

PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

Dick Burdon

DICK BURDON

A green thumb and love for gardening have remained steady for Dick Burdon throughout his life of many adventures and changes. He grew up in Willamina and went to Oregon State University to study horticulture.

Introduced by his roommate to the Methodist religion, he was drawn to the church and the possibility of international travel. He applied to be part of a seminarian program in Brazil, where he met his wife and taught students between 14 and 30 years old.

After two years in South America, and equipped with the Portuguese language, Burdon returned to Oregon for another year at OSU. Nevertheless, his wanderlust took him away again, to Pennsylvania this time to continue his education. He was there for four years and received a ministry position before returning to Oregon.

Burdon, his wife and their two children soon packed up to visit the Congo for more missionary work. After two years there, and several back in the Pacific Northwest, he settled down in Wilsonville, where he returned to agricultural work, building up a blueberry farm while working at Fred Meyer and later the U.S. Postal Service.

After much soul searching, Burdon came out late in life. He now stays busy square dancing with the Rosetown Ramblers and Heads to the Center and participating in an invite-only group called Cook Boys and the Portland chapter of Prime Time International. He also is active at University Park United Methodist Church.

When asked about the significance of Pride, Burdon answers simply: It is about a life free of shame, one where we mark our advancement and move forward with the support of friends and allies.

—Nadia Cannon

DONNIE DE VALMONT

When 19-year-old Donnie de Valmont moved to Portland from Roseburg last November, he knew what he wanted to do: become a member of the Rosebud and Thorn court, the longest-running youth drag pageant in the United States, if not the world. In March his dream came true when he was voted to represent the gay youth of Oregon and southwest Washington as Thorn XXVI.

When de Valmont first entered Klub Z, which sponsors the pageant, he was ostensibly straight. When he left, he had danced with one young man and been given another's phone number. His life would never be the same; he wants to help other young people experience the same sense of liberation.

"I want the gay youth to feel accepted and like they don't have to hide what they are. Especially in a small town like I came from, I hated not being able to be who I really was and being afraid of how people would react."

To accomplish these goals, he hopes to help improve the performance quality of Klub Z acts and spearhead fund-raising efforts for organizations such as the Greenhouse and Outside In. Both nonprofits provide vital services to queer street youth and often provide one another with important peer support.

Along with his desire to assist worthy social causes, de Valmont plans to refine his dance skills. "I got started dancing in fourth grade," he explains, tracing the roots of his lifelong passion. "Ever since then I've loved to perform."

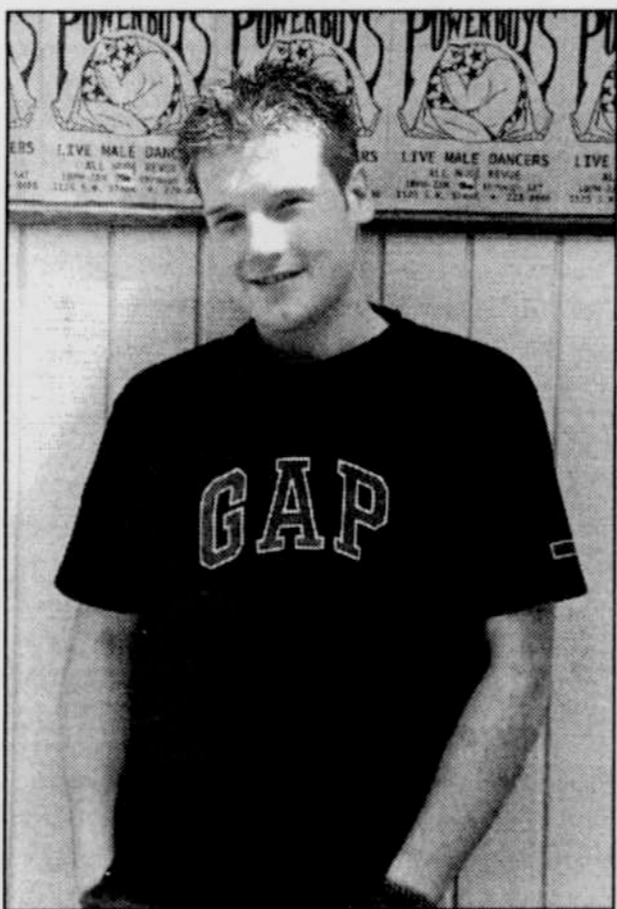


PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

Donnie de Valmont

His dance skills led him to win county and state fair talent titles and, ultimately, the Heaven or Hell Rosebud and Thorn competition. This month, de Valmont will perform in his official court capacity at Pride events in Portland and Eugene as well as Peacock in the Park.

He sums up his desire for involvement in the community simply. "I don't really know what I would like to do when I grow up, but I do know that I feel like I was put on this earth to make people happy."

—Darklady

DANE FUJIMOTO

Anyone who attended Pride 2001 or, in fact, anyone who follows the Rose City's robust performance scene is familiar with Portland Taiko. Founded in 1993 by a small band of devotees, the company has grown steadily—and none too quietly—to its present status as one of the premier groups of its kind in the country.

Taiko is a form of traditional Japanese drumming used to celebrate community. According to 32-year-old Dane Fujimoto, who joined the group a year and a half ago, it also has some very practical applications. At last year's Pride (his first public appearance with the group), a homophobe with a megaphone was screaming the usual epithets, trying to drown out the fun.

