

James Rae and Debi Duren will tell you Hank Stack was irreplaceable.

The longtime supporter and member of the deaf and gay communities was also a well-known personality in Oregon through his 30-plus years as a sign language interpreter for KGW-TV. He died July 31.

Now, it is up to Rae and Duren to carry on his work as the Portlanders take over signing duties at KGW, waking up each morning and bringing the news to members of the region's deaf community. Both have a great deal in common with Stack: They have been deaf their entire lives, are members of the queer community, have been signing for years and are activists of sorts. And both truly admired and respected Stack and have pleasant memories of him.

"Hank was an incredible man," Rae says. "When I first moved to Portland, Hank made me feel very welcome. He always made an effort to make sure I was invited to functions or had been introduced to people."

Duren adds: "It was a huge loss with Hank gone, and there's no way I could replace him as he was very well liked and well known by the deaf community and KGW community as well. However, I feel very honored to be able to carry the 'torch' in his name and continue with this important piece for the sake of the deaf community."

Duren recalls Stack's adventure stories and his laughs. "He was very generous with love and care," she says.

Rae and Duren are excited about the door that has opened for them. They admit to a touch of "nervousness" but are enjoying being sign interpreters for KGW.

Duren is not totally new to the job, either. She had served as a substitute for Stack during the past four years.

"I have gained more confidence in signing in front of the cameras and in signing update news in such a short time," says Duren, who notes that several members of the deaf community have told her they are glad KGW chose to continue having interpreters on the morning news broadcasts. "The deaf community deserves something that meets their needs for [American Sign Language], and I feel KGW has been kind to work with Hank for many years and to keep this commitment going. I feel touched by the comments from the deaf community and am grateful for KGW in attempting to keep it there."

Rae says he is honored to fill Stack's seat. "I can do a job that I love and also have fond memories of whom I am replacing. It also has been stressful knowing that so many people are watching. I get nervous pretty easy, which affects my interpreting. So...for all viewers, please be patient with me."

He, too, is pleased that KGW has continued the tradition of providing sign language interpre-

tation. He attributes that partially to the fact deaf people have shown "they are watching and value the segments that are interpreted."

Rae says his mornings at KGW tend to be challenging. "Upon arriving, we are given a script of the segment's information. Sometimes we get them pretty close to the airing, and then I do some modification so it is easier to interpret. I make notes of things to pay special attention to, like spelling or a number."

First they work on the 8:56 a.m. segment of the news, which is taped, then they prepare for the 8:26 a.m. segment, which is live. Rae admits the last thing he does before going on the air is look in the mirror and make sure he looks "sassy."

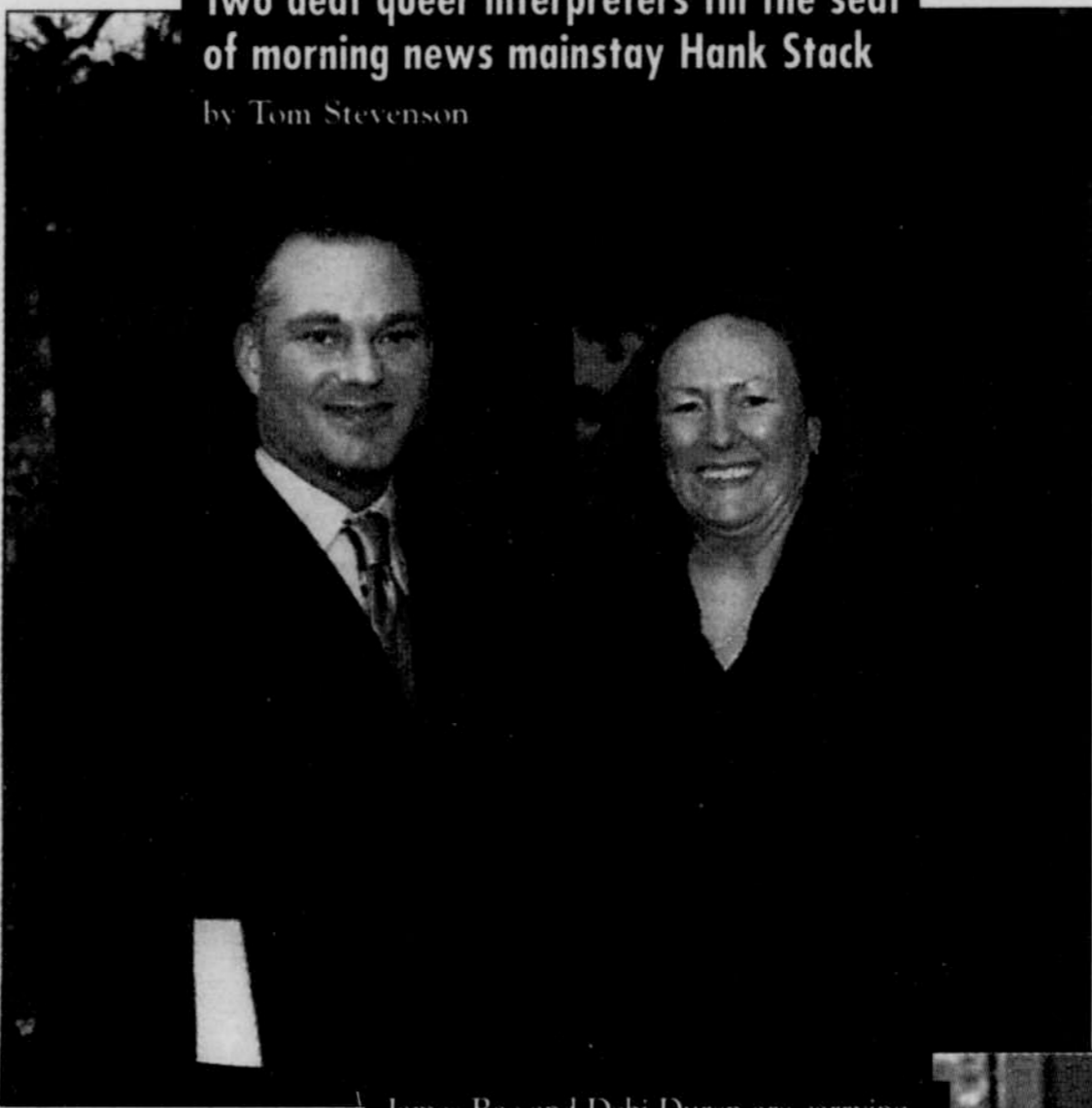
Duren says she's getting used to the hectic morning schedule. "At first, when I started subbing [for Stack], I required about a half-hour to prepare and to make sure I remembered the news. But now, I do two update news segments, including preparation, in about 20 minutes."

Rae and Duren didn't grow up in Portland but have become actively involved in the community since moving here.

ON THE AIR

Two deaf queer interpreters fill the seat of morning news mainstay Hank Stack

by Tom Stevenson



PHOTOS BY MARTY DAVIS

James Rae and Debi Duren are carrying on the legacy of Hank Stack (below)

Rae, who has been deaf since infancy as a result of meningitis, was born and raised in New York. He later attended Lexington School for the Deaf.

He has been signing his entire life but says in the 1970s sign language was not encouraged, so his parents decided to encourage speaking and lip reading. "It didn't work," he told *Just Out*.

Rae acknowledged to himself that he was gay in junior high school, "denied it to people in high school" and then came out in college. He has long been involved in both the deaf and queer communities, and although he does not



consider himself an activist, he does admit he can be "a pain."

"Most of my activism is in regards to interpreting," he says. "I have dedicated my efforts to make sure that events are accessible to the deaf and hard-of-hearing communities. I am pretty outspoken, and I don't beat around the bush when it comes to injustice. I am willing to do whatever it takes to educate people to influence a change."

Duren, who was born in Colorado profoundly deaf, spent most of her time growing up in Long Beach, Calif. She has been communicating in ASL since she was 14.

Like Rae, Duren has long been an active member of the deaf and queer communities. She is vice president of Northwest Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf, served as program co-chairwoman for the Seattle Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf Conference in 2001, has volunteered at community events such as Portland Pride and has worked on fund raising for a number of groups.

Although she and Rae acknowledge that some of the challenges faced by the deaf and queer communities are similar, they do not necessarily see a tight bond between the two groups.

"Right now there's a new nonprofit organization named [Deaf & Hearing Out Reach] founded by two lesbian couples, both hearing and deaf," Duren says. "This organization's goal is to reach out to the queer community and bring hearing and deaf members to bridge and communicate together.... It's hard because the deaf community is hard to reach at times."

Rae says he does not personally feel any great bond between deaf and queer people. In fact, he thinks many hearing members of the sexual minorities community are intimidated by those who are deaf.

"Most of it is due to the communication issue," he says. "I think until the mainstream [members of the queer community] becomes more aware and are willing to learn about different needs, whether it is signing or other subcommunities, the bond can't happen." □

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