

Around the BEND

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the area. Last October, she launched a vacation planning service for central Oregon.

Although she makes arrangements for everyone who calls on her, she hopes to have many gay and lesbian clients. "People don't realize all the options that are out here," she says.

By the time tourists figure out what they want to do while visiting the Bend area, Lee says, it is too late—everything is booked. Playtime Vacations can save people time and money and make their travels to central Oregon especially rewarding.

At the time she arrived in Bend, her new friend Bonnie Ashenbrenner already had lived there for six years. The Portland-area native bought a small cabin in Camp Sherman in 1978 as a first step in her migration to the state's center, where she started learning the art of fly-fishing.

She says she spent as much time as possible at her weekend retreat. A few years later she started fly-fishing clinics; she was the area's first fly-fisherwoman at the time. Today, her small business is called On the Rocks.

Ashenbrenner had grown tired of her job at Tektronix, where she had worked for 21 years. She decided to sell her Willamette Valley home, pack everything up and head east.

"Something deep in your soul dictates where you live," she says. "And this is it."

Lee adds, "It's an uncluttered life compared to Portland." People who move here need to be prepared for a limited social life. "You can't call up Bonnie and say, 'Hey, let's go to Hobo's for dinner.'" If you are looking for a fast life, she says, this isn't it.

Both women say their sexual orientation hasn't been an issue in their new home. Ashenbrenner says she expected some opposi-

tion when she moved to the area; she knew there were "redneck" pockets.

But she says once people get to know her as a person, life is as comfortable as ever. She considers her co-workers "just like family" and loves her neighbors. "We'd do anything for each other."

Lee agrees. Even though her next-door neighbor is as stereotypically "country" as a person can be, she says he is supportive and friendly. "We get a bail of straw and have a couple of beers together."

"Something deep in your soul dictates where you live. And this is it."

—Bonnie Ashenbrenner

Bonnie Ashenbrenner (left) and Cecilia Lee say neighbors have been supportive and friendly

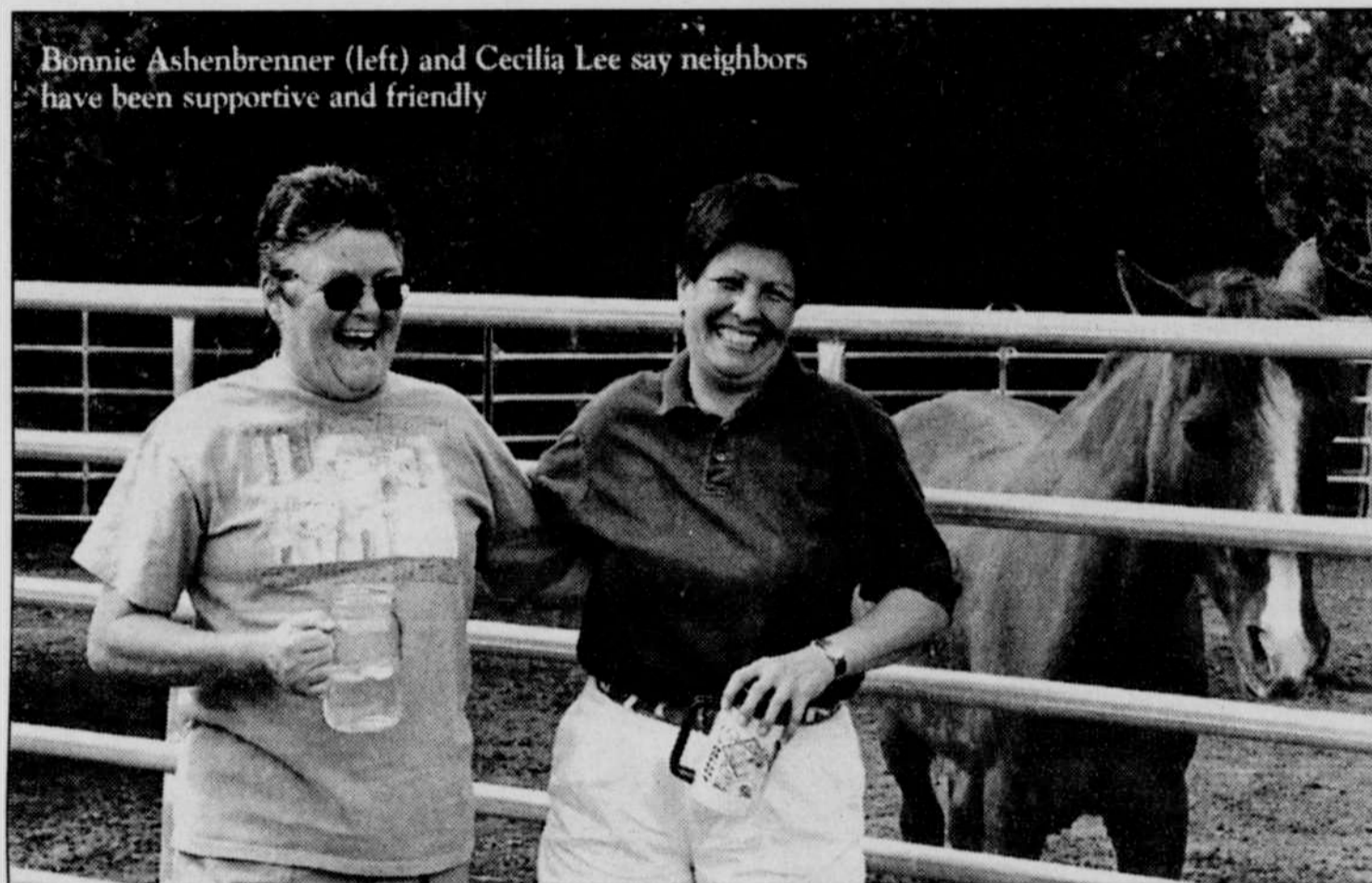


PHOTO BY JONATHAN KIPP

Sure, Bend has few cultural events. But Ashenbrenner says she and her friends periodically head to the city for those activities. "If we had those things we'd never leave."

Besides, Lee and Ashenbrenner will be busy this summer teaching "Fly-Fishing 101" classes to female urbanites Aug. 12 through 14 and Sept. 21 through 23. The \$225 tuition includes lodging, meals and beginning instruction, not to mention socialization with other women.

The business partners say they got together and decided they wanted to do something especially for the gay community. The event is for women only, but future events likely will include men.

Although only six anglers can participate, nonfishing partners are welcome as well. The course includes videos, lectures, dry land casting and one-on-one instruction.

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Where's the party?

There might not be any bars in Bend exclusively for gay men and lesbians, but these communities are organized. "We party a lot," Bonnie Ashenbrenner says.

The communities are diverse but close-knit. Even though gay men and lesbians are doctors, lawyers and construction workers, locals say everyone comes together. Most gatherings are at private homes.

Cecilia Lee says women come together dur-

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