



Providence to encourage employee connections. Spokeswoman Dianne McConkey points out that not only are employees welcome to represent the sexual minorities community on the health system's diversity committees, but a group of gay men and lesbians also use company facilities to meet informally about pertinent issues.

Don't fight a battle of the sexes. Kaiser and Safeway say they have a written nondiscrimination policy regarding "gender identity" or "gender expression." Intel confirms its written policy is "in progress." Providence, however, notes only that its verbiage covers "the breadth of discrimination."

In Portland and Multnomah County, gender identity is covered under the same nondiscrimination provisions as sexual orientation. Additionally, the state provides some trans protections under the Oregon Civil Rights for Disabled Persons Act. The significance, then, is the discrepancy between the legal obligations of companies within these jurisdictions and their formal written policies.

Finish the job. Overall, Kaiser and Intel lead the survey, joining the ranks of American Airlines, Apple Computer and Xerox in fully meeting these basic criteria.

"We at Kaiser Permanente believe strongly in creating an inclusive workplace free of discrimination," says Tricia Peters, vice president of human resources. "This survey recognizes the hard work of many people here to create not just fair employment practices but also a culture that celebrates the diversity among our staff and health plan members."

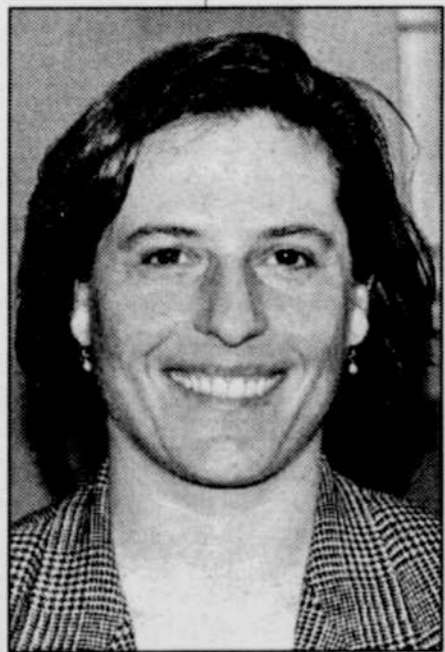
Some in this poll, however, still have work to do. UPS and Fred Meyer, for example, significantly trail their colleagues, only slightly ahead of other low-scoring national brands, such as Wal-Mart, Federal Express and ExxonMobil.

This wasn't always the case for Freddie's, at least. Seven years ago, the then-local chain stepped forward with Portland General Electric and Northwest Natural to found BRO's Fair Workplace Project. This corporate trio pledged

not to discriminate based on sexual orientation and recruited other businesses to join them. But while the pledge has expanded to include gender identity, Freddie's has yet to adopt the new language.

Despite this, Fred Meyer spokesman Rob Boley says, "The key things are that we do have sexual orientation in our [nondiscrimination] policy, we do include the discussion in our diversity workshops and training, and we would not ever actively engage in any action that would undermine the dignity or worth of this employee group."

Of all the measures in this review, BRO program coordinator Melissa Shepherd remarks: "These are really easy things to do. It takes employers very little effort to be up to speed on these things. It's good company policy—and good competitive policy."



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—Antoinette Laferriere

Antoinette Laferriere, Portland Area Business Association president, adds that because many gay-owned businesses are small, their active support of diversity and equality is not as widely noticed in the general public. But by working together with large corporations, the sexual minorities community can achieve a significant presence in the workplace.

"It is really important that these employers show leadership," Laferriere says of companies in this survey. "The publicity associated with large employers prioritizing issues of sexual orientation, gender identity and workplace fairness is critical to fairness and integration becoming the norm in society in general." □

To review the FAIR WORKPLACE PROJECT, including participating employers from throughout Oregon, go to www.basicrights.org. (Some companies have signed only the original pledge against

discrimination based on sexual orientation; others have signed the current pledge against discrimination based on both sexual orientation and gender identity.)

TIMOTHY KRAUSE is a Portland writer.

The Pulse of Pride



Kaiser Permanente employees show their pride last summer

In 1998, a small group of sexual minority staff at Kaiser Permanente's Northwest division banded together to seek health care benefits for domestic partners. Four years later, registered nurse Sue Caulfield and physician Richard Bills now jointly chair KP Northwest Pride, an active and growing employee group.

Its mission has grown, too. Today, the group represents a variety of sexual minority concerns—not only of employees but also health plan members. For example, beginning in 2003, Kaiser's benefits contract specifically will cover trans care. The group also is working to develop a referral process by which members can request queer or queer-friendly clinicians.

The ongoing objective, Bills says, is to improve communication in order to avoid closing doors. Through diversity training presentations, for instance, the group helps Kaiser staff be sensitive to unique require-

ments and situations of sexual minorities. Its representatives address issues of access, communication, special health concerns and differing family structures.

