

just out

The IN publication for the OUT population

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Letters to the editor should be limited to 500 words. Announcements regarding life transitions (births, deaths, unions, etc.) should be limited to 200 words; photos are welcome. **Deadline for submissions** to the editorial department and for the **Calendar** is the Thursday 15 days before the next publication date. Views expressed in letters to the editor, columns and features are not necessarily those of the publisher.

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COMMENTARY

BY ORIANA GREEN

What if?

Thinking outside the rainbow-hued box

What if we consider the unthinkable? What if we suddenly veer away from tradition? What if we cancel Pride celebrations in Portland for the next three years and instead focus all that blood, sweat and money (about \$180,000 was spent in the past three years) on buying our own building to house a much-needed community center?

What if there was a permanent physical presence in Portland for our community? Buildings confer credibility and stability on organizations.

Instead of sending out a very narrow view of the queer community when we make the 6 o'clock news every June, we could create a central place where all of our organizations could be represented: from Brother to Brother to the Lesbian Community Project to Basic Rights Oregon to the Portland Bisexual Alliance. Even the Lesbian Avengers could have a room to call their own.

Pride proponents point out that the event offers young people and the newly out an opportunity to learn about the many facets of our community and a chance to feel "normal" rather than "other." But what if there was a place where those same folks could go 365 days a year to feel accepted and welcomed?

A place where they could easily learn about every existing social and support group out there. A place where they could sign up to go square dancing with Rosetown Ramblers or hiking with the Adventure Group or fossil hunting with Lesbians Enjoying the Sciences.

What if our new center had a large multipurpose room for meetings, dances, performances and even Flamingo Bingo? Activists always need a space to spread out and make signs.

Money formerly shelled out renting other venues could remain in our coffers. Perhaps we could even run a cafe on the premises to stimulate some cash flow. There is no shortage of people in our community with original ideas that could make this venture a self-sustaining success.

This is not an attack on Pride Northwest. But this hardworking group of volunteers toils year-round just to put on a two-day party that really only a fraction of the queer community even attends. Many older sexual minorities no longer find relevance in Pride celebrations—especially in such a progressive city and county.

I lived in New York during the Stonewall era and marched in several early parades there as well as later ones in San Francisco. During those years it was very much about making political statements and queer visibility.

But in the 21st century, in this part of Oregon at least, I have to

believe that any straight people who want to know a homosexual don't have to look very far. We're here, we're queer, and everybody is used to us.

We've assimilated in many ways. Portland Mayor Vera Katz, Police Chief Mark Kroeker and City Commissioner Jim Francesconi marched in this year's parade, for heaven's sake! And although their show of support is heartily welcome, wouldn't there be plenty of other perhaps more meaningful opportunities for civic leaders to prove their concern if we had a year-round venue for our activities?

Sure, our Pride celebration draws folks from other parts of the state where perhaps they still feel the need to be closeted and gives them a fleeting glimpse of another way of life. But what if they could attend queer events all year long in a building all our own? What if they got inspired to create something similar in Eugene or Corvallis?

It has always struck me as sad and ridiculous that the only town in Oregon with such a center is Ashland. Kudos to them for founding the Abdill-Ellis Lambda Community Center, where myriad activities are enjoyed.

What if having our own community center rallied people to volunteer for causes they'd never considered before? What if, from a solid base of operation, we could consider giving back to our larger community in a greater way? What if the Portland Gay Men's Chorus adopted a section of highway? (They could make especially fetching T-shirts just to wear while collecting roadside trash.) What if the Oregon Bears collected Toys for Tots at Christmas? What if the Lesbian Garden Club went trick-or-treating for UNICEF?

What if more people in the straight world viewed us as valuable, contributing members of society?

What if the Oregon Citizens Alliance died out from a lack of interest?

What if we took some risks and made a Herculean effort for the good of all of us?

What if you started to care again about your community?

What if, in another 25 years, we didn't even need a community center?

What if a safe haven like this saved just a few lives?

What if we all tried thinking outside the narrow boxes of our own creation? ☐

ORIANA GREEN is the Entertainment Editor of Just Out and can be reached at oriana@justout.com.

REFLECTIONS

10 years ago in just out...

VOL. 8 No. 9, JULY 1991



• The 13th World Conference for the International Lesbian and Gay Association, scheduled for June 30 to July 6 in Guadalajara, Mexico, was canceled June 12 after the mayor promised he would have all the delegates arrested for "immoral behavior."

• AIDS and gay organizations May 30 called off their yearlong boycott of Marlboro cigarettes, Miller beer and Philip Morris, maker of the products. The corporation promised to double its annual charitable contributions to AIDS and gay and lesbian organizations.

• Armed with a load of free cookies and various handouts, Portlandia's Pride successfully went public June 12 in the Portland Building. It was a coming-out party long to be remembered. After meeting continuously for almost seven years, the city of Portland and Multnomah County gay and lesbian employee association held a "Gay Day" in the lobby. Sexual minorities came out to fellow employees and let everyone know that, indeed, "we are here."

• The sixth annual Tournament of Choice was held Aug. 17 and 18 at North Clackamas Central Park in Milwaukie. The Lesbian Community Project sponsored teams from at least three states, including all of the wonderful local dyke softball teams.

• Portland celebrated its first gay and lesbian sports festival during Labor Day weekend Aug. 30 to Sept. 1. Sponsored by the Pride of Portland Athletic Association, the agenda included bowling, power lifting, swimming, running, tennis and volleyball.

• University of Oregon was under fire for refusing to make a lesbian couple eligible for subsidized family housing. The case was headed for the state Court of Appeals.

• Ariel Waterwoman presented a "Communicating with Animals" class July 6.

• City Nightclub presented It's Zowie, Portland's only post-industrial, alternative drag queen, July 27.

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