

NORTHWEST news

Ward 7 Eugene City Councilor Scott Meisner had a tough time deciding whether to run for re-election in 2000.

It was not an easy choice because the unpaid position required a demanding commitment beyond that of a full-time job. But Meisner woke up the morning after Election Day surprised to find Eugene voters had approved a measure extending salaries to the city councilors.

And he ended up securing a second term with 78 percent of the vote. "It was one of the highest margins in the state," he says proudly.

Meisner began law school and mediation training in 1981. "Most of the mediation I do now is in public policy, family or domestic partner preparation," he says.

In 1996, he saw an opportunity to bring his mediation experience to a City Council that had been unable to get along. He had served on Eugene's Planning Commission and the Whiteaker Neighborhood Planning Team.

As a councilor Meisner also could work "where you get to put all the pieces together." He says he loves his job in a city of "big issues and, at times, big controversy."

One challenge for which he is well suited is understanding how issues are connected—seeing how dollars spent on one project will affect other services. His work as a mediator enhances his "natural style to look for the composite and then to make the details work."

Meisner serves as chairman of the Council Committee on Intergovernmental Relations, working with Eugene's lobbyist in Washington, D.C., legislators, commissioners, city of Springfield representatives and other jurisdictions.

CIVIC PRIDE

Openly gay Eugene city councilor enjoys second term

by Susan Detroy

Because of his longtime interest in train travel, he also is a member of the Oregon Passenger Rail Council.

He serves, along with Councilors Nancy Nathanson and Bonnie Bettman, on Eugene's Planning Commission working on a new downtown plan. He also has helped recast the neighborhood program, creating a matching grant program and the opportunity for creating new neighborhoods and new boundaries.

Meisner continues his primary focus on the new Eugene Public Library. The facility is scheduled to open at the end of the year.

"I have loved the opportunity to get a new library in the city—not just a new building but a new system, including branches," he says. "At no point ever in council history has an individual councilor been assigned to a department or to a program. The mayor appointed me to be liaison for the library. It has been my baby, and I am proud of it."

Meisner has been involved in Eugene's Human Rights Commission since his first term as a councilor. He recently assisted in a proposal for the city to create a domestic partnership registry.

Civil rights has been an intense interest of his since the '60s, when he did voter registration work in Alabama. For seven years, as part of a nationwide team of attorneys, he worked for the

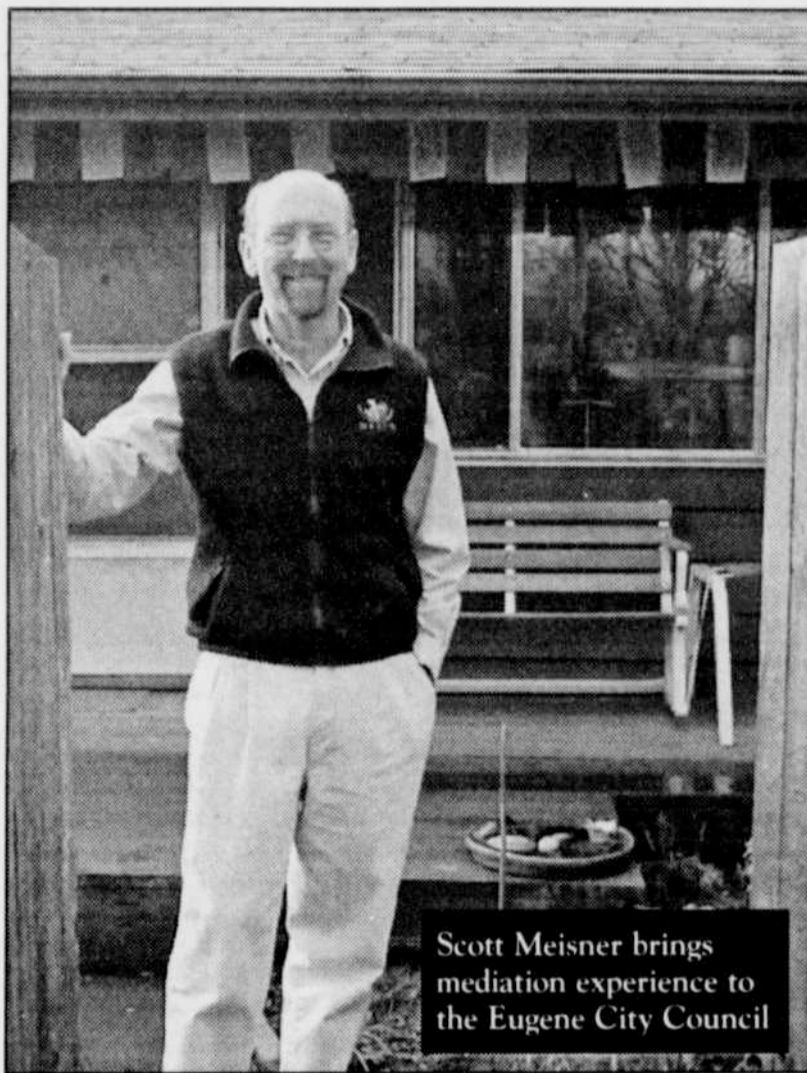


PHOTO BY SUSAN DETROY

"I try very hard not to judge people," he says. "To me, honoring diversity goes in every direction."

When asked about queer life in the city, Meisner responds: "Eugene is an easy place to be gay in. It is not always an easy place to be socially gay in."

He refers to a common theme among locals: the lack of social options for gay men and lesbians, particularly those older than 50. "I hang out at Full City Coffee. I wish there were a gay Full City."

Meisner also enjoys rebuilding and restoring antique furniture. "There is an incredible satisfaction taking a piece of furniture and getting a tangible, visible result that is beautiful," he says.

He equates his civic work with a large extended family; as a televised public official, he constantly is recognized in public by individuals who want to talk about issues. "Once I get home I value the privacy."

Meisner, who is single, lives with his 10-year-old cat, Max, with whom he shares a January birthday. He also has a son, Alexi, 17.

"I have a really active life," he says. "I think gays and lesbians have given themselves...more permission just to be free...to be a little more risk-taking." □

Japanese American Citizens League on the cases of people who were arrested during World War II.

"Their convictions were fraudulently obtained," he says. "And we won in every case."

Meisner, 55, says he never has had difficulty being openly gay in Eugene. He achieves this by being respectful.

SUSAN DETROY is a Eugene artist, photographer and writer. Her Internet site is www.efn.org/~dets/.

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