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NORTHWEST news

FAMILY REUNION

Human Dignity Coalition throws another party for Central Oregonians
by Tom Stevenson

When the Human Dignity Coalition in Central Oregon received funding from Equity Foundation last year to do some work with the area's sexual minorities community, organizers tossed around several ideas.

According to bisexual board member Renee Davidson, one of the key ideas was to put together an event that would give people "an opportunity to network in a fun, safe setting." The coalition got the word out, and a core group of about eight people, including members of the sexual minorities community as well as straight folks, joined forces to put everything together.

Just like that, the first-ever "Family" Celebration was born. "We decided the event should have something for everyone—a family event during the day that was suitable for children and grown-ups alike and a 21-and-over 'cabaret' event in the evening," Davidson says.

The celebration was such a success that the group decided to do it again this year, with a few minor changes. Davidson says "Family" Celebration II—Reunion! will be "a little less elaborate" but still will be a fun-filled afternoon at the infamous Funny Farm between Bend and Redmond.

The coalition is planning a true "family reunion"; it will be providing grills, napkins, utensils and nonalcoholic beverages for the event. Those who wish to attend should bring something to grill, something to share with others and a blanket.

As part of the fun—and as a clever way to collect cash for the coalition—a special drawing will be held for an "UGH-ly" prize, which is being created and donated by the owners of the Funny Farm. According to Davidson, the unique fund-raiser will force people to pay \$5 to keep their name, out of the running so they won't have to go home with the unpleasant reward.

The celebration is open to anyone who wishes to attend. Organizers are hoping to have 100 people come from throughout Central Oregon and even from across the rest of the state.

Last year the coalition was put in the strange position of advertising the location for the celebration in *Just Out* but not in Central Oregon. Instead, only a phone number was listed for people who were interested in attending to call.

"We just weren't sure if it was safe to let everyone know where they could find a group of queers all in one place," Davidson says. "We also informed the police department of our party, just in case anything were to happen. Of course, there were no problems at all—not that we expected any, we just didn't want to take any chances."

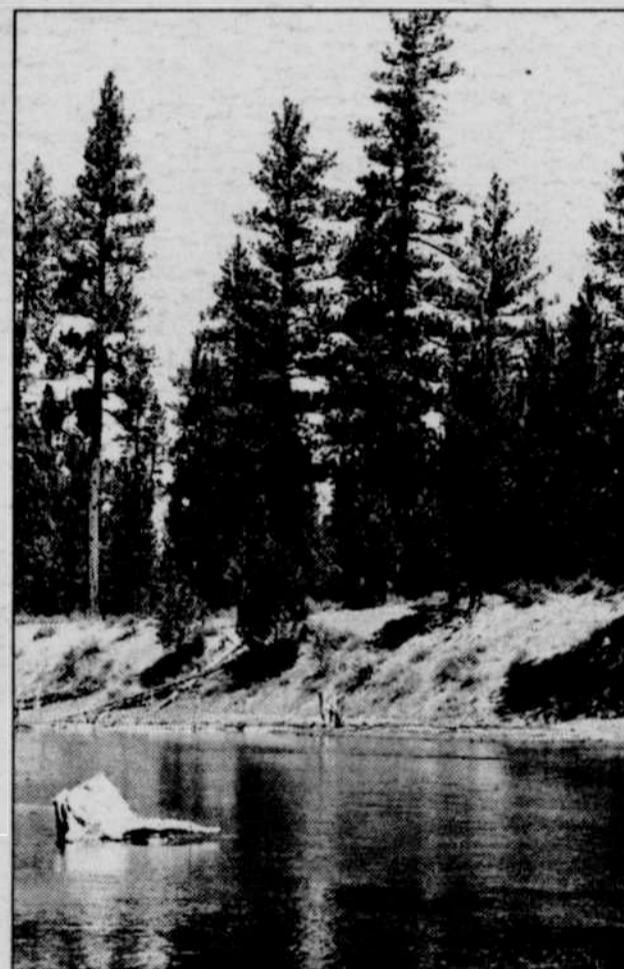
Is there reason for the queer community in Central Oregon to feel threatened? That depends on who you talk to, according to coalition board member Cliff Cook. The gay man insists he feels "very comfortable" in Bend.

"I have rainbow/pride stickers on my car, and I'd have to say that I've never received any direct negative comments and have never felt threatened because of being out," Cook says. "I've actually felt accepted and appreciated. But much of that is because I'm out and active and involved."

Still, Cook says he receives many e-mails



Cliff Cook (left) and Mike Lovely are helping plan "Family" Celebration II—Reunion!



The area is beautiful and gay-friendly but lacks a cohesive queer community

and messages from gay men living in the area who are unhappy because they do not have a place to meet others and are afraid to come out of the closet. Central Oregon has no gay bars, and a gay-friendly coffeehouse no longer is operating.

"We do have several gay-friendly establishments, but there used to be the one which you could suggest folks go to," Cook says. "Now you don't know which one to send guys to."

Cook is "convinced that on a per capita measurement, Bend/Central Oregon has a larger gay community than what would be the average" statewide but says the closet keeps many of these folks from connecting and making friends. This is why members of the coalition are sponsoring events like the "Family" Celebration. □

"FAMILY" CELEBRATION II—REUNION! will be held from 4 to 8 p.m. Sept. 8 at the Funny Farm, 64990 Deschutes Market Road. For more information call 541-385-3320 or e-mail renee@humandignitycoalition.org.

TOM STEVENSON is a Portland free-lance writer, a Portland State University student and a big fan of the Central Oregon area. He can be reached at ruraltom@yahoo.com.

PHOTO BY JONATHAN KIPP