Like KP Northwest Pride, many employee groups find they must tune in to their employer's corporate mentality to be most effective. Bills recommends examining a company's goals and priorities,

looking for how the needs of sexual minority employees can contribute to good business. "What do we need that is congruent with where they want to go?" he suggests asking.

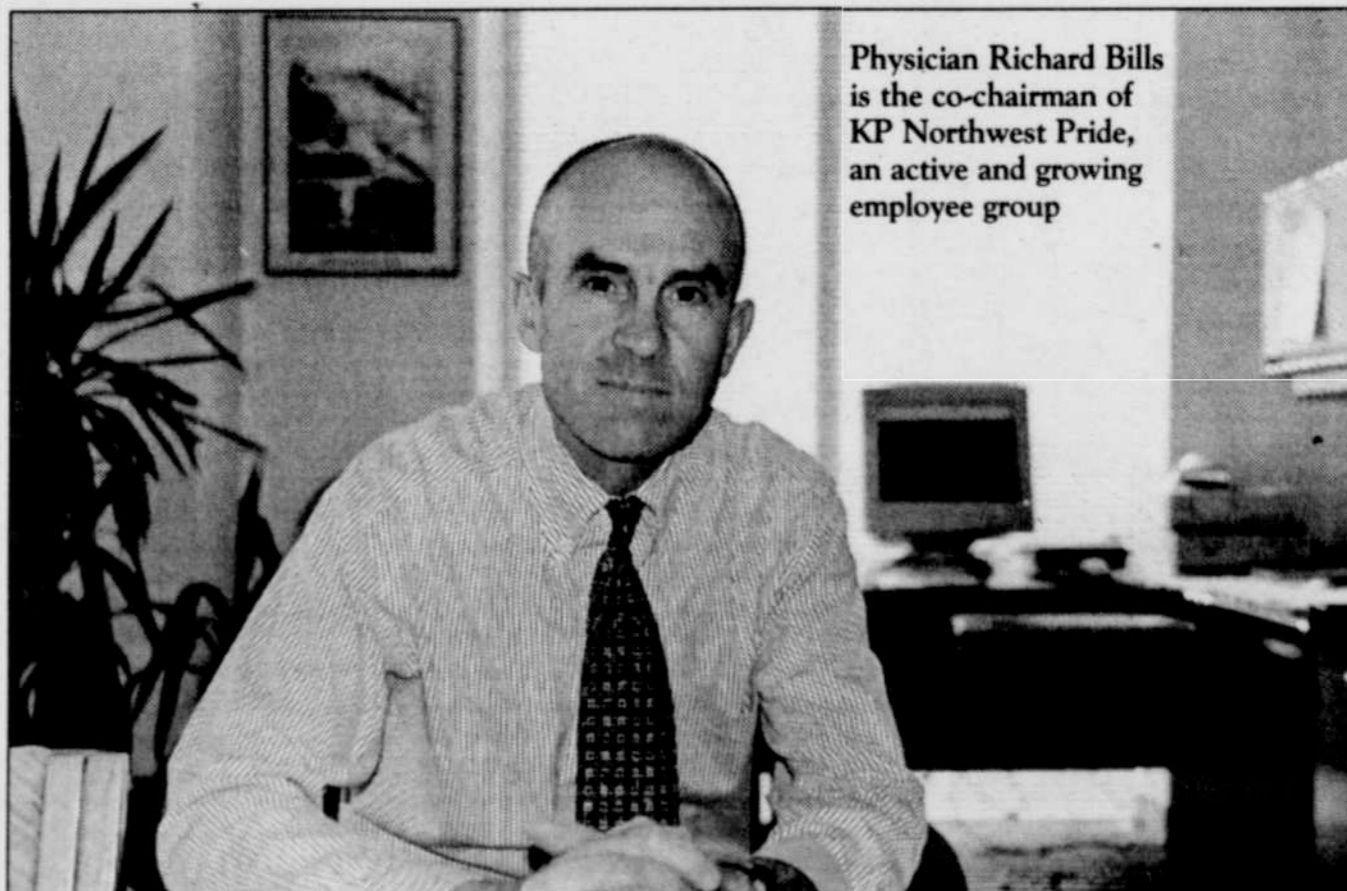
The answer from Kaiser was clear.

"We are recognized as an agent for positive change within the organization," Bills states. "By the focus we've had, we've been able to make Kaiser Permanente see that these changes improve their customer satisfaction."

"We are recognized as an agent for positive change within the organization"

—Richard Bills

For more information call Richard Bills at 503-350-2435.



Physician Richard Bills is the co-chairman of KP Northwest Pride, an active and growing employee group