

PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

TABLE TALK
Co-chair candidate seeks an honest conversation and a common understanding by Timothy Krause

Frederick B. Hayes II

Sitting on the back porch of his Northeast Portland home, Frederick B. Hayes II casually chats over a cigarette. His calm demeanor does not divulge his whirlwind history. Nor does it convey the immediate controversy sparked by his unexpected appearance at the November meeting of the Sexual Minorities Roundtable, in which he announced his candidacy for the position of co-chair.

Hayes, a 45-year-old gay African American, is in the final year of his term as president of Woodlawn Neighborhood Association. He first learned of the co-chair election through a community policing newsletter. Serving on the roundtable, he thought, would be another way to do more to help the people of Portland and to give voice to the African American community.

"There is only one African American member right now," he notes, "and she will be leaving soon."

But Hayes, who was unknown to the others at the meeting, received what he thought was an adverse reaction.

"People didn't realize I was gay," he says. "They thought I was just some straight guy who decided he wanted to represent the gay community."

One woman told Hayes she thought he wasn't gay because of the inflection of his voice.

"What kind of stereotype is that? That all gay men lisp? I don't look at myself in the mirror and ask myself if I look gay today," Hayes says. "Society is funny. People see what they want to see.

Being African American—that's seen five blocks away. Then, as people get closer to me, it's the piercings. They might shut off from there because that's more than they can deal with at once. So I was surprised that it was my own community questioning if I was gay or not."

Hayes arrived at the meeting accompanied by Cmdr. Derrick Foxworth of the Portland Police Bureau's Northeast Precinct. Although Hayes says Foxworth was present only to offer a recommendation as a friend and colleague, some perceived a maneuver by police to seat their own choice as co-chair.

The election ultimately has been postponed until the January meeting so the roundtable can research whether the group has bylaws requiring previous attendance at meetings as a requisite for holding office.

"One of the things I could bring to the roundtable is the ability to facilitate meetings, to keep things moving," Hayes offers. "The roundtable began in 1992 and was instated in 1994. Here we are, almost seven years later, and they don't know if they have bylaws. That should be defined; that should be known."

Hayes went on to say he personally would do more outreach so all sexual minorities would know of the roundtable's existence and purpose. His goals include offering diverse groups of people the opportunity for honest conversation. He emphasizes his skill to speak out to the community and encourage wide participation.

Although Hayes' objective is to ensure com-

ty in our lives, it wasn't this that was going to tear us apart."

Astoria was also where a prominent choreographer discovered the dancer in Hayes when he performed his own choreography at a talent show. He began to study dance and continued to do so after his family moved to Portland in 1973. A scholarship and budding career soon took him on to Seattle.

Even as he embraced the dance world, Hayes found new success in modeling. Seattle offered new opportunities, but work for African American models still was limited. At 25, Hayes faced a crucial choice: Set up house with the "white picket fence" or throw caution to the wind and embrace his wanderlust.

The latter won, and Hayes' serendipitous life began a new chapter with a one-way ticket to France. When he arrived at the airport in Paris, the first thing he did was sit down with a glass of wine and ask himself, "Now what am I going to do?" After two days of sitting in his hotel room, Hayes stepped out to face the world.

His trepidation was short-lived when he coincidentally ran into a close friend from Seattle. She was in Paris on a modeling assignment and quickly arranged for Hayes to break into the French scene by working as her dresser. When a male model left for another job, Hayes literally filled his shoes and landed his first European modeling assignment.

Hayes spent 15 years in Paris working in fashion, interior design and bartending. He trav-

eled to Thailand and Cambodia before returning to Portland in 1995.

His homecoming, however, was not a happy one. For Hayes, life had come to an emotional crossroads.

"All my best friends had died," he recalls. "The lights had gone out in the City of Lights. Having survived AIDS—after having seen all of my friends die—my pact with the powers that be was that if I'm saved, I'm going to do something for society."

Hayes ventured out into Portland and realized the city he thought he knew had changed. It had grown up into a more appealing, sophisticated place.

A year later, Hayes met a man with whom he would share the next four years of his life. He knew he was home for good.

"I feel I'm here for a reason," Hayes says. "I have experienced a lot, and it would be very selfish on my part to hold that inside. I want to give to others. The more I become involved with issues about life in Portland, the more I feel there is a need for me here."

Whether or not he wins the election, Hayes wants to be involved. He plans to visit each of the four roundtables: Sexual Minorities, African American, Asian American and Hispanic American.

Hayes hopes one day all four will have a chance to meet together. "Once I understand what the issues are for an Asian American, then I can understand more what the issues are for a gay Asian American," he explains.

Hayes wants to use all of his public service roles to advocate inclusive and diverse neighborhoods. He thinks that Portland is comfortable but that at the same time people have become lax and uninvolved. On a larger level, Hayes would like to see a philosophical shift regarding sexual minorities.

"Hopefully, we as a gay community will understand that we don't want to be 'tolerated,'" he champions. "As a human being, I want to be understood. I'm hoping that we are going toward a trend of understanding."

In addition to his neighborhood association, Hayes participates in interracial community dialogues sponsored by the mayor's office. He intends to become active in the African American Roundtable as well as the Sexual Minority Crisis Response Team. Each new role, he says, offers him an opportunity to learn.

"For me, the day I stop learning, I die," he says. "Hopefully, any person in public involvement or public life is the same way, that they will continue to learn." □

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