

# Speak Out

## Humor is subjective

TO THE EDITOR:  
Dear Jennifer:

Thank you for your recent letter; we appreciate you taking the time to share your thoughts ["An Open Letter to Balloons on Broadway," Oct. 17].

We at Balloons on Broadway have spent the past 12 years developing a unique and humorous mix of cards and merchandise that is irreverent by intent and potentially offensive to some. But bigoted and racist? Our product line *certainly* is not.

If you are familiar with our merchandise, then you're aware that we not only stock sardonic greeting cards poking fun at many stereotypes (because, of course, most stereotypes are by their nature inaccurate and baseless) but also cards representing black-positive images and celebrations. We have found that humor is one of the most effective tools at breaking down those stereotypes. The bottom line is to get us all to laugh at ourselves and take life a little less seriously.

Humor is such a subjective and personal thing. We believe our responsibility as shop owners is to provide as wide and balanced a selection as possible, and leave it up to the individual to determine what he or she perceives as humorous. Many customers enjoy shopping at our store *because* of this diversity.

We do understand that you're uncomfortable with our product mix and that you'd prefer to shop elsewhere. Still, we appreciate you taking the time to express your opinion.

RON PITT  
GARY HOPPING  
Balloons on Broadway

## The race card

TO THE EDITOR:

I feel that I need to respond to a rant against Balloons on Broadway published recently in your "Speak Out" section.

First, let me say that I can't think of another store in Portland where I have been treated as well as at Balloons. Although just another customer in the door, I have always been greeted as a friend; had new and sale merchandise and the clerk's current "faves" pointed out to me; and had any questions answered. Opinions and requests have always been listened to. And the record shows that Balloons has always been a proud sponsor of gay and lesbian events and charities. *This* is what determines my patronage of a store.

Secondly, the card that these ladies take exception to is hardly new—the card and the series has been around for years. And it's not exclusive to Balloons—I could name two other gay-owned stores that carry it as well; I'm sure many straight-owned stores sell it also. Perhaps these ladies would be better served expressing their objections to the company that produces that card—as well as the writer, the photographer and the African American model who posed for it.

Thirdly, I would remind everyone that humor is extremely "subjective" and very often targets some sort of stereotype. The ancient Greek plays are full of such jokes. Balloons on Broadway also carries cards that make fun of hillbillies, cat lovers and old people—which are bought and enjoyed every day. The clerk was correct in stating that the store also carries cards that depict gay men as sex-starved size queens and gay women as flannel-wearing tool toters; these cards are meant for gay people to give to other gay people so that we can laugh at ourselves. If one doesn't find them funny, one should simply put the card back on the rack and move on.

Finally, I have to point out that taking an African American co-worker back to a store where she, in fact, *hadn't* been a customer in an effort to somehow give more credence to the argument sounds a little like "some of my best friends are" and an objectifying of said co-worker.

I would urge everyone to stop by Balloons on Broadway and make up their own minds about whether they care to patronize this friend of the community. And I would say to these two ladies that, if they really wish to shop where their sensibilities won't be offended, there's a Hallmark store at Lloyd Center.

DONALD FINCH  
Portland

## Trust the small guy

TO THE EDITOR:

I wonder what would have happened if the editor of *Just Out*, when approached about placing an ad for Portland General Electric in the last issue, had told the gay sponsors, "No ad lauding that scum-sucking Enron subsidiary is ever gonna be in my paper." Yet in the same paper we are faced with a letter to the editor, in the form of "An Open Letter to Balloons on Broadway," a gay-owned business, bringing it to task for having an allegedly racist greeting card and requesting a boycott.

I often wonder, when I notice things like this, how the influences of money and power come to affect the result. Will I take the word of two women, one of them African American, that the card is racist and join a boycott? Can I boycott PGE/Enron? Will I change my vote on PGE/Enron because they use fellow gay people to sway my vote? Do I think the gay employees are just pawns in a larger game? Do I think gay employees are misguided for backing PGE/Enron, or are they just worrying about their jobs?

I think the ad for PGE is full of scare tactics, lies, damn lies and half-truths. I was a customer of a consumer-owned utility for many years, and the power was cheaper, the service more efficient, and I got to know the people in it, and they knew me as an individual. I'm all for the change. I can go to Balloons on Broadway and see the card and make my own decision about the card.

Basically, I'm going to trust the small guy. Someone I can go to, see what I want and make my own decision.

PGE/Enron is not interested in being a strong supporter of the gay community. As all have seen who are paying attention, PGE/Enron is only interested in money and lots of it; despite the image they try to project, they could give a shit about being a member of our "community."

KIM BALLER  
Oak Grove


## Absolute power

TO THE EDITOR:

Every area in this region that has public power instead of private power pays less than those living under PGE's greedy thumb. Yet some people quoted in articles and ads in the last *Just Out* would have us believe it hurts the queer community to support a PUD ["Queer Energy: Two Views," Oct. 17].

I disagree since I and many other queer people live in the district now "served" by PGE. I'm a gay person who had to pay \$180 electric bills last year when I lived in a two-bedroom house with electric heat—and that's from only heating the house half of the amount it would take to make it a comfortable room temperature. I'm a

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