

NORTHWEST newsbriefs

ing their gay, lesbian and bi employees. ExxonMobil now becomes the last of the 10 largest, most successful U.S. companies without a policy protecting workers from sexual orientation discrimination.

Wal-Mart's new policy was a result of an almost two-year effort by the Seattle-based Pride Foundation, which had purchased stock in the company and had been considering putting forward a shareholder resolution asking it to change the policy. Such a shareholder effort has been mounted at ExxonMobil for the past five years in row, yet the company refuses to change its written policy.

"This action helps ensure that Wal-Mart's gay and lesbian employees will be judged on their merits, not on their sexual orientation," said Zack Wright of Pride Foundation. "The inclusion of sexual orientation in Wal-Mart's nondiscrimination policy may be the only example of fair treatment for gays and lesbians that some people will ever see, particularly in rural, more conservative areas."

The shareholders began meeting with Wal-Mart in September 2001, asking them to include both sexual orientation and gender identity in their nondiscrimination policies. Pride Foundation received a letter June 26 from Wal-Mart Stores Inc. stating that the company had amended its Equal Employment Opportunity policy to include sexual orientation.

"I look forward to continuing our discussion with Wal-Mart concerning gender identity," said Marsha Botzer, Pride Foundation board member, "and look forward to the day when Wal-Mart can include gender identity in their nondiscrimination policies."

The 17-year-old gay, lesbian, bi and trans community foundation has an endowment of more than \$2 million. It awards grants and scholarships and promotes corporate anti-discrimination policies.

Federal law allows bias based on sexual orientation for private employment, and only 13 states and the District of Columbia ban this type of discrimination. The Employment Nondiscrimination Act would prohibit bias on the basis of sexual orientation, providing basic protection to ensure fairness in the workplace for U.S. citizens who are denied equal protection under the law.

DARCELLE RECEIVES AWARD FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE

In honor of her generosity and commitment to the sexual minorities community through the years, drag icon and former Empress Darcelle (aka Walter Cole) received a special appreciation plaque July 9 from the Portland chapter of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change.

OLOC is a national organization for women 60 and older interested in changing the social disease of ageism. About 15 members and their guests were sitting in the audience when Kathy Bambeck and Lou Cooper made the presentation after the evening's performance at Darcelle XV Showplace in Old Town.

"She's done so much for the community," says Cooper, a fairly new member of OLOC but a longtime friend of Darcelle and her partner, Roxy.

Cooper works at Hopewell House, and Darcelle has held many benefits for the hospice at her nightclub. "She's just a wonderful gal," Cooper says.

Bambeck also shares a personal connection with Darcelle, having performed onstage in the 1980s as a Foxy Lady. She notes how Darcelle gave her an opportunity to perform when other venues turned her away because she didn't have a trained voice. Cole's acceptance, Bambeck says, helped raise her self-esteem.

"We decided that he was such a superhero to us," Bambeck adds. "He is over 70, and he has done so much for our community. It's about time the women recognized and gave him an award to show that we appreciate his work."

SMITH: BILL COULD REDUCE AIDS DEATHS BY 50 PERCENT

A new study on the Early Treatment for HIV Act of 2003, introduced by U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith, R-Ore., finds that passing the legislation would reduce the death rate for people with HIV on Medicaid by 50 percent over 10 years. The research, conducted by PriceWaterhouseCoopers, was released by the Treatment Access Expansion Project.

"This study shows that the lives of people with HIV can be greatly improved through the passage of ETHA," Smith said in a statement. "Some people living with HIV and AIDS get the latest medical treatment, but too many do not. This is literally a life-and-death issue for many Oregonians, and ETHA can help many more Americans enjoy long, healthy lives."


The study found that providing early intervention care through the act significantly delays the progression of HIV, increases the life expectancy of HIV-positive people and is highly cost-effective. It found that over 10 years:

- The act reduces the death rate for people living with HIV on Medicaid by 50 percent.
- Disease progression is significantly slowed and health outcomes improved.

Continued on Page 11



Lou Cooper of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change congratulates Darcelle on her special appreciation plaque



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