"I remember two guys standing in front of him in a liplock for five minutes, and that didn't stop him. Nothing would. Then we started to play, and he stopped, and he left. That was very interesting because in Japan taiko drumming is also used to chase away pests from the field. And, I thought, to this day, it still works!"

When they're not chasing away pests, Portland Taiko presents multimedia events that use drumming, dance and storytelling to promote diversity at schools and community venues around the Northwest. Fujimoto, whose day job is working with special-needs kids in Hillsboro, estimates the group has

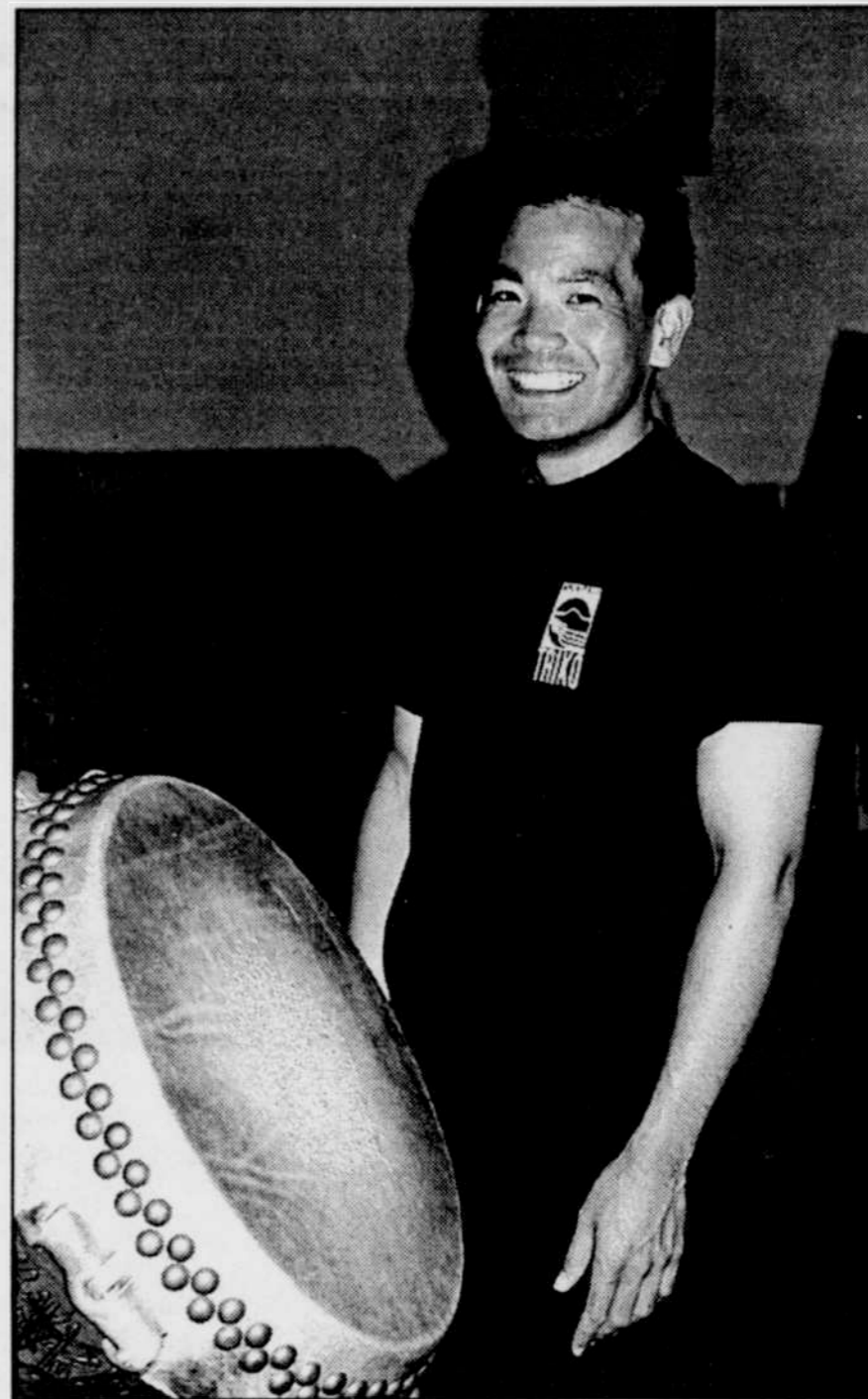


PHOTO BY CHERNE CUMMING

Dane Fujimoto

been as high as 40 percent queer but has settled recently at a respectable 20 percent. It's also been a crucial part of his own ongoing coming-out process.

Coming from a traditional Japanese family in Hawaii, where he says gay Asian Americans commonly lead a double life, has made it particularly difficult. But taiko is helping. Last year, Fujimoto helped organize a gay and lesbian drumming workshop in Los Angeles, and he's looking forward to playing again at this year's Pride.

"It's been an amazing opportunity just to push yourself past your comfort level. You have to play with passion, free and open."

Drumming, he says, is "part of every culture, its self-expression, the heartbeat, letting it out." Which Dane Fujimoto is doing, beat by beautiful beat.

—Gary Morris

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