

# GOOD NEIGHBORS

Gay and lesbian Oregonians are laying the foundation to build a stronger community

This month *Just Out* tracked down four gay men and lesbians who are doing their part to make the world a better place for everyone—queer or straight.

Three of them—Dan Beck and Rick Brissette of Lincoln City and Phyllis McBride of St. Johns—are making their presence known in places where the sexual minorities community isn't too visible. And while they are working hard to open improve people's quality of life, activist Cathryn Cushing is busy trying to save those lives by fighting tobacco use and breast cancer.

Oregonians are lucky to have so many strong role models out there representing our community.

## THE COAST IS CLEAR

Meet Dan Beck and Rick Brissette, Lincoln City's Couple of the Year

by Sarah Leimert

Something shocking happened in the small coastal town of Lincoln City on April 13: The local weekly newspaper named two gay men as Couple of the Year.

Dan Beck and Rick Brissette were honored for their work with Coastal AIDS Network, the Democratic Party and the antique shop they built from the ground up. Partners in business and in life, they have had an immeasurable impact on their tightly knit community and have made themselves indispensable in the fight against AIDS.

The two met in 1989 in Lincoln City and formed a partnership that seems to grow stronger by the year. Upon arrival in Oregon, Beck founded the Coastal AIDS Network with Laurie Ammerman. As executive director, he publishes a monthly newsletter for the sexual minorities community, holds weekly social



Beck (left) and Brissette have friends in high places

events and organizes the World AIDS Day Candlelight Vigil.

Beck also does HIV counseling and testing, operates a needle exchange program utilizing

two employees and does advocacy work. CAN soon will be starting a group for queer youth in the Lincoln City and Tillamook areas. Additionally, Beck acts as program chairman for the Lincoln County Democratic Central Committee.

Brissette's involvement in and dedication to his town are equally astounding. He serves as a CAN

advisory board member, a Lincoln City planning commissioner, Lincoln City Chamber of Commerce president and Lincoln County Democratic Central Committee chairman.

"In the '90s, we were losing everyone in our lives, and a lot of our early involvement in CAN was not entirely altruistic," Brissette says. "It began because we, too, needed the support, and we just kept going forward with our dream."

With seemingly boundless energy, Beck

and Brissette also own and operate a business. With the help of many volunteers, the Little Antique Mall was opened in 1993 and continues to flourish, bringing avid "antiquers" from

throughout the state to do business with them. The mall has been successful amid numerous personal challenges, including the death of Brissette's mother in 1998 and Beck's hospitalization with pneumonia shortly thereafter.

"The whole process of opening the mall was a very spiritual and gratifying experience," Brissette says. "Dan and I both know that to those whom much is given, much is expected."

The Couple of the Year award was a shock but could not have been given to more deserving recipients. The Lincoln City

*News Guard* declared:

"Together Rick and

Dan have poured

their hearts and

resources into helping

those at risk or

suffering with HIV

and AIDS, they were

instrumental in the

formation of the

Coastal AIDS Network

in an area where

services are scarce. At

the same time, [they]

have built one of the

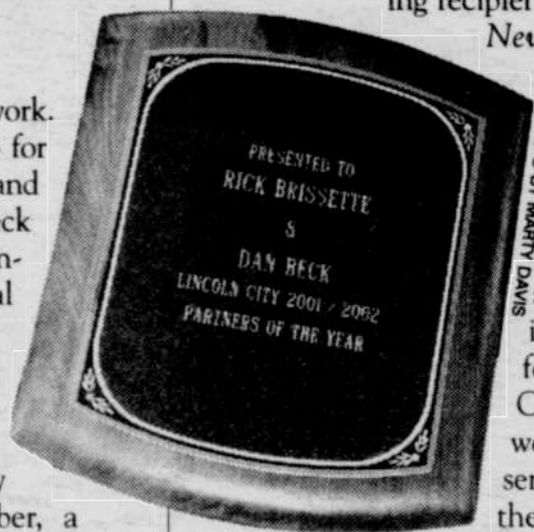
most successful and nationally recognized businesses in the community."

The reaction to Beck and Brissette's victory was widely supportive during the 2002 Community Days Banquet.

"I was overcome by the reaction of the audience," Brissette remembers. "Some people were standing on their seats screaming and applauding, some individuals were crying, it was truly overwhelming. I think that many in the crowd were not only cheering [Dan and I] but were applauding all the gays and lesbians that have been in their lives."

Beck praised Lincoln City at the ceremony, revealing that they came there "to heal and found not only each other but a community that just said no to the hate being promulgated in our beautiful state."

Friend and co-worker Ken Hull admires Beck and Brissette for their willingness to give so selflessly and considers them his mentors. "I strive to be half the men that they both are professionally and personally. They have made it



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