

# PORTLAND TRAILBLAZER

Basic Rights Oregon honors longtime volunteer by Jim Radosta

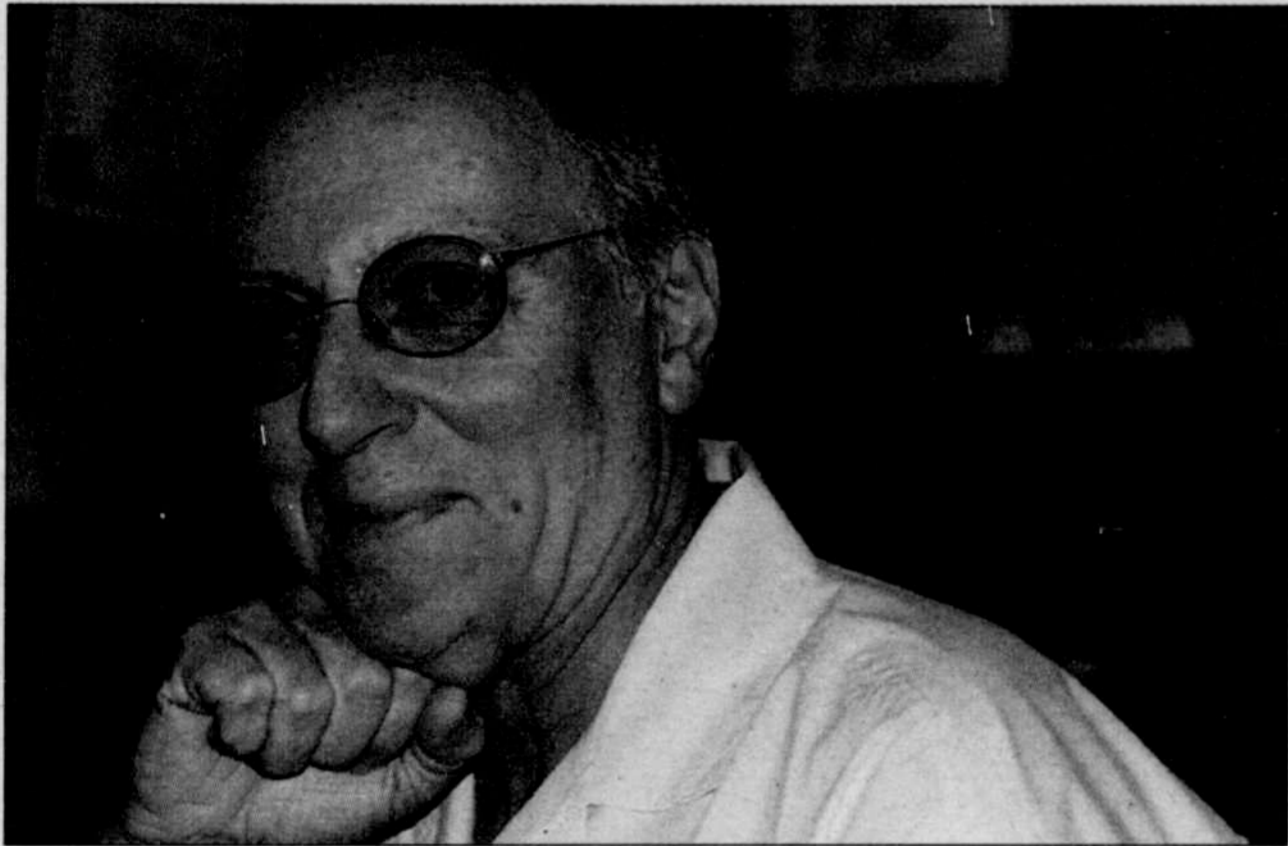


PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

Lyle Tucker also has volunteered at Oregon Public Broadcasting and Sisters of the Road Cafe

In the ongoing struggle for equality, a select few familiar faces receive most of the attention for the hard work they do. Behind the scenes, though, scores of volunteers quietly perform the everyday tasks that are necessary to keep the movement alive. Understated? Perhaps.

Thankless? Not to Lyle Tucker. The 63-year-old retired French teacher has volunteered for Basic Rights Oregon almost every week since 1994. He finally will receive his moment in the spotlight Sept. 13, when he will be honored as a Basic Rights Trailblazer during the nonprofit's annual fund-raising dinner.

BRO also will recognize Bill Dickey, a longtime supporter; Cary Renfro, Salem Human Rights and Relations Advisory Commission vice chairman; and the Metropolitan Group, a strategic communications and social marketing firm. The special guests at the dinner will be the family of Steve Lofton and Roger Croteau, a Portland couple who are fighting Florida's gay adoption ban.

Tucker first got involved in gay rights during 1992's successful No on 9 Campaign. But when the Oregon Citizens Alliance returned with 1994's Measure 13, he knew he had to do more.

"I was afraid every couple of years...we'd have one of those OCA campaigns and we wouldn't be ready," he says. "I was concerned about an organization being ready right away to get organized. I didn't feel sending a contribution was enough."

Tucker decided to make a weekly commitment to volunteer. Every Monday he comes into the office to fold letters, stuff envelopes and enter donor information into BRO's database.

"Even though I view what I do there as...the 'little guy' kind of volunteerism—I'm not an activist, I do behind-the-scenes stuff—I know they need that kind of help," he says. "I feel that this is something that I can comfortably perform for a group that means a lot to me."

So what's the driving force behind Tucker's passion? For one thing, he wants to ensure that teachers and students don't have to endure the kind of environment that forced him to stay closeted throughout his education career.

"I knew people suspected I was gay," says Tucker, who worked for five years at Franklin High School and another 25 at Wilson. "I was mildly harassed and called 'fag' in the hall and

getting phone calls at home...people would just say the word 'fag' and then hang up."

Tucker says he didn't want to worsen the situation by coming out. He avoided Gay Pride and anyplace parents or students might learn about his sexual orientation.

All that changed at his retirement luncheon in 1992, when he told his colleagues about what campus life is like for gay teachers and revealed that he would be volunteering for No on 9 as soon as the school year ended. The positive response was overwhelming.

"I was really afraid I was going to chicken out," Tucker says. "I had, to my knowledge, the first standing ovation that ever occurred at one of those end-of-the-year luncheons. After the lunch was over, I was surrounded by people hugging and kissing me and saying, 'Sorry that you suffered this way.'"

Wilson High School has come a long way in the past 10 years. While preparing to march with BRO during Portland Pride 2002, Tucker spotted some students from its gay-straight alliance.

"I went over to tell them how wonderful I thought it was that there could be an organization like that at the high school and how I appreciated the fact they were there and participating in the parade," he says. "When I was their age, I did not know there were other gay people. It was a 'love that dare not speak its name,' and people did not speak about it. I heard words like 'queer' and had some vague feeling that maybe it was people like me, but I didn't know there were other gay people around."

Tucker remembers the first time he read about gay people in a learning environment. While attending Willamette University, he saw a one-paragraph entry in a psychology textbook that called homosexuals "sick."

"At least kids nowadays...know they're not alone and there are places they can go to get information, and there are counselors they can talk to, and they can get support," he says. "I think the changes are really significant." □

The BASIC RIGHTS OREGON ANNUAL DINNER featuring comedian Bob Smith will be held Sept. 13 at the Hilton, 921 S.W. Sixth Ave. Cocktail hour will begin at 6 p.m., with dinner at 7 and a roving after-party at 9. The theme is "Setting Sail," and cruisewear is encouraged. Tickets cost \$100. For more information call 503-222-6151.

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