

SOLD ON SUCCESS

Lesbian real estate agent receives business award by Timothy Krause

Deborah Betron has been selected as the Portland Area Business Association's second annual Commitment to Our Community Award winner. The special recognition honors those in the business sector who are visible in, involved with and consistently supportive to the gay and lesbian community.

"It means a lot to me to be acknowledged not only as an exemplary model of business ethics but also as a committed advocate for our community," says Betron, the 58-year-old owner and president of Bridgetown Realty.

Connecting with other businesses in the gay and lesbian community always has been a priority for her. In fact, she was one of the three original founders of PABA in 1992.

Betron says the organization offers a venue where queer business owners can meet each other and share their experiences. She sees networking within the gay and lesbian community as a particular advantage.

"You have a choice," Betron explains with zeal. "With every dollar you spend, you have a choice. Yet, over and over again, people call up just any old company with an ad in the paper, when instead you can call up somebody in the community."

Betron wonders why people would want to patronize businesses without knowing whether they are supportive of the gay and lesbian community.

"Yet, that's what you do when you pick up the phone and call somebody you don't know," she says, "someone who could be diametrically opposed in political philosophy and, even worse, giving money to organizations that oppose us."

Betron's business savvy surfaced from a long history of working in diverse communities. She

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moved to the Portland area from California, where she put her fluent Spanish language skills to work at a rural agency that addressed poverty, affirmative action and job training. After successfully taking the helm of the agency's floundering bus company, she found a new route for her career.

"I didn't come out of school saying I wanted to be in business," Betron confesses, "but the bus company—and my ability to change its direction and get it going—was a fuse that ignited me."

Once in the Northwest, Betron found further inspiration from the real estate agent who found her a home. She recognized real estate as a career that would let her be her own boss.

She saw an opportunity for the independence and flexibility she had been wanting. In 1976, her business focus shifted from social services to selling houses.

Three years later, Betron founded Bridgetown Realty as a one-woman office working out of her home. Despite a sour economy at the time, her company slowly grew.



Deborah Betron

Today, with more than 25 agents, Bridgetown Realty is the largest woman-owned realty company in the Portland market. Betron attributes much of this success to her employees, who share her priorities of diversity, tolerance, cooperation and teamwork.

The public's perception of the real estate industry, on the other hand, remains a significant challenge for this business owner. Within PABA, in the business community and among her clients, Betron strives to enhance the image of real estate agents as professionals.

"There's a tendency toward thinking that our time is not as valuable as a lawyer who clicks the clock as soon as you start talking," she notes. "But we are incredibly needed to make a transaction go right. It's seeing the forest for the trees, and that's what a good Realtor takes care of."

With the same tenacity, Betron has worked to increase the recognition of sexual minorities as part of the larger community. And, over time, she has played many roles.

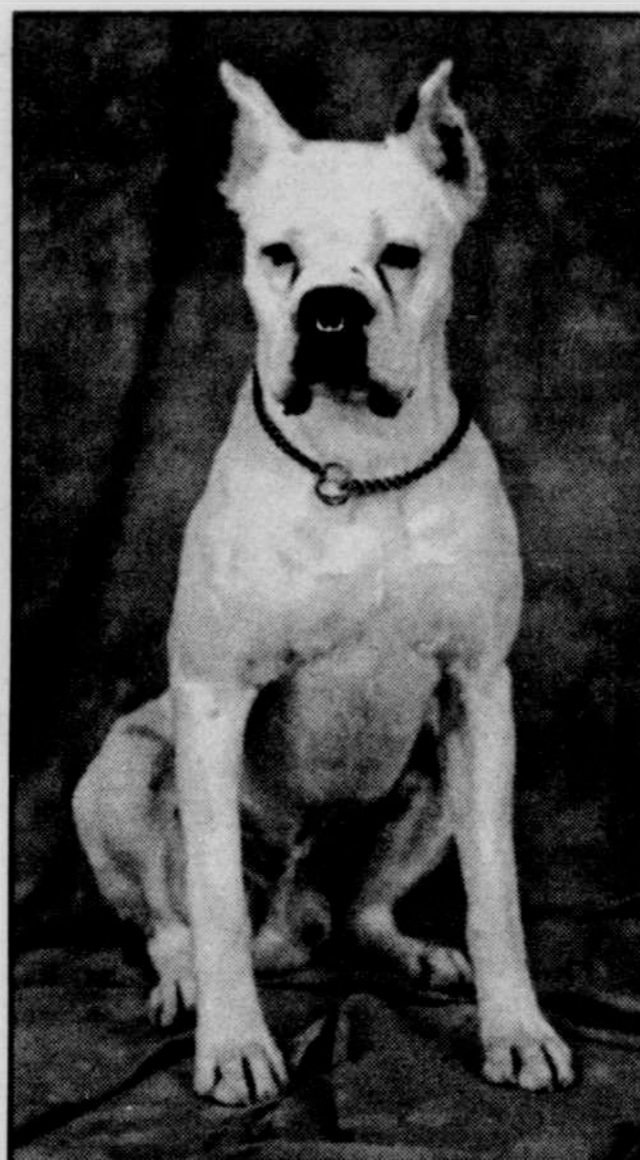
Although both she and her staff have supported a wide spectrum of causes through donations and volunteering, Betron also has spoken to a variety of traditional service organizations, such as the Rotary Club and the Elks. She has made an effort to reach out into communities where gays and lesbians are less visible.

"Most people know I feel very proud to be a successful lesbian entrepreneur," Betron says, "but I also feel good that, through the years, through the battles with Lon Mabon and the awful ballot measures, I have spread the word...that we are your neighbors, your family, your co-workers and that we are good people." JN

The second annual COMMITMENT TO OUR COMMUNITY AWARDS DINNER will start 6 p.m. Feb. 21 at the DoubleTree Hotel Lloyd Center. For details call 503-241-2222 or visit the Internet site www.paba.com.

BRIDGETOWN REALTY, located at 1000 NE Multnomah St., can be reached at 503-287-9370 or www.bridgetownrealty.com.

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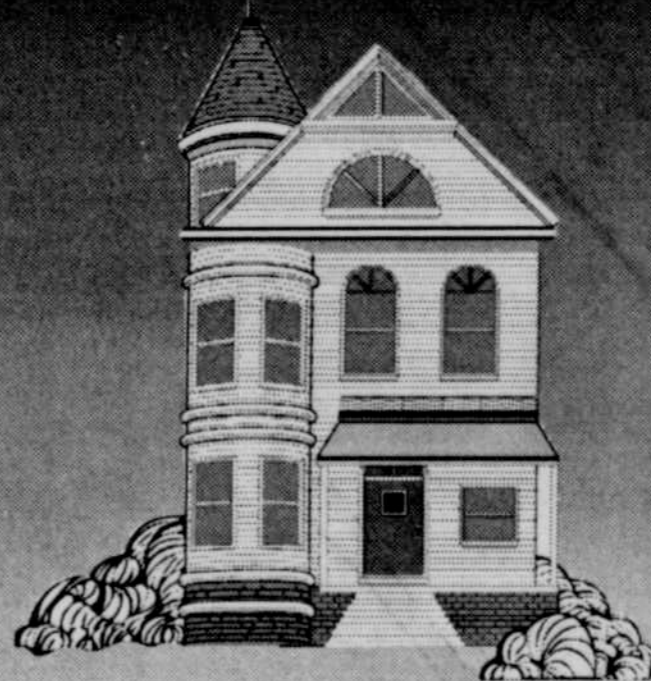
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