

CULTURE

Sweets for the sweet

Event benefits law students who vow to fight discrimination

BY MEG DALY

April showers bring May...desserts? That's right. On May 21, the Bill and Ann Shepherd Legal Scholarship Fund will celebrate the 10th anniversary of A Class Act, its music and dessert fund-raiser extravaganza.

The fund, administered by Equity Foundation, offers scholarships to third- and fourth-year law students dedicated to fighting bigotry and discrimination. Bill and Ann Shepherd were known for many years as the "mom and dad" of Oregon's sexual minorities. Bill Shepherd, a civil rights attorney who died in 1995, exemplified the kind of scrupled lawyer the scholarship fund hopes to engender.

"Practicing law was his passion," says his lesbian daughter, Susie Shepherd, who herself is a legal assistant.

Bill and Ann Shepherd co-founded the Portland chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays in 1977. The couple's kitchen table became the site of innumerable meetings with members of the sexual minorities community who the Shepherds treated as their own children.

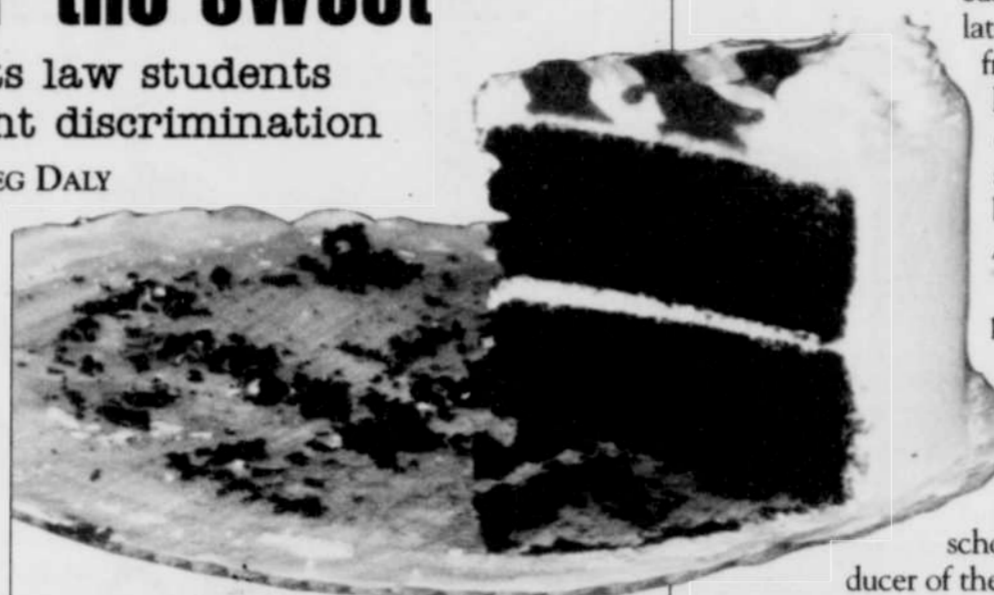
In addition to their passion for justice and equality, the Shepherds were devoted fans of the symphony. Susie, one of five daughters, remembers falling asleep to the sound of classical music each night in her youth. She says her mother also loved daffodils and decadent desserts.

Thus...the inspiration. Held at The Old Church, this year's benefit performance features celebrated Northwest musicians Michael Allen Harrison and Julianne Johnson. Nosh for the dessert reception is provided by Holiday Essence Quality Cake Shop, Joseph's Dessert Company and Piece of Cake.

Queer folklore has it that the desserts at A Class Act are the best in town. Susie confirms that "there are people who come only for the desserts."

Not that she's condoning such philistine motives. "Let your soul be swept away by the music first, then your body can catch up at the reception," she advises.

Joseph Vasquez, the gay owner of Joseph's Dessert Company, has been donating to the event for more than five years. He's been told that people go "gaga" over his petits fours. This year's two-bite morsels include raspberry decadence, orange almond cake, lemon curd tarts, caramel walnut, mocha cups and chocolate cherry cups.



Don't be late for the coveted annual dessert reception following the music of A Class Act

"I'm glad we're a part of it," says Vasquez. "Susie is a great lady, and her mother was a wonderful person."

Marilyn DeVault, owner of Piece of Cake, says that Susie and her mother were customers for years and that Susie continues to be a patron and friend. DeVault says Ann, who died in 2003, "had energy like you never met."

DeVault is donating all manner of dessert bars for the event. Not for the fainthearted, her fudge-like chocolate brownie is as sweet as they come.

Though her Class Act contributions will be of the old-fashioned nondiet variety, DeVault has made a name for herself as one of the few cake shops in the nation to make vegan, wheat-free vegan and gluten-free cakes. DeVault says she has fun creating cakes for people's special needs.

Also on the menu for the evening will be custard-filled and chocolate-covered baby eclairs from gay-owned Holiday Essence. Like the others, owner Brad Smith says Susie is the reason behind his support of A Class Act.

"She is a wonderful person," says Smith. "She's always going out of her way for other people."

Susie is committee chairwoman of the scholarship fund and producer of the benefit. She says her parents taught her volumes about civic service and compassion.

"They taught us it was important to give back to God the gifts he has given us," she shares. "They encouraged us to leave the world a little better when we leave."

As the scholarship fund turns 10 years old, Susie is preparing to pass on resources to young people who did not have the opportunity to meet her parents. She will act as the conduit for her parents' ideals.

"If I can continue on the legacy they left me," she says, "it will be the greatest privilege of my life." ☐

A CLASS ACT starts 8 p.m. May 21 at The Old Church, 1422 S.W. 11th Ave. Tickets are \$25 from Balloons on Broadway or Gay-Pied. Bill and Ann Shepherd Legal Scholarship applications for 2004 are available online at www.equityfoundation.org. The deadline is June 30.



Marilyn DeVault owns Piece of Cake bakery

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