some of them have been involved with for years.

Despite that, they insist they will not let the situation rest. If it takes formal reports to the secretary of state and the Internal Revenue Service, the group says it will do just that.

Others want the situation to go away. "I'm hoping it will fizzle," says Christopher Webster, formerly of Pride Northwest.

Ettinger says that she will not attend the upcoming community meeting and that Pride Northwest has not been extended an official invitation. The gathering's sponsors insist they repeatedly have asked the board to come.

■ A community meeting will be held from 6 to 9 p.m. Aug. 23 at Metropolitan Community Church of Portland, 2400 N.E. Broadway. To review PRIDE NORTHWEST'S finances, visit www.pridenw.com/pridenwbudget.html.

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*licensed in Oregon and Washington
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