

# The state of the community

Just Out reader survey provides useful information

It started a month ago. The phone began ringing early in the day. First came the questions, then later the rumors and the speculations. No one was really sure what was happening, but one thing was clear: Something big was about to go down. And then about 4 p.m. March 2, clarity came in the form of e-mails and press releases. On March 3, Multnomah County would begin issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

And then the commotion began. Commotion that continued up though and including April 1, an odd irony indeed, when the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners resolved, by a vote of 4-1, to support Chair Diane Linn's decision whereby she directed the Tax Collection and Records Management Division of Business and Community Services to issue marriage licenses to all qualified persons regardless of their gender or sexual orientation.

In the past month same-sex marriage has seldom left the forefront of public scrutiny. There have been countless articles, interviews, letters, meetings, rallies and rants and raves. *The Oregonian*, which historically could scarcely bring itself to use the words gay and lesbian, has been spewing forth a gay lexicon almost as frequently as their ads for a Meier & Frank sale.

With all the attention, all the spotlight, many questions still remain unanswered about the gay and lesbian community in Portland. Misconceptions abound. Emotions override logic, and anger mistakenly confuses people and families with process and government.

Who are we, this group suddenly in everyone's faces? Where do we live? Where do we work? How many of us are there, anyway? Does our agenda really include world dominance, or are we more likely to be concerned about just how we're going to pay the new Multnomah County income tax that's due in two weeks?

Just Out can help provide useful information and answers to many of these questions. As you may recall, last fall we solicited feedback and data for our 2003 readers survey. By sharing with you now a portion of the results, we can start to piece together the answers to some of the questions above.

Just how many gays and lesbians are there in Oregon? Well, that question we cannot answer. No one knows exactly. Even if we all picked a day and agreed to stand up and count off, the number would be different the next day. People come and go daily; we are not a static community. The 2004 Oregon Blue Book lists an estimated Oregon population, for 2002, at 3,504,700. Using the old tried-and-untrue 1-in-10 theory, an estimate of the gay and lesbian population in Oregon would put our number in excess of 350,000. What an amazing number. What powerful potential we have as an political and economic force.

Just Out distributed mail-in surveys in two issues of the paper and posted the questions on our Web site. By the closing date we had

amassed 548 entries, from which we compiled the following data. Many more entries were ultimately received but well past the closing date of Dec. 1.

The question will be asked, "Are Just Out readers an adequate and indicative reflection of the greater sexual minorities community?" The answer is "yes" and "no." I'll come back to this question later. First, some facts and figures for your consideration.

### How do readers of Just Out self-identify? What is the composition of our community?

Male	47%
Female	48%
Trans	2%
Other/multiple	2%
No answer	1%
White/European American	88%
Multiracial	4%
Other	3%
Hispanic/Latino American	2%
Native American	1%
Asian American	1%
Black/African American	1%
Other	1%
Gay	42%
Lesbian	35%
Bisexual	7%
Queer	7%
Straight	5%
Trans	1%
Other/multiple/questioning	3%
Younger than 21	1%
21 to 34 years old	26%
35 to 45 years old	31%
46 to 55 years old	25%
Older than 55	8%
No answer	9%
Single	43%
In a committed relationship	48%
Other	9%
Own their own home	57%
Rent their home	41%
Other living arrangements	2%

### Following are the figures compiled for the annual household income; note that household implies dual incomes in partnered households.

Less than \$15,000	12%
\$15,000 to \$30,000	21%
\$30,000 to \$50,000	25%
\$50,000 to \$75,000	19%
\$75,000 to \$100,000	12%
More than \$100,000	6%
No answer	5%

In addition to the above statistics, here are more facts reported by our readership.

The average number of children in households in 2003 was zero. The average number of pets in gay and lesbian households in 2003 was two. What can we conclude from this? Gays and lesbians raising children probably have little time for completing long newspaper surveys.

About 98 percent of Just Out readers graduated from high school, and 84 percent hold a post-secondary degree. This breaks down to 17 percent with a two-year degree, 36 percent with a bachelor's degree and 21 percent with a master's degree. About 9 per-

cent of Just Out readers have received a doctorate or similar professional degree.

About 78 percent of respondents indicated they are employed, with the remaining 22 percent including students and retirees. About 30 percent of readers say they work in professional/managerial roles, with 14 percent employed in the service and/or technical sector. Health care employs 10 percent of readers, and 8 percent more say they are teachers or professors. About 4 percent toil in sales, and 4 percent did not answer the question.

A great deal of additional data were obtained from the surveys, much of which will be presented to you at a later time. But in context to the same-sex marriage debate, it should be noted that when asked what topic readers would like to see most frequently in Just Out, the highest category recorded was "relationships." Clearly our partners, spouses, children, families, friends and myriad others in our lives are so often first and foremost in our minds. So what is it about our relationships that is so very threatening to so many people?

I asked earlier the question, "Are Just Out readers an adequate and indicative reflection of the greater sexual minorities community?" Does this survey reflect our greater community as a whole? Again, "yes" and "no."

Clearly our readership is not representative of the under-21 demographic. There are two things I know for sure. First, indeed there is a large, vibrant and energetic queer youth crowd in Portland. Second, I'm well aware that this age group does not read Just Out. In this specific example, our survey is NOT representative. Do I fuss and fret about this? Yes, but mostly to the point where I have to accept and realize that Just Out cannot and will not ever be all things to all people. Short of a cover-to-cover reworking of the entire paper, it's not likely that we'll ever be able to capture this demographic. What we hope for is that in a few years our paths will cross and our new young 21- to 34-year-old readers and Just Out will continue on together in converging parallel lives.

As far as racial representation goes, even while acknowledging that the sexual minorities community in Portland is predominantly white, we cannot overlook that we're not doing a good job in bringing a racially diverse our former Features Editor and the person who did all the work on this survey, summed it up well with: "Just Out readership remains skewed towards white/European Americans when compared with Oregon's population. If compared with Multnomah County census data the disparity would be greater. Just Out should consider how to better target and serve the Asian American, African American and Hispanic/Latino American populations, in particular."

So as we work and struggle together to find our place at the table of the community at large, Just Out will also not lose sight of the fact that there's plenty of work and improvement to be done right here in our own house. [ ]

## just out

The IN publication for the OUT population

FOUNDED 1983 • JAY BROWN AND RENÉE LACHANCE

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April 2, 2004

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**Letters to the editor** should be limited to 500 words. Announcements regarding life transitions (births, deaths, unions, etc.) should be limited to 200 words; photos are welcome. **Deadline for submissions** to the editorial department and for the **Calendar** is the Thursday 15 days before the next publication date. Views expressed in letters to the editor, columns and features are not necessarily those of the publisher.

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**Subscriptions** are \$22.50 for 12 issues. First Class (in an envelope) is \$40 for 12 issues.

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