

Taking the initiative

How can we convince rural Oregonians to decline to sign?

June 2004 marks the 35th anniversary of the Stonewall riots, considered to be the birth of the modern gay liberation movement. While not present at Stonewall, I can't help but imagine that few of the participants, bystanders and observers of this event could have dreamed that in a historical twinkling of the eye same-sex marriage would be legal in one state of the union and in the forefront of political turmoil across much of the remainder of the nation.

As we enter the season of resultant celebrations now known as "Pride Month," it's our time to celebrate achievements and accomplishments while not becoming complacent about the work yet to be done.

In our own back yard little snags of worrisomeness pop up to remind us that all is not yet well in the world. A complaint from a client at a North Portland state resources office has officials there in a quandary about allowing the continued distribution of our publication. In 2004 a newsmagazine serving the gay, lesbian, bi and trans community is about to be tossed from a state office building. We have been deemed offensive.

Equally offensive to a *Just Out* reader was an ad for a Memorial Day celebration that was spotted in *The Jewish Review*. The copy for the event reads: "Women bring men. Men bring women. Absolutely no exceptions." When the reader called the paper to register concern about the ad, she was accused of being "too sensitive." Can we ever become "too sensitive" to concerns about discrimination?

As I sit and write this column I'm annoyed by phone calls and e-mails from someone who thought it would be a funny "practical joke" to subscribe to *Just Out* in his friend's name. Nothing quite as amusing as attaching a gay stigma to a co-worker. Good job, fellas. With all that's going on in the world today, how refreshing to know that you find it funny to use homophobia as a joke.

As legal same-sex marriages continue in Massachusetts, the 3,000-plus couples who obtained licenses in Multnomah County were jolted by the news that the Oregon Court of Appeals has temporarily halted Judge Frank Bearden's order mandating that the state of Oregon register and validate their marriages. As a cloud of uncertainty and confusion hangs over this latest ruling, opponents of same-sex marriage in Oregon, primarily the Defense of Marriage Coalition, continue to claim that they will meet their objective of obtaining the 100,000-plus signatures needed to qualify their ballot initiative for the November general election. If they are successful, Oregon voters will be faced with the possibility of writing discrimination into the state constitution.

While it's tempting to scoff at the logistics of obtaining such a high number of signatures, let's not lose sight of the fact that there's a lot more to Oregon than the immediate Interstate 5 corridor, it would be highly naive of us all to dismiss the thousands of Oregonians who live in The Dalles, Pendleton, Ontario, Baker City, Burns, Klamath Falls, Albany, Prineville, Medford, Roseburg, Grants Pass, Curry County (yes, the whole damn county), Coos Bay and our old nemesis, Springfield. These towns are populated with conservative folks who follow the dictates of their church and church leaders, and they will be key to the success or failure of this petition drive.

And guess what? Gathering these signatures is perfectly legal. Signing these petitions is a voter's right. While we can abhor the proposed outcome, like it or not, we have to respect the process. So what can be done to make our neighbors, our fellow Oregonians, decline to sign?

*How can we work together to alleviate fear?
How do we motivate people to shake their heads no, and turn away from the petition gatherers?*

Basic Rights Oregon and the Rural Organizing Project are to be given credit for acknowledging and taking initiative to increase voter awareness of the implications of signing petitions. However, folks in Harney County will sign the petitions because they've never known the dedication of a lesbian schoolteacher from Portland. An unemployed logger in Gold Beach may sign because he's already lost economic viability and knows

nothing about his commonalities with gay couples struggling to raise their children with hate-free values. Across Oregon people will sign these petitions because they don't know who we are. People always fear the unknown.

So, how do we increase our visibility? How do we bring our statewide differing worlds together? Should we purchase educational ads in rural newspapers? Would you, or someone you know, join a speakers bureau and work aggressively to organize town hall meetings and forums? Can you imagine a caravan of gay and lesbian families prepared to attend church services away from Portland? Hell, we could even send a softball team to Prineville—a lesbian team, if we want to win (or the Bella Boys, if we want to make friends).

How can we work together to alleviate fear? How do we motivate people to shake their heads no, and turn away from the petition gatherers?

June is our month, a grand time indeed to take our pride, our parade and our politics on the road, be it across the street, across town or across the state. That's how we stop people from signing petitions. We let them get to know us.

Got pride? ☐

just out

The IN publication for the OUT population

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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.

The **display advertising deadline** is the Monday 12 days before the next publication date.

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REFLECTIONS

10 years ago in just out... VOL. 11 NO. 15, JUNE 3, 1994



• The International AIDS Candlelight Memorial and Ceremony, a multicultural service honoring those who have died of AIDS complications, featured poetry by Judith Barrington and an original musical piece by David York titled "AIDS Requiem."

• The National Association of People with AIDS called for the resignation of Kristine Gebbie as the national AIDS policy coordinator in a statement released May 11. Gebbie said, in an interview with *The Associated Press*, that she has no intention of stepping down.

• Cathlyn Abbruzzese says Albert Odell Jones refused to serve her because of her sexual orientation and her gender. Abbruzzese, a Southeast Portland resident, filed the suit in Multnomah County Circuit Court against the owner of Dooley's Lounge on Southeast Division Street. The lounge, now a nude dancing establishment, is the site of the former Eastside bar.

• Queer Night on June 13 at La Luna will benefit

the upcoming Dyke March! Take refuge from the hopelessly tired and helplessly heterosexual Rose Parade and indulge your queer and political sensibilities.

• Just in time for the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall riots, it's *Unnatural Acts*, an evening of original comedy and music and extra-special rites featuring Carol Steinel and Howie Bagdadonutz, June 17 to 19 at Echo Theatre.

• The National Association of Black and White Men Together 1994 Convention will be held July 16 to 24 in Washington, D.C. The theme will be "Breaking the Chains of Isms."

• Women's Herbalist Conference: A Celebration for Women Who Love Plants will be held at the Lost Valley Education Center in Dexter.

• The Northwest's only gay Harley-Davidson motorcycle owners organization will hold its annual Harley Stokers Rendezvous '94 in northern Idaho. This is a Harleys-only event, open to all gay and lesbian Harley owners.

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