

Home Run

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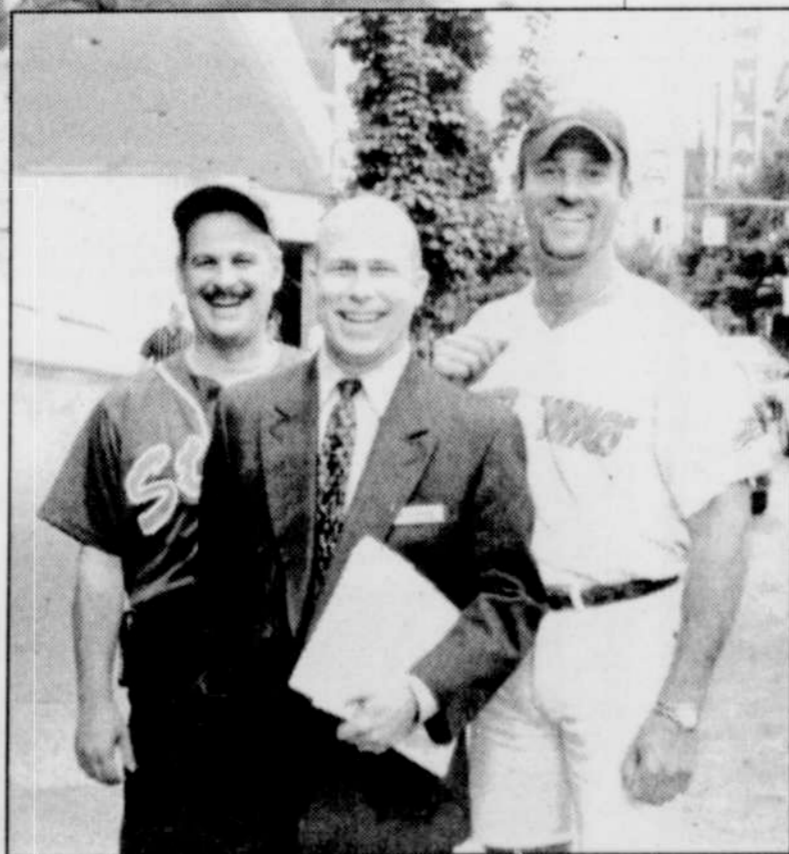
EVERYBODY WINS WHEN THE RCSA SCORES



Between 2,500 and 3,000 visitors will stay for a week in the Rose City, leaving behind \$2 million to \$3 million in cash registers.

PHOTOS BY MARTY DAVIS

Roy Melani hit it out of the park in Toronto



Roy Melani (left) and Tim Bias (right) signed the contract with Todd Wells of the Hilton

Weather permitting, when batters step up to the plate in Delta Park during the 2002 Gay Softball World Series, they'll see postcard views of Mount Hood and Mount St. Helens in the distance. That picturesque image was a key idea that envoys from the Rose City Softball Association conveyed last month in Toronto to delegates of the North American Gay Amateur Athletic Alliance, which voted to hold its annual event in Portland from Aug. 19 to 25, 2002.

Toni Carr, women's division commissioner, was on hand for the announcement and describes the emotional scene. "We just jumped up on top of each other; it was so exciting—we really wanted it."

Someone not involved with amateur softball leagues might not be able to appreciate how big a deal this is—for the RCSA and for Portland. It was such a big deal that a diligent committee labored for months to prepare a polished, hourlong presentation touting the merits of Portland and its environs as an ideal locale for this prestigious event.

It was such a big deal that a delegation of 17 people flew to Toronto to make the bid presentation. And it was such a big deal that the group even included Todd Wells, Portland Hilton Hotel sales manager, and Cathy Kretz of the Portland Oregon Visitors Association.

So why all the fuss to bring some gay and lesbian softball teams to Portland? Money, honey.

Between 2,500 and 3,000 visitors will stay for a week in the Rose City, leaving behind \$2 million to \$3 million in cash registers. And if all goes according to plan, the RCSA will present checks for at least \$10,000 each to three Portland charities: Esther's Pantry, Our House and the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation. Oh yeah, and it's one hell of a party, too!

The visionary behind it all is Roy Melani, who has segued from chairman of the bid committee to chairman of the event. Back in Pittsburgh, he played on a championship softball team that made it to the gay world series several times. So when he and his partner moved to Portland in the mid-'90s, one of the first things he did was establish the Portland Storm.

Since its inception, it has placed first every year in the open B division, and this season it even managed a record of 20 wins and no losses—the first time an RCSA team ever has gone undefeated. The Storm also has participated in the gay world series three times, trips that fueled a desire to play host to the event.

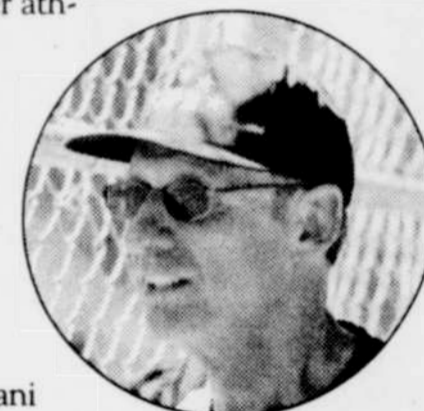
Sounding like a true transplant, Melani says he wanted to bring the event to Oregon to "showcase Portland. When you're a member of NAGAAA, it's not required that you host the games, but when you have the facilities, it's nice to take your turn."

And boy oh girl do we have the brand-spanking-new facilities. Two of them, in fact, were completed in the past few years. One venue will be at Delta Park in North Portland, and the other will be the Hillsboro Stadium complex, for a total of 11 softball diamonds.

Another reason this is a big deal is that Portland is considerably smaller than cities that typically play host to this event, such as Atlanta and Kansas City, Mo. "It will enhance our stature as a city," Melani believes. He also thinks the gay community has an opportunity "to make a major impression on the city."

Which begs the question: Do thousands of beer-guzzling, hard-partying, out-of-towns queer athletes spending a week mingling with the locals create a recipe for trouble? For protests? For spring break-style confrontations with police?

Not at all, Melani insists. During the six years he's attended the event, he never has seen a problem. In fact, the



Portland Police Bureau Chief Mark Kroeker will play ball

bid presentation included a letter from Chief Mark Kroeker stating "the Portland Police Bureau will work very hard to ensure a safe, positive and friendly event."

Toni Carr also has been to many of these series, and she agrees behavior is not an issue. "Sure, it's fun to party, but it's ball—that's what it is," she says emphatically.

Melani goes on to say umpires love to work the NAGAAA games because good sportsmanship is the norm. "We don't hassle the umpires over their calls. To me, it's one of the best gay sporting events in the world," he explains, adding that he's formed many lasting friendships through the years.

Pride also figures in the equation. "When you are one of the best in the nation, representing your team in the world series"—he pauses to laugh at his own admission—"and when you're as competitive as I am, it's a goal to do well."

In fact, Melani promises that the Portland Storm, which finished tied for 17th out of 24 teams in the B division at the gay world series this year, already is planning to crank up its effort during the next two seasons in preparation for the big event. "We're going to work really hard to play especially well in 2002," he pledges.

So how did representatives from a city known mostly for rain—whose most famous athlete just might be Tonya Harding—convince hundreds of delegates who never even had been to Oregon to pick us? It wasn't so simple!

Continued on Page 23

