

# QUEER AND FAR

Activists from throughout the state will converge in Salem for a strategy session by Tom Stevenson

Members of the Oregon Rural Organizing Project, along with a number of the group's supporters, will gather in Salem for the annual Rural Caucus and Strategizing Session.

The event is the one time of the year when activists from all corners of the state gather together not only to celebrate victories but to plan future battles. The participants hear rally cries and discuss strategy, but most of all the caucus is a chance simply to sit down and talk to people who are facing similar struggles throughout Oregon.

"It is a time for ROP members and allies to get together to plan for the future, learn about continuing campaigns and participate in designing new cooperative efforts to affect human dignity in Oregon," co-director Marcy Westerling said.

The event will be held from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. March 24 at First Congregational Church, 700 Marion St. N.E. Afterward, old and new members of the Rural Organizing Project will meet over dinner.

The day truly will offer something for all activists. The opening full group plenary session will include a presentation about how a group of Salem residents created a leadership team. "It's an inspirational model of where power and capacity can take a community," Westerling said.

From 10:15 to 10:50 a.m., participants will hear a panel of leaders discuss other models they have used to create functional power bases.

Workshops will begin at 11 a.m. One of the key discussion topics will be what human dignity groups can do to build power and capacity back in their communities.

In addition, during those morning workshops, participants will have an opportunity to listen to presentations about the Bias Crime Intervention Teams, Project Fishbowl and the "Decline to Sign" campaign. The latter will focus on how the Rural Organizing Project and others can join forces to stop the Oregon Citizens Alliance from gathering enough signatures to place another measure on the ballot during the next major statewide election. In 1996, the "Enough Is Enough—Decline to Sign" campaign "worked to educate voters to not sign on to bigotry," according to Westerling.

"There were many features to that effort, but perhaps the best remembered are the personal-

ized postcards that we sent out to neighbors," she added. "They attracted a lot of positive visibility for our message. Over 25,000 of these got mailed out by ROP members and—guess what?—the OCA did not gather the signatures they needed that year."

In the afternoon session of the caucus, participants will go over, among other things, the "action menu" for the coming year. During that time, all of those attending will get a brief overview from representatives of various groups.

One of the major programs that will be discussed during the caucus is the upcoming Walk for Farmworker Justice. Rural Organizing Project co-director Kelley Weigel said member groups "will be asked to consider what they can do to be a part of this important event."

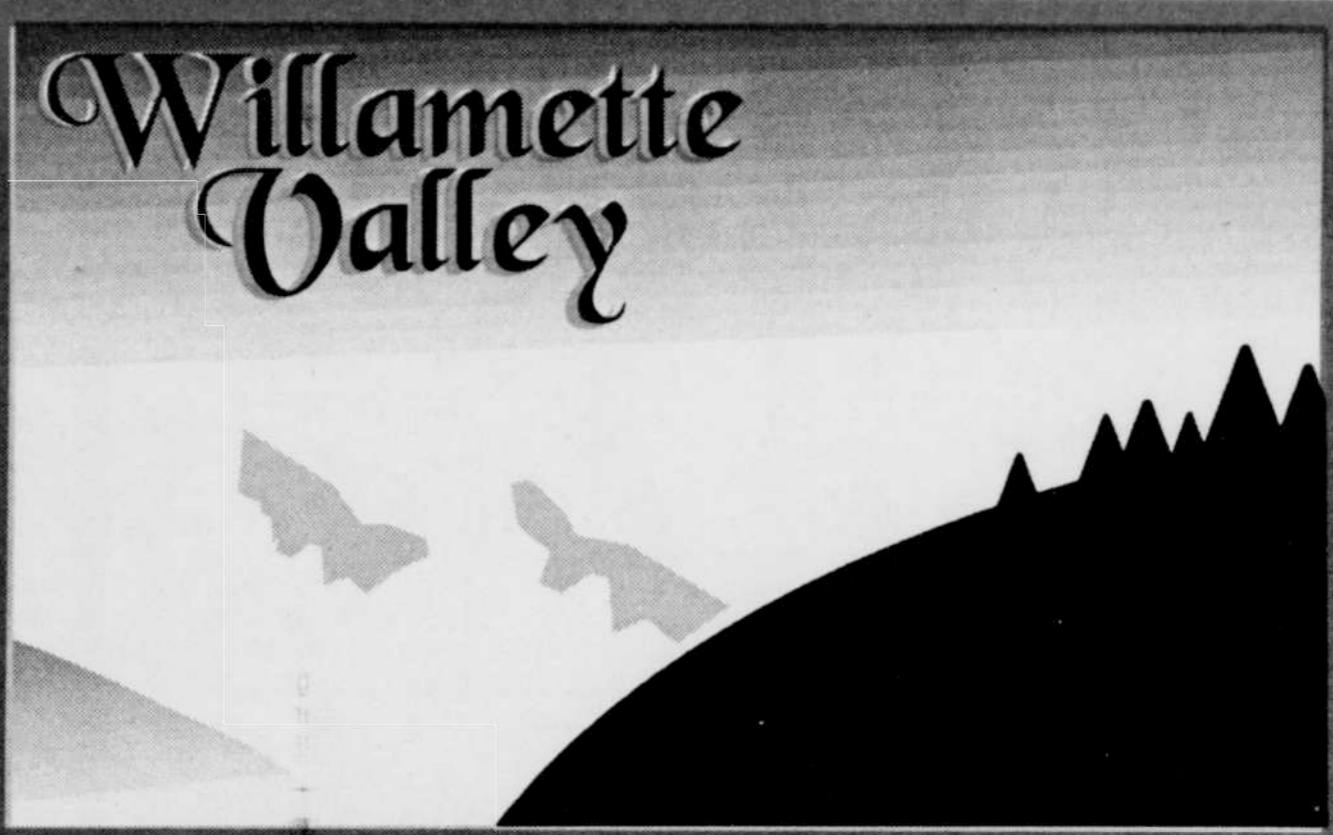
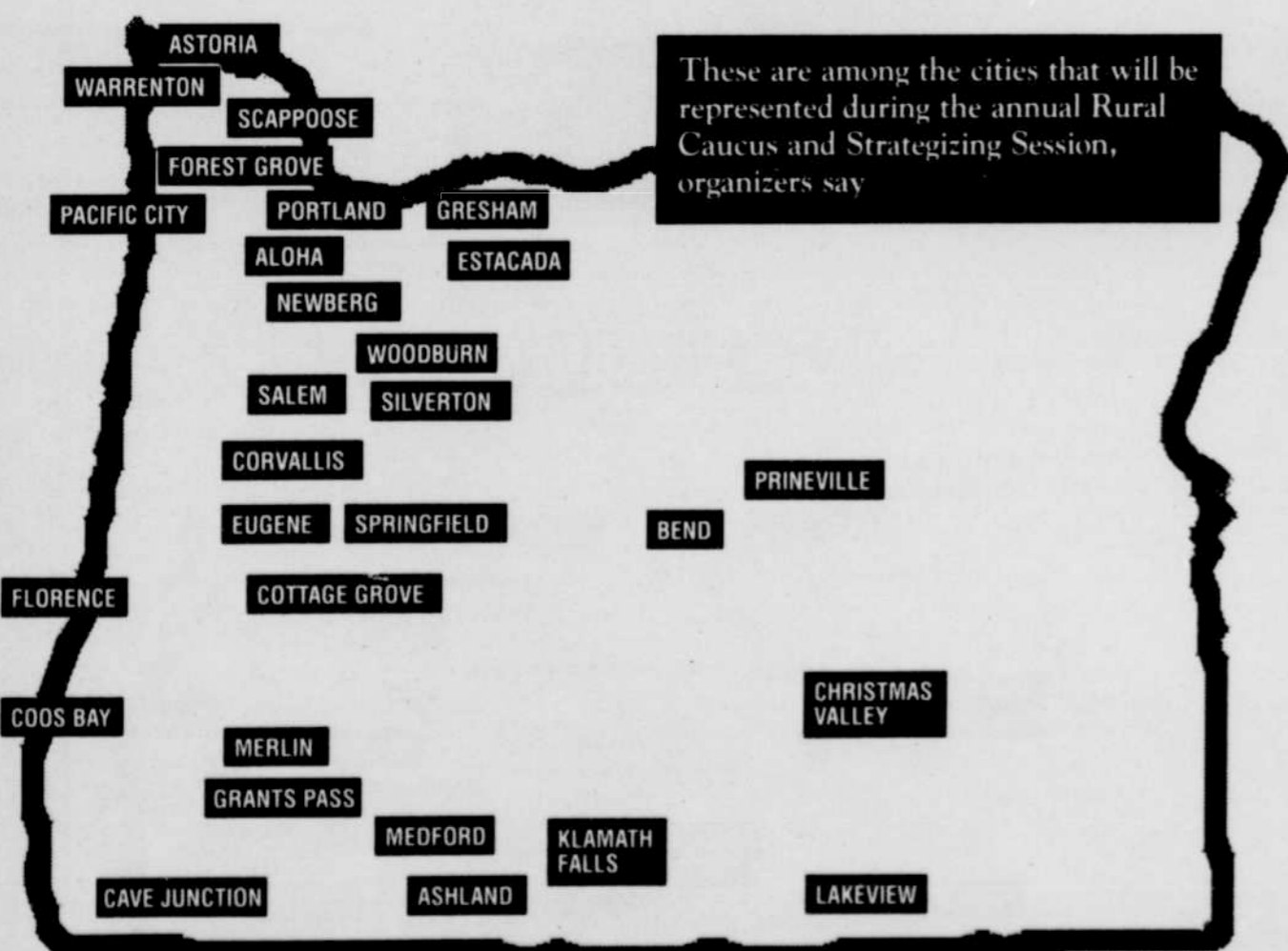
The walk will be held the week of June 18 to 24 in the Willamette Valley between Cornelius and Salem. According to Weigel, the event is designed to "bring national attention to the situation farmworkers face" as well as to bring an "inclusive coalition of labor, faith and community members to be a force for justice now and in the years ahead."

As a special treat, participants at the caucus will be entertained by the Portland Taiko Drummers.

The Rural Organizing Project office is located in Scappoose, but leaders work with individual human dignity groups throughout Oregon—literally from Klamath Falls to Portland and from Astoria to the farthest reaches of Eastern Oregon. The project is involved in a large number of efforts ranging from topics of immense concern to the gay and lesbian community to special labor coalition issues. Events such as the annual caucus benefit the organizations because they give representatives a chance to talk to others who are facing the same challenges in expanding their base of supporters, bringing in new leaders, raising funds and selecting various projects to work on, according to Westerling. □

To register for the RURAL CAUCUS AND STRATEGIZING SESSION call 503-543-8417.

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