

# just out

The IN publication for the OUT population

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## COMMENTARY

# Happier holidays

'Tis the season to be yourself

What's your pleasure this holiday season? Are you a "ho ho ho," happy holidays type or more of a "bah humbug"? Whatever it is that jingles your bells, there can be no doubt about it: The holidays, and accompanying stresses, are everywhere we look.

These coming days and weeks and what we make of them represent another of life's choices. They can be whatever it is you wish them to be (within reasonable gay and lesbian boundaries, of course).

For the shoppers and gift-givers among us, we present to you the *Just Out* Gift Guide, our annual tutorial and ode to consumer delights. Should economic constraints, religious diversity or personal preferences disallow holiday shopping, here's another plan for your consideration. Dispense with the checkbook, grab your *Just Out* instead, and head off to your favorite coffee shop to relax, ponder and plan for the many holiday offerings that our delightful and creative community presents and offers as its gift to you.

Among the offerings available to you is the annual Portland Gay Men's Chorus holiday concert. Blending seasonal favorites with choral mastery and a touch of camp, this could well be your only festive seasonal opportunity to sing along with hunky men. This year you have multiple opportunities to attend the concert; hopefully one will fit into your schedule. This truly is the best of the best.

For a complete listing of concert schedules, including Confluence and PGMC, please check out the calendar section of *Just Out*. Our Dec. 19 issue will present complete details on all the events planned for New Year's Eve.

Shopping, concerts, dances and parties fit into many of our lives, but not all of us. For some the holidays can be a time of loneliness, separation and anxiety. If you are one who faces the season with fear, concerns or distress, please consider that there are opportunities for finding comfort and allies during this time. Should you be inclined to find solace in the traditional religious aspects of Christmas, please know that a multitude of welcoming congregations invite you to join in their services and their activities. Many of these churches have special programs and services geared toward gay, lesbian, bi and trans folk. Many have ads in this issue that detail programs and services, while others are listed in the OutReach section of the paper.

While many among us do find comfort in religion, others will

choose to look elsewhere for activities and companionship. Again, there is a place for you. Many of our community groups and organizations have events scheduled during the holidays—everything from outdoor hikes to game nights to single events at coffeehouses.

If you don't find what you're looking for or what you need, don't give up or become disheartened. Instead, create your own opportunity. Write a personal ad, take the initiative, be bold. All personal ads don't have to be looking for romance, sex and love. Ask for what you want. Ask for what you need. Does the idea of playing cards on a wintry night tickle your toes? Want to go bowling or roller-skating, play board games, learn chess? Put out the word. Invite some strangers—yes, strangers, as in "friends you haven't met yet"—to join you.

Meet in a friendly, safe-to-all space. Meet at Touchstone Coffee House, Blend, 3 Friends or Haven. All of these are comfortable, welcoming spaces that encourage and cater to friends, both new and old. These are places meant for conversation and fun. While enjoying the space, though, please do remember to buy a beverage and, yes, a pastry, too. After all, it is the holidays.

A word, if I might, to those groups that list their meetings and events in the calendar, with an invitation for newcomers to join. Please, consider that it can often be intimidating for someone new to join a "group in progress." Be friendly, be welcoming. I've been to far too many such gatherings where I've seen newcomers tentatively stand off from the circle and not know how to

approach or enter. If you're a group inviting new people to attend, please have a plan, have a greeter, take the time to acknowledge that new person, smile, welcome and encourage them to approach and join.

It sounds like such a simple thing, but too often the welcome isn't offered, and someone who ventured out with hopes of meeting new friends returns home feeling lonelier than when he or she left. Remember when you were this new person? New to town, newly out, newly single? Remember how it felt? A simple smile and hello can be a wonderful holiday gift to someone.

This season do not get locked into or become emotionally trapped by false expectations. It is, after all, your holiday, too. Make it be what you need it to be. If your reason for celebrating this year is all about *The Lord of the Rings*, then so be it. See the damn movie five times if that's what you want to do. There are no rules. Celebrate your time, your pleasure and your enjoyments. Celebrate yourself this holiday season. j

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## REFLECTIONS

Crowd favorites Rose Emperor XX Babalou and Rose Empress XXXVI Maria present a sentimental song during Mr., Miss and Ms. Gay Oregon's "A Holiday Harmony Rendezvous" Nov. 30 at Darcelle's. Many of the performers donated their tips to the Friends of People with AIDS Foundation.



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