

**"E**ven if people don't think highly of lawyers in general, lawyers who have been working for gay, lesbian and transgendered equal rights do a lot of good things," Beth Allen says. "And we need to keep encouraging more people to go into law who are willing to work toward that end."

## LEGAL LEGACY LIVES ON

**Scholarship recipient still advocates for equal rights**  
by Michael Burdick

In 1995 Allen became one of the first recipients of the Bill and Ann Shepherd Legal Scholarship, which honors law students in their last year of study who are dedicated to donating part of their expertise to helping keep their state hate-free. It is named after the couple who co-founded the Portland chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays back in the 1970s.

Allen first thought about becoming a lawyer while attending high school in Myrtle Creek. Though she got some encouragement from teachers, she didn't seriously consider it as a career until much later, because "girls from small towns in Oregon didn't become lawyers."

After graduating she worked at motorcycle shops for several years, then joined the Army to earn money for college—and "because there's lots of cute girls in the Army." There she landed a photojournalism assignment and worked for military newspapers, winning several awards and having an all-around great time.

After three years Allen left the Army and pursued a speech communications degree at Portland State University. She supported herself working in public affairs at the Army Corps of Engineers, which moved her into an editing job after college.

"When I first started going to school, Lon Mabon had just come out with Measure 8," she recalls. "Measure 9 was going on about the time I graduated from PSU. I was bored

with the job I had. It was not what I thought I was gonna be when I grew up."

Allen noticed lawyers were actively making political progress for sexual minorities, which renewed her interest in a legal career. "I went into it thinking I was going to become a lawyer and make the world safe for gays and lesbians everywhere."

She attended the relatively conservative Willamette University College of Law and was an activist right off the bat. Along with another lesbian and a trans woman, she created the school's first queer student group. She educated her classmates and professors, "talking about gay and lesbian issues in classes and making sure all the professors knew that they had gay and lesbian students and that we were active in what they were discussing."

Willamette had given her a partial scholarship, but she always was looking for more money to make ends meet. A school counselor brought the Shepherd scholarship to her attention, and she applied for it.

It stands out among the many awards Allen



"With the high cost of a legal education, scholarships such as this one really make a difference," says Beth Allen (geared up to practice for June's Dragon Boat races)

received. "For those of us just scraping by...it was a big deal."

And it came with other kinds of support from the Shepherd family. "They were always checking in on me, seeing how I was doing, making sure I was staying active, being proud of me.... [They] have taken the scholarship to a whole different level, a very personal level."

Allen's first "real" job after law school was with Tonkon Torp, where she convinced the management to provide domestic partner benefits. Now she has settled into a comfortable position at Lane Powell Spears Lubersky, a firm that specializes in labor and employment law.

This gig might be a far cry from the legal crusader she envisioned in her idealistic youth, but she has not forgotten her commitment to the queer community. A big part of her job is giving advice to employers, which gives her an opportunity to steer them away from discriminatory practices.

And she still does direct work on gay and lesbian issues in her spare time. She helped push through Portland's domestic partnership registry, and she was active in the opposition to 2000's Measure 9.

She also is working on efforts to get state administrative rules changed to comply with 1998's Tanner decision, which held that partners of gay men and lesbians should have access to the same benefits as everyone else. This spring she will teach a class at Lewis & Clark College titled "Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and the Law."

This year's scholarship fund-raiser will have special significance because of Ann Shepherd's death in January. Susie Shepherd still is grieving for her mother but is committed to carrying on the tradition. "It'll be hard looking out there at the seat where she always sat, but I know that she and Daddy will be up there and have the best seats in the house." □

Classical jazz musician Skip Elliott Bowman will perform during the concert and decadent dessert revue *A CLASS ACT 2003: ENCORE, ENCORE!* 8 p.m. April 25 at The Old Church, 1422 S.W. 11th Ave. Tickets cost \$30 at the door or \$25 in advance from *Balloons on Broadway* or *Gai-Pied*. For more information call 503-286-1752.

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