



PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

*"From my point of view, there was only one goal... to defeat the ballot measure"*

—Sherry Oeser

**2**002 marks the 10-year anniversary of the Oregon Citizens Alliance's infamous Measure 9.

The anti-gay organization wanted to amend the state constitution to declare homosexuality as being abnormal, prohibit state and local governments from encouraging or facilitating homosexuality and require schools to set a standard for youth that recognized homosexuality as wrong, unnatural and perverse. The measure also linked homosexuality with sadism, masochism and pedophilia.

It appeared on the ballot in November 1992, a presidential election year. Political speeches and campaign ads were full of "family values" rhetoric. President George Bush was running for re-election. Vice President Dan Quayle picked on television character Murphy Brown for having a baby out of wedlock.

Patrick Buchanan spoke at the National Republican Convention and said: "There is a religious war going on in our country for the soul of America. It is a cultural war."

The *Oregonian* reported that OCA leader Lon Mabon compared the Republican National Convention to an OCA convention. "We couldn't have written some of the speeches better if I'd done it myself," he said.

Anti-gay rights measures were on the ballots in Oregon, Colorado and the city of Portland, Maine. *Christianity Today* called 1992 "The Year of the Homosexual Vote," as the religious right wing claimed it had to stop the advancement toward gay equality.

While all of this was going on, none of it



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*"There was no way that a campaign based in Portland was going to be able to navigate the kind of very sensitive topics of homophobia, heterosexism and oppression in rural communities and leave us further ahead"*

—Marcy Westerling

# 10 Years After 9

**Lessons learned, progress achieved and battles won**

by Pat Young

even began to compare to the rhetoric, emotion and violence stirred up by Measure 9.

**T**he story stretches back to 1988, when the OCA passed its first statewide anti-gay initiative, Measure 8, which repealed Gov. Neil Goldschmidt's executive order banning discrimination by state agencies against homosexuals. When it was announced, opponents thought the OCA wouldn't get enough signatures to place it on the ballot.

And then, when the OCA was successful, opponents thought surely it wouldn't pass. This isn't to say they didn't put up a fight. Still, many people believed Oregonians were pro-

gressive and never would pass such a measure. But it did pass.

Opponents were shocked. Keeston Lowery's comments to the *Oregonian* best summarized how many reacted.

"I feel this terrible sense of sadness and sense of shame by what this state has done," he said. "I think there's a lot of people who feel that the state has said we're not part of the family."

Measure 8 gave political momentum to Mabon and his organization. The OCA was thrilled with the victory and said the vote proved Oregonians did not want "special rights" for gay men and lesbians, nor did they accept homosexuality as a normal alternative lifestyle. "And like anybody who tastes blood, then you want more," attorney Charles Hinkle comments as he looks back on the events.

Mabon tried to tackle other social issues, such as abortion, but failed. So he returned to his tried-and-true. "1992 was his big bite at the apple," Hinkle says.

When Mabon filed for Measure 9 in May 1991, the reaction was immediate.

His opponents remembered what happened in 1988 and wasted no time lashing out at the OCA. Gail Shibley, the first openly gay member of the Oregon Legislature, told the *Oregonian*, "I would think people would have better things to do with their time than to spew out such hatred."

Newspapers across the state condemned the measure and urged people not to sign the petitions. The *Grants Pass Daily Courier* stated, "The sheer outrageousness of the Oregon Citizens Alliance's proposed anti-homosexual measure should be enough to set every rational Oregonian's teeth on edge." An *Oregonian* editorial stated that the OCA had changed its "battle cry from no special rights for homosexuals to heap special scorn on homosexuals."

As the OCA gathered signatures, numerous people tried to stop the process. Bigot Busters, led by Bob Ralphs, sent teams of people to confront voters who were about to sign the petitions.

"He did a yeoman job in organizing people legitimately to go out and say: 'Do you know what you're signing? Are you sure you want to support the OCA?'" Hinkle notes. Occasionally, some of the interactions led to violent confrontations.

Hinkle was also in the heat of the battle as he represented Fred Meyer and other stores in an effort to stop the OCA from gathering signatures on their property. The companies did not want any group gathering signatures. Period. And they won injunctions.

"That helped give visibility to the idea that mainstream corporate Oregon—the business community—was not happy with this radical right social agenda," Hinkle notes. "Businesses that otherwise might have cared less about gay rights or anything else nevertheless thought that Lon Mabon was giving Oregon a black eye, and they didn't want to be associated with him."

**D**espite these efforts, the OCA succeeded in gathering enough signatures for the measure.

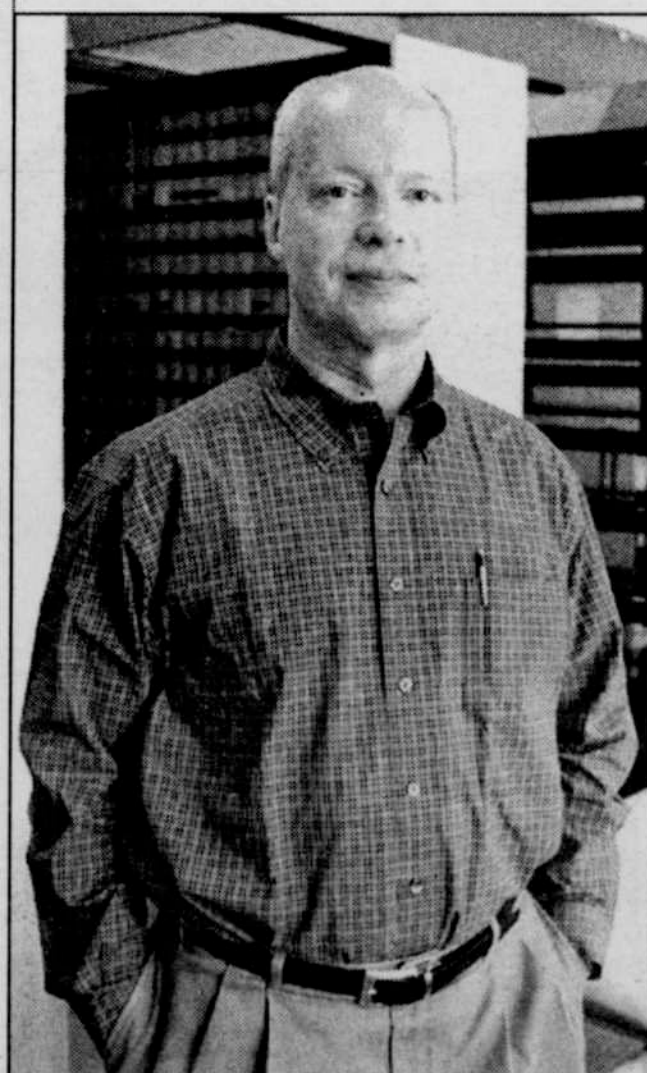


PHOTO BY PAT YOUNG

*"In so many ways, the battle has been won... I think '92 was a watershed year from that point of view"*

—Charles Hinkle