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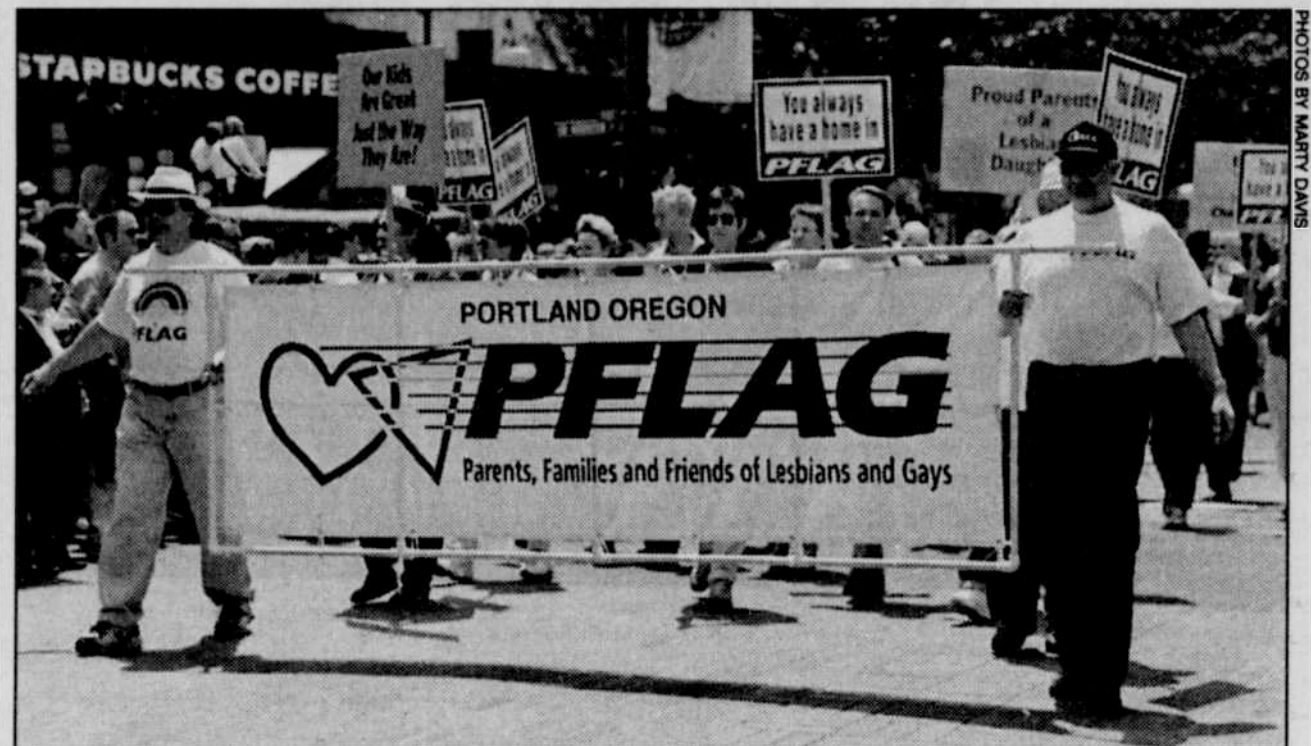


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## GROUPS



Betcha didn't know half the members are gays and lesbians

## Meet the parents

Continued from Page 1

partygoers will be entertained by members of the Portland Gay Men's Chorus, singer/songwriter Juliet Wyers and Terra, a duo Fain likens to the Indigo Girls. So if you hate the holidays because you have no welcoming place to go, don't miss this chance to wallow in a room overflowing with unconditional love and acceptance.

It all started in 1972, when Jeanne Manford marched shoulder to shoulder with her gay son in New York City's Gay Pride Parade. The next year she started the first PFLAG group to help people better understand and support their sexual minority friends and family members, to educate the public and to advocate for equal rights.

The Portland chapter meets monthly in a group of rooms graciously provided by First United Methodist Church. Each gathering is different, but some aspects are constant. Although the chapter has hundreds of members, about 40 folks braved the stormy weather for the November meeting.

Things get started with announcements, and Poison Waters stops by to thank folks for their support in her recent election as Rose Court Empress. Thoughtful moms even present her with a congratulatory bouquet of flowers. Waters notes PFLAG has a strong link to the Imperial Sovereign Rose Court, which donated \$4,000 to the chapter during the past year.

A bearded man stands to announce he's playing Santa this year at a shopping mall. Seated nearby is a gay teen who has been coming alone for months and has brought his shy mom to the meeting for the first time. She is immediately made welcome.

The attendees eventually divide into smaller discussion groups, each heading off to a separate room with a trained facilitator. There, with anonymity and confidentiality assured, people are encouraged to share what they are dealing with in their lives.

One emotional 30-something man reveals a sibling has outed him to his conservative parents. He asks for advice on what to do next.

A gay man who has attended the meetings for years replies, "You'll never find a safer place to be whoever you are than PFLAG." He goes on to point out the hypocrisy of "so-called Christians who don't know how to love, even though that's what they're supposed to be all about."

One of the parents in the group chimes in: "I'm so glad I have a gay child. It has so enriched our lives and opened us up."

Another gay man counsels him by adding, "Once you get through the coming-out process, a stronger bond often forms with your family."

The whole group later reassembles for a question-and-answer session. The questions are anonymous, and anyone is welcome to join in with an answer. □



You'll never meet a nicer bunch of folks than these