



Working Out

Just Out evaluates the area's 10 largest private employers

by Timothy Krause • Photos by Marty Davis

Oregon's unemployment rate still hovers above 8 percent, and many today worry about keeping their jobs. But for sexual minority workers, the state's present economic condition has not eclipsed the struggle for on-the-job equality.

To appraise the current employment arena for sexual minorities in Portland, *Just Out* surveyed workplace policies among some of the city's largest employers. Results illustrate that although progress is evident, parity often remains elusive.

Companies for this poll were chosen based on a list of the area's 10 largest private-sector employers published by the Portland Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce. Employers were

asked questions adapted from the Corporate Equality Index maintained by the Human Rights Campaign. The answers to these seven questions constitute a baseline to evaluate how companies treat sexual minority employees (see chart).

Don't lie with my enemies. None in this group say they do anything to undermine the dignity or worth of sexual minority workers, such as supporting anti-gay organizations.

Nationally, however, HRC's database lists at least one business that doesn't meet this definition. CBRL Group, based in Lebanon, Tenn., and better known for operating Cracker Barrel restaurants, flunks the index altogether.

Rate my job—not sexual—performance. When it comes to a written nondiscrimination policy that includes the words "sexual orientation," employers again score high, thanks in part to civil rights assurances offered through city and county ordinances as well as a statewide court decision.

Portland and Multnomah County, for example, specify "sexual orientation" in civil rights policies, saying such discrimination poses a threat to citizens' health, safety and general welfare and "menaces the institutions and foundation of our community." Furthermore, based on the 1998 Oregon Court of Appeals decision in *Tanner vs. Oregon Health Sciences University*, the Bureau of Labor and Industries accepts com-

plaints of sexual orientation discrimination from employees throughout the state.

Take a diversified approach. When the focus shifts to on-the-job dialogue about queer issues, United Parcel Service stops delivery.

The prognosis for Legacy, however, looks good. Spokeswoman Quita Lupfer reports that the nonprofit health care system recently initiated a new cultural diversity training program for managers in which the presenter addresses all groups, including sexual minorities.

Safeway, too, maintains a diversity board, and spokeswoman Bridget Flanagan says the Portland division plans to set up a Web site where all employees can provide input.

Be a good neighbor. Neither UPS nor Fred Meyer reaches out to the sexual minorities community through advertising, sponsorships or contributions. But of the rest, some donate to causes, such as the Oregonians Against Discrimination Luncheon (see sidebar), while others, including Safeway, supply events with goods-in-kind.

"Support from the May Foundation and our department store divisions to AIDS-related causes across the country totals more than \$2 million since our AIDS fund began in 1990," Meier & Frank spokeswoman Cheryl Hansen says. "Support specifically for gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender causes in the past several years totals nearly \$50,000 nationwide."

Provide for domestic tranquillity. According to HRC's *State of the Workplace 2001*, domestic partner benefits nationwide have increased 50 percent since 1999. Intel, Kaiser, OHSU and U.S. Bank all offer health insurance coverage for employees' same-sex domestic partners, and some have for several years.

Many consider this an issue of equitable pay, and studies show costs to be negligible. But in hard times, employers might decline to add or continue benefits they view as only perks, including pension benefits.

"There are a lot of benefits that employees are looking for companies to provide," UPS spokeswoman Peggy Gardner says. "In the past year, the benefit we chose to add was a work/life balance kind of benefit. Same-sex benefits are part of our ongoing conversation, but as of yet, they are not formally offered through our health care program."

OHSU found that providing access to this coverage was a difficult pill to swallow—the public nonprofit corporation was forced by a lawsuit that now covers public employees statewide. According to Basic Rights Oregon, *Tanner vs. OHSU* confirms that because of the Oregon Constitution's commitment to equal protections, public employers must offer domestic partners of gay men and lesbians access to health care and other benefits if they offer them to spouses.

Recognize our strength in numbers. Three companies—Kaiser, Intel and OHSU—benefit from input of sexual minority constituency groups (see sidebars). Although not exactly as defined here, *Just Out* also recognizes efforts by

How do they stack up?

	Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of the Northwest	Intel Corp.	Oregon Health Sciences University	U.S. Bank	Safeway Inc.	Legacy Health System	Meier & Frank	Providence Health System	Fred Meyer Stores	United Parcel Service
Does not actively engage in actions that would undermine the dignity and worth of sexual minority employees.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Has adopted a written nondiscrimination policy that includes the words "sexual orientation."	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Offers diversity training that includes discussion of sexual orientation and/or gender expression in the workplace.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Advertises, sponsors events or makes charitable gifts to the sexual minorities community.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Offers domestic partner health insurance benefits.	✓	✓	✓	✓						
Supports a sexual minority employee group.	✓	✓	✓							
Has adopted a written nondiscrimination policy that includes the words "gender identity" or "gender expression."	✓	✓			✓					