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SECURING THE VOTE

A proactive organization builds community by meeting candidates, talking issues and wielding political power

In 1996, southern Oregon activist Rosemary Dunn Dalton invited to her home local and state political candidates to speak with members of the sexual minorities community.

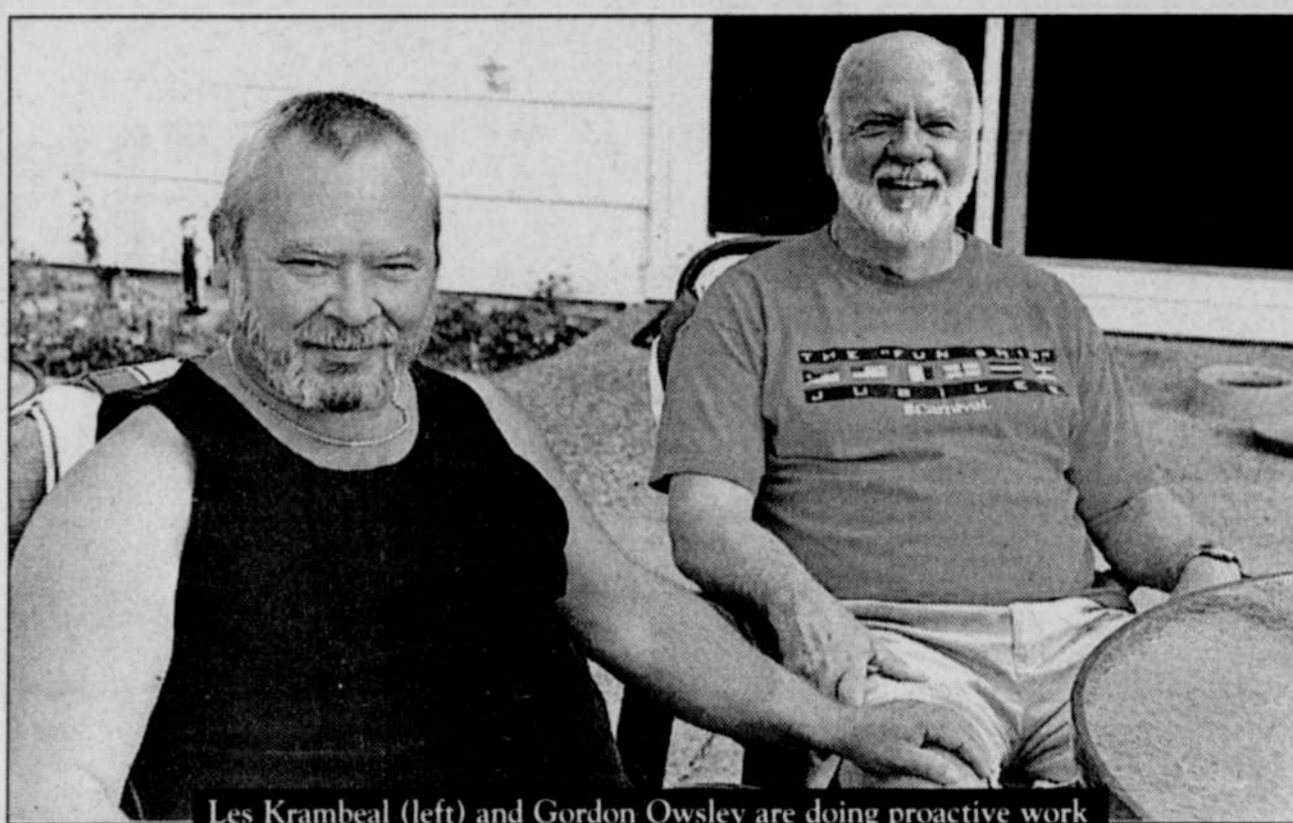
Voters were able to put faces to the names on the ballot, and candidates had the opportunity to shake hands with an important group of their constituents. From this simple gathering sprung the influential Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Caucus of Southern Oregon.

Six years later, "candidate night" continues to be a major feature of this nonpartisan educational organization that strives for equality through political action. Based in Ashland, the caucus today reaches out to more than 500 individuals across southern Oregon.

And its activities are expanding as well. "We're trying to be more than a political organization," caucus co-chairman Les Krambeal explains. He hopes that educating the public about the sexual minorities community will be a proactive way to head off future anti-gay measures, such as those initiated by Lon Mabon and the Oregon Citizens Alliance.

He wants to replace myths and stereotypes with knowledge and neighbors. "In the past, I think most of the gay and human rights organizations have been reacting to [Mabon's] activities rather than making people aware of who and what we really are," he says.

Krambeal's partner, caucus treasurer Gordon Owsley, adds: "There are a lot of misconceptions



Les Krambeal (left) and Gordon Owsley are doing proactive work simply by being out in the Rogue Valley

PHOTOS BY MARTY DAVIS

down here, particularly in the rural areas. We're hoping to overcome some of that."

Toward this end, a new project in development at the caucus is a speakers bureau.

The organization will draw on its membership network of professionals willing to speak to area groups. Prior to the program's launch next spring, each will receive training on the caucus' position on current political issues and candidates as well as how best to represent the overall sexual minorities community, especially

to clubs and organizations outside Ashland.

"Ashland is a microcosm of gayness in the valley," Owsley admits.

"But," Krambeal counters, "the gay community works and lives throughout the valley."

So, throughout the Rogue Valley they go, with personal lives and volunteer efforts often overlapping. For instance, the couple often represent the caucus at other meetings, such as the Ashland Chamber of Commerce. Perhaps more importantly, they make a signifi-

EXPANDING THE MIND

Queer students launch resource center at Southern Oregon University while continuing hands-on activism

Sexual minority students at Southern Oregon University in Ashland will have an alternative space to call their own this fall when the Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Trans and Allies Student Union opens the doors of its new Queer Resource Center. For 15 years, this student-run organization has sponsored dances and social gatherings, presented safer-sex sessions, played host to educational panels, advocated in the political arena and provided a general peer support network.

But the workload has grown too large. According to student union president Deanna Leitner, a senior majoring in theater, "The people who are doing the most advocacy on this campus are students first, and the focus on academics leaves little time for advocacy."

In September, the organization will become two, each with distinct roles. The existing student union will continue to operate in the domain of activism and politics, working with larger organizations such as Basic Rights Oregon



Although acceptance on campus is growing, hate crimes and derogatory language still concern Deanna Leitner

ing is set for Oct. 11, National Coming Out Day.

Growth has been both a positive and a negative reflection of campus life. Student involvement in the union now numbers some 500, demonstrating acceptance among the academic community and a growing comfort level for queer or questioning individuals.

On the other hand, Leitner observes, the organization's mission of diminishing prejudice, discrimination, violence and oppression is still meaningful and just as important as ever to cultivate an open and

and the Oregon Statewide Equal Rights Alliance toward goals of policy and social change.

The new resource center will focus on social activities and offer a lounge, meeting space and library. More importantly, it will have a soon-to-be-hired paid staff director to coordinate its events on behalf of students. The physical location has yet to be identified, but the grand open-

accepting academic environment.

"We still have hate crimes happening," she says. "We still have people using derogatory language and maybe not even realizing they're using derogatory language because there's still ignorance."

Stories of hate crimes and negative experiences are common among students who live in


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