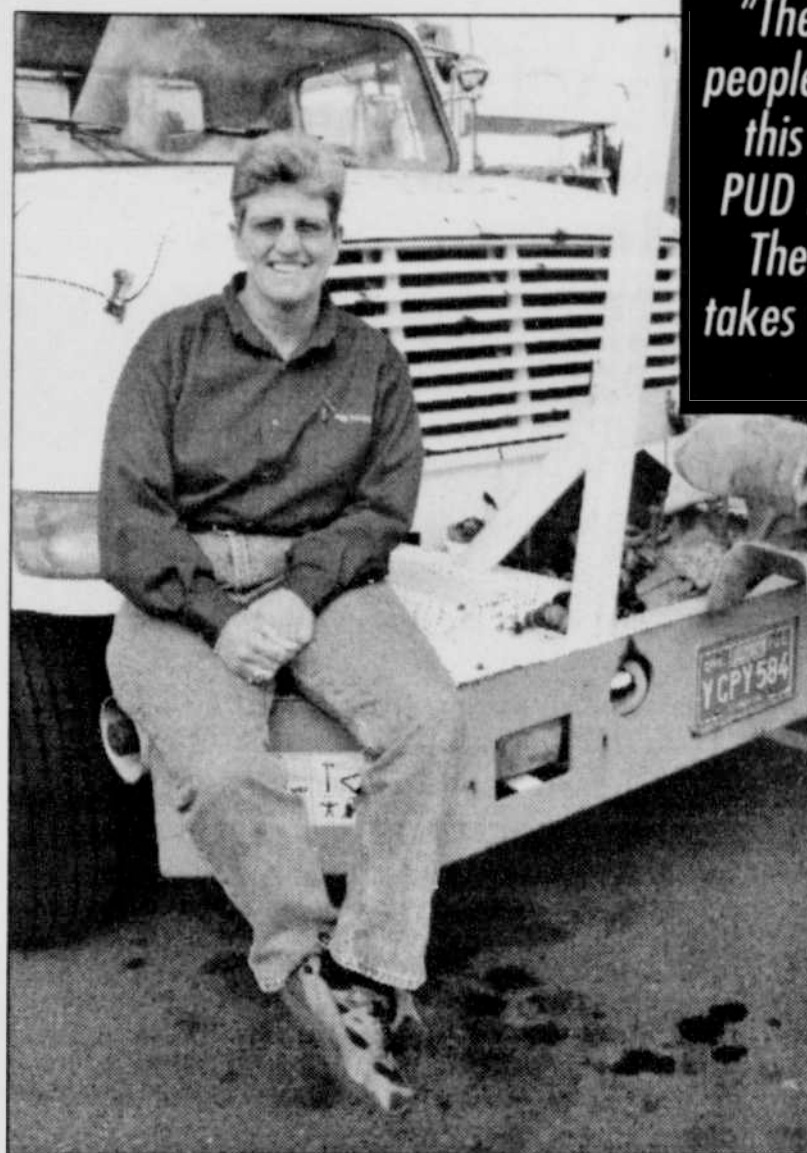


NORTHWEST news



"The real fear for me is that people won't be educated about this issue. They'll vote for a PUD because they hate Enron. They won't think of what it takes to run an efficient utility."

—Suni Miani

expense of the earth and people all over the world for far too long," Newell says. She hopes the proposed PUD would make solar, wind and other alternative energy choices more mainstream.

QUEER EMPLOYEES AT PGE FIERCELY LOYAL TO THEIR COMPANY

"It's presumptuous to think that I would want to work for a PUD just because there is a lesbian board member," said Gregg Arntson, a member of GALE Force (Gay And Lesbian Employees and their Friends), a queer employee group at PGE.

He has been a public information officer for seven years at the 2,700-employee company in Portland. A native Oregonian, Arntson performs regularly with local theater and music companies, including the Oregon Symphony Pops. In August 2002, *The Portland Business Journal* recognized him as one of the city's "Forty Under 40" for his business and civic leadership.

Arntson and the other members of GALE Force contend that their company has been unfairly maligned because of the Enron scandal. "We are not Enron," he says. "We are extremely loyal to PGE."

Arntson says that what happens in local headquarters is a far cry from the corrupt corporate misdeeds of their parent company. In fact, most GALE Force members profess affection and deep respect for their CEO, Peggy Fowler, an outspoken supporter of her gay, lesbian and transsexual employees.

"I moved here from Florida for this job because of the leadership," says Brian Craig, an information technology specialist.

"PGE was one of the first large corporations to take on No on 9," says Patrick Stupek, who has worked as a supervisor of corporate communications for seven years. "They pulled in other corporations to fight that measure as well. And they were one of the first companies to stop giving contributions to the Boy Scouts after they banned gay Scouts."

"I transitioned at this company," says Devan Deuel, a lead field operations technician and an out transsexual. "And I had the full support of my managers."

"If people vote for this PUD, they will be

hurting their gay and lesbian neighbors," says Jann Gilbert, a project coordinator for customer energy resources. GALE Force members worry that a PUD would not provide queer employees the powerful platform PGE has proved to be.

Additionally, they are dubious about the proposed PUD's ability to deliver the same quality service as PGE. Or PacifiCorp, for that matter. Gilbert lives in a PacifiCorp district and wonders how the proposed PUD would affect her home service.

PUD advocates "have no plan," she says. "What are they going to do?"

"In order to keep rates low, they're going to have to slash salaries," says Margo Bryant, a special needs policy supervisor. "Plus they would lose half the service area, so they'd have to cut jobs."

If GALE Force members are any barometer, PGE employees take pride in their work and their service to the community. Arntson credits GALE Force and the company's six other diversity groups with increasing customer service and employee knowledge. Because employees from many different departments converge at GALE Force meetings, they can learn from one another how various aspects of the company work.

Arntson, who has a desk job, has joined Deuel on meter-reading trips so as to better understand the service PGE provides. "I don't think I would have done that if it weren't for this group," he says.

Not surprisingly, corporate leaders at PGE are fighting the proposed PUD measures, calling the effort a "government takeover." PGE says that in the event of the PUD being voted in, rates would go up, taxes would go up, service would falter, checks and balances would disappear, all with inexperienced people at the helm.

While this chaotic picture might be overly doom-and-gloom (a number of U.S. cities have effective public utility districts, including Los Angeles and nearby Columbia River PUD), the Oregon Public Power Committee plan has been criticized for being thin on realistic strategy.

Suni Miani, chairwoman of GALE Force and a 15-year employee at PGE, says: "The real fear for me is that people won't be educated about this issue. They'll vote for a PUD because they hate Enron. They won't think of what it takes to run an efficient utility."

"The picture these measures are painting of our company is not the company we know," Bryant says. She and others feel strongly that now is an important moment for PGE to regain its good standing in the public eye. They worry that public ignorance on this matter could cost them their jobs as well as their hard-won acceptance and voice at work.

Says Miani, "We want our company back." □

For more information about the MULTNOMAH COUNTY PUBLIC UTILITY DISTRICT visit the Internet sites www.oppc.net, www.enronfraudinfocenter.com, www.portlandgeneral.com and www.citizensagainstthegovernmenttakeover.com.

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