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A super hero

TO THE EDITOR:

I saw a true hero on television Jan. 30. Justin Gregorich is a kid who saved someone's life on his way home from school. But there is much more to the story than that.

Justin left school early because he was discouraged. Other kids were teasing him because he couldn't bench-press as much weight as they could. He also has Tourette's syndrome, which causes his face to twitch. Tired of the teasing, he left school. Normally, he'd call his mom for a ride, but that day he decided to walk so he could think things through. And that's when he saw the car veer across the road and right into a pond. Justin dove in and helped save the driver's life.

To say I was touched by Justin's television interview would be an understatement. I was deeply moved by his kind spirit, courtesy and humility. When his interview concluded, I turned the television off and wept. It is beautiful to see a kid like Justin, who battles teasing and the stigma of being different, respond with courage and kindness rather than with anger. The temptation to just give up and accept that the bullies may be right after all is strong. But Justin responded by becoming a hero.

Justin said some kids at school are still unkind to him after his heroic rescue, yet he responds with an inspiring purity of heart. "That's life," he says. I hope Justin knows that he is a hero not just because of what he did, but because of who he is. He inspired me, and I live thousands of miles away from him. The impact this young man can have on others is powerful. Justin Gregorich has a long road ahead of him. He will be teased for being different, but he will survive and go on to do great things.

Justin lives in Florida, a state that has been on my mind a lot lately since gay adoptions were recently banned there. I wonder why it is so hard for some to understand that people's sexuality has nothing to do with how much love they will give a child.

As a gay man, I grew up being different and endured childhood bullies. It's disappointing to realize the battle is not over. Now, as an adult, I am still bullied politically. I'm not allowed to marry the person I love. The possibility of adopting a child I love is forbidden in some places.

But, like Justin, I can still do the right thing. I have the choice of becoming angry and bitter, or I can stand up for myself and be a hero. I would be so proud to have a kid like Justin, and I know many other gay men and women who feel the same way. I hope someday we will have that honor.

TODD POZYCKI
Portland

Support Dean

TO THE EDITOR:

I recently returned home to Portland after serving on Gov. Howard Dean's presidential campaign staff in my home state of Iowa. I want to encourage those participating in the Washington caucuses and the much-later Oregon primary to support Dean.

Dean has a record of standing up for queer Americans, as he is the only candidate to have signed a civil unions bill into law. He knew at the time it was not popular, but has said that he needed to do what he knew was right, whether it was popular or not. He also stood up against the Iraq war during a time when the media and the Republicans were calling such a stance treason.

He always says what he really thinks and stands up to those who are standing in the way of justice. This is the kind of leadership we need in the White House.

He is the only candidate to have provided more than 95 percent of children in his state with health insurance. He also balanced the budget every year he was governor (11 years) while still providing enough money for great schools and social services.

I assume that many of you who are undecided are considering U.S. Sen. John Kerry. He has for the most part been a very progressive senator, but Dean has so much boldness, strength, integrity and toughness that he outshines Kerry as a candidate. Kerry has caved in to President Bush on some major issues including the war on Iraq. While Kerry was part of the failed mess that is the opposition party in Congress, Dean has been standing up for better solutions that transcend politics as usual.

Dean offers a real choice compared to Kerry: someone who has stood up to the Republicans at every opportunity, someone who is part of many successful reforms in what is now one of the few states with a solvent government. Studies show people would rather vote for someone who they believe may be wrong but is steadfast and bold about his views, rather than someone who may be right but is wishy-washy, uninspiring and playing me-too games with his opponent's views. This is why we need someone who is clearly and admittedly a clean break from Bush.

Also, the same corporate mass media that love Bush do not like Dean. This only confirms that Dean is a great candidate. The media are being quite kind in comparison to the other Democratic candidates. This probably means the pro-Bush media think Dean is electable and the others aren't, as it is in the corporate media's interest to convince Democrats to nominate someone unelectable.

Whoever is the Democratic nominee will endure the media's wrath in the general election, so Democrats should not base their primary season vote on current coverage. Since the media will be biased against any Democratic nominee, we should nominate Dean, as he has proven he can stand up to the media's abuse and come back again and again.

TOM SOPPE
Portland

Community commitment

TO THE EDITOR:

As 2004 begins, we want to give everyone an update on what was accomplished in 2003 and what is next for the community center feasibility effort.

The most visible 2003 activity was the "Out with It!" survey, which gathered views from more than 1,600 people in Oregon and Washington. The data and analysis were done entirely by volunteers who spent weeks making sure we had every comment and piece of contact information.

If you didn't have the chance to see the results through *Just Out's* news coverage, please check out the Web site at www.outwithit2003.com. It was heartening to see in the survey results that the community was supportive of having a center. A community center could be wonderful for Portland, and we are committed that the center both reflect the needs of our community and be feasible.

The LGBTQ Community Center Fund also filed and received status from the Internal Revenue Service as a nonprofit organization and received pledges and commitments of about \$17,000 from individuals, corporations and the city of Portland. We had a major community forum in September to review the survey results, and then we took a break for the holidays.

Now we are ready to undertake the next piece of the feasibility study. We are asking organizations to give us input specifically about

how they think a community center can help their mission and constituencies. We will seek their views on issues such as co-locating or offering services at a center.

We are holding a community forum at 5:30 p.m. Feb. 12 in the boardroom of the Multnomah Building, 501 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd., to share the draft organization questionnaire and get ideas on how we can achieve the broadest possible input from the nearly 200 organizations in the region that address LGBTQ issues. Comments can also be sent to P.O. Box 1682, Portland, OR 97207.

This LGBTQ Community Center effort has generated a lot of interest, enthusiasm and support, which is terrific. Much work has taken place, and we continue to do our best to keep the community informed with timely updates. This can be a challenge at times; for example, Ron Rasmussen didn't receive the update e-mail we sent him in October, which addressed his questions about the progress of the community center effort and gave contact information ["Best Foot Forward?" Jan. 23]. We recently contacted him again by phone and e-mail, and he was very pleased with our response.

We hope to complete the community center feasibility study—including fund-raising feasibility and a three-year estimated operating budget—by Pride 2004. We still have a lot of work ahead and hope anyone interested will attend the Feb. 12 forum or any future monthly forums.

SAM ADAMS, GWENN BALDWIN, KATHY BAMBECK, KAELIN BOWERS, JACOB BROSTOFF, JOHN COOMLER, ASHLEIGH FLYNN, JOEY LEE, DAVID MARTINEZ, BILL SODERBERG, MOLLY FRANKS AND ALEX DELARA
LGBTQ Community Center Fund Board

Follow the leader

TO THE EDITOR:

It is an honor to be honored. I appreciate having the work of the Rural Organizing Project recognized nationally through the recent Leadership for a Changing World Award. It was generous of *Just Out* to feature the award in an article in your Jan. 9 publication ["Westerling Receives Leadership Award"]. Thank you.

Out of 1,300 nominees, 17 award recipients were chosen. Two are from Oregon. Both of us have been strong organizers for social justice that demands full human rights for queers, immigrants and farmworkers.

Receiving an award that is also given to Ramon Ramirez (PCUN/Causa) is the most humbling aspect of this honor for me. Ramon has worked tirelessly and inspirationally, with grace and force to not allow homophobia to be a wedge issue that divides people of color from queers. I hope that *Just Out* will make it a priority to herald his selection as a Leadership for a Changing World Award winner as well.

The queer community has much to be proud of in Oregon. These awards highlight the power of a broad vision for justice.

MARCY WESTERLING
Scappoose

Gauging aging

TO THE EDITOR:

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people merit respect, understanding and support at every stage of life from childhood to old age, yet the needs of LGBT elders have all too frequently been overlooked by contemporary queer culture and by society in general. *Just Out* therefore deserves high praise for giving the voices of LGBT older adults a prominent place—most recently with your inspiring feature "Generation Stonewall" [Jan. 9].

I would encourage readers who would like to