

Continued from Page 1

Aspen then began arranging conversation projects at LCP under the same model as those that were successful at Pride Northwest. These facilitated conversations bring together different groups of people—such as those with different gender identities or those from different generations—for conversation in order to learn about each other.

The office began holding lesbian social nights, monthly potlucks for lesbians of color and art/game nights. Interest in the organization was rekindled.

This year, LCP's paid membership increased from 125 to 175. It also held a membership meeting last May, electing a new working board of seven members and reinstating a board for the Community Education Project, LCP's nonprofit entity.

The CEP board consists of four longtime community activists who all have participated with LCP to some extent for years. It oversees the organization's finances and its long-range goals.

"I think it's called guidance, but it's really kibitzing," CEP board member L.C. Hansen laughed. "I don't think there's any of us with less than 30 years in the lesbian community of Portland."

Hansen also noted that the board's commitment to strategic planning has "given life to some of these ideas that are bubbling up to reinvigorate the organization." She gives a lot of the credit to Aspen.

"Her hat is on right now," Hansen quipped. "But often it's fully off her head with all the different ideas that she comes up with."

Aspen replied, "It's very exciting to think of the potential of all the things we could do." Out of the surveys and the annual meeting have come more new projects.

Libby Harrison was hired as a part-time youth liaison and implemented a summer needle-exchange program through the office as well as emergency packs for homeless youth. She also plans winter emergency packs that will include

warm clothing. The 23-year-old is in charge of LCP's Youth Leadership Camp, which increased this year from an annual to a quarterly event, thanks to a grant from Multnomah County that was earmarked for sexual minority youth.

Working board member Mara Cohn organized the Boomers, a social group open to anybody "who was born in 1959 or earlier and is single." They recently enjoyed dinner together before attending the Holly Near concert.

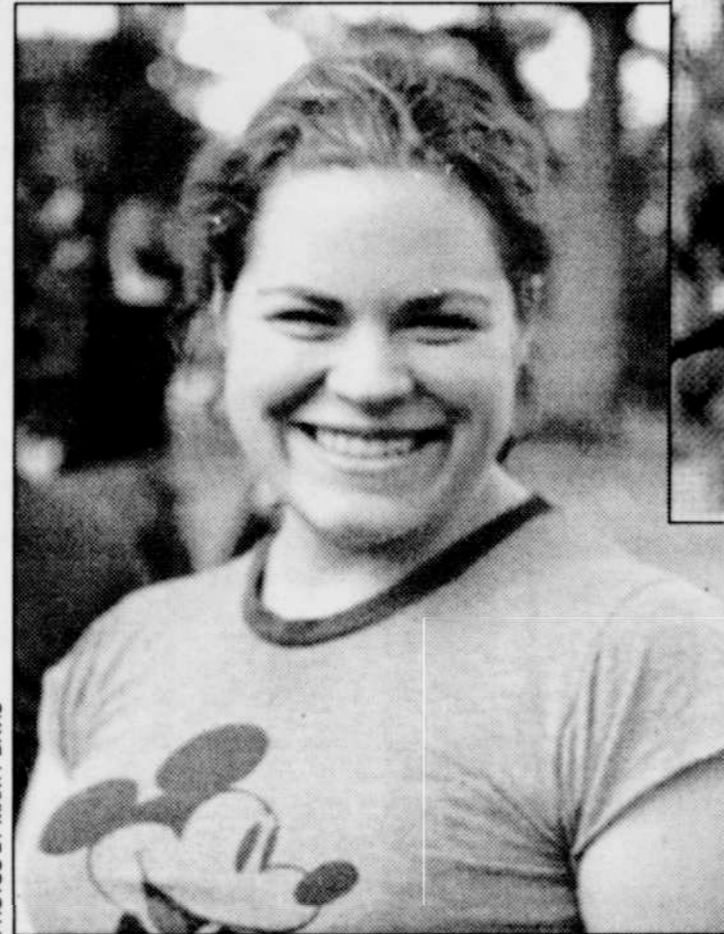
A total of 39 women are involved, and Cohn hopes to encourage some of them to become official, dues-paying members. "They're tough, but I think I can convince them," she said, smiling.

Aspen noted LCP's evolving relationship with the Deaf community as another important gain this year. Pagan Thomsen, a member of the Northwest Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf, was part of the panel at an LCP-sponsored disability forum last February, and survey results showed members were interested in learning about Deaf culture.

"I was totally surprised how many women signed up saying they would like to take an ASL class," Aspen exclaimed. One of LCP's current board members is an American Sign Language interpreter and is looking for a teacher for those classes.

In October, Thomsen performed standup comedy at LCP's No on 9 spaghetti dinner fund-

*"It's very exciting to think of the potential of all the things we could do."*  
— Kristan Aspen



Libby Harrison

PHOTOS BY MARTY DAVIS

raiser, which successfully integrated LCP's social and political aspects as well as its outreach into the Deaf community. "We made a big connection there," Aspen said.

Part of LCP's work this year has been to define the organization and its goals more clearly in

order to better represent its primary constituency. Back at the 1998 membership meeting, the then-board and program director presented a change in the bylaws that removed the word "woman."

It was a step they thought was progressive in creating a welcoming atmosphere to a large and diverse group of people who lay claim to a lesbian identity in its many and evolving forms. It was a controversial move that came too quickly for many members of the organization.

The bylaw change passed by popular vote, but many in the crowd felt alienated and betrayed. At this year's membership meeting, the word "woman" was reinstated.

Continued on Page 19

## CAMPING OUT

Youths tackle tough issues during a weekend retreat

by Natalie Shapiro

The Lesbian Community Project's fourth Sexual Minorities Youth Leadership Camp recently gave queer and transgendered youth a much-needed opportunity to build community, learn new skills and meet others.

It attracted 25 people between the ages of 14 and 26 for a weekend in early November at the Mount Hood Kiwanis Camp. The goal, organizer Libby Harrison explained, was to have a weekend planned by youth for youth in order to work on issues such as classism, racism and gender.

A grant from Multnomah County Youth Services ensured the camp was free of charge. This was important, Harrison said, so low-income and homeless youth could attend.

Harrison began the conference with a talk on sex. She discussed the traditional concepts of safe sex but added a new twist on the subject: mental safe sex.

"It's a state of mind you need to be in when you are having sex," she explained. "If you are wondering what color to paint the ceiling when having sex, you shouldn't be having sex."

This adds another dimension to safe sex. "It allows you to figure out if you really want sex with that person and how you can get out of the situation if you need to."

Harrison added that people all too often base their identity on sexual acts rather than feelings. "Nobody counted me as queer until I had sex with a woman," she noted. Mental safe sex allows a stronger connection with one's feelings.

Kari Kruse, Rainbow Youth program director, gave a workshop on racism. In spite of organizers' efforts to bring in youth of color, only one participant was a person of color. Therefore, the focus of the workshop was on confronting and changing one's own racism.

When asked what can be done to increase numbers of youth of color participants, Kruse suggested more outreach in different communities. "Especially in North Portland—there are so many gay, lesbian and transgendered youth there," she said. Kruse is planning to organize a youth of color retreat in the near future.

Roper, Bradley-Angle House sexual minorities services coordinator, and Molly Franks of Washington County Pride led workshops on classism. Franks began by giving definitions of class along with the stereotypes of people from different backgrounds.

Participants broke up into two groups according to the class they grew up in. One group included those identified as poverty and working class, and the other was middle and upper class.



Kari Kruse

PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

Participants talked about "Mattering" and "Marginality." "We shared a time when we felt we mattered and a time when we felt marginalized based on class and also when we made someone feel that way," Franks explained.

The hardest thing for the participants, Franks observed, was figuring out their own class background. "In our culture, we don't talk about class, so many hadn't thought about their class background."

Harrison presented a workshop on gender

issues. She opened up the discussion with questions such as what is one's right to have a particular gender and what rights does one lose by crossing over to a different gender.

She noted that there are many, many different genders and many different ways to express them. She added that transgender issues and gender rights are really new concepts.

Harrison said gender labels are often artificial, forced on people by straight society.

"Nobody has a right to say who is a woman and who is not," she noted. "People are judging by someone's skin, not their character."

For example, at women-only dances, Harrison noted that people at the door decide who can be there and who can't. "It's not fair. It excludes people."

She is frustrated at the hostilities she perceives toward transgendered people within the queer community. "It's bullshit that we are fighting our supposed brothers and sisters—we simply lose battles elsewhere."

Camp participants were pleased and rejuvenated by the weekend. Meghan Garrity, 21, was moved by many of the discussions.

"People were frank and honest," she said. "We had a safe space to talk about who we were."

Emma Rood, 15, is one of two out lesbians at her high school. For her, learning about mental safe sex and gender issues was important.

Camp was also a place to connect with the larger community. "I met cool people and found out about things going on, such as the Lesbian Community Project." □

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