

NORTHWEST newsbriefs

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ship, which honors the early Portland PFLAG activist and mother of the late Lady Elaine Peacock and Misty Waters. Board members of Portland PFLAG and the scholarships will be donating extra items to help make the weekend event a huge success for all the charities.

For more information call 503-286-1752.

PORTLAND STUDENT RECEIVES SCHOLARSHIP

Portlander Matthew Vail is among the 25 students who were announced July 13 as 2004 Point Scholars.



Matthew Vail

The Point Foundation awards the multiyear scholarships each year to support academic achievement in higher education among disenfranchised queer youth who have been marginalized, abandoned or rejected by their families because of their sexual orientation or gender identity and unable to find support and community. The students must demonstrate leadership, scholastic achievement and a passion for social change.

The average scholarship is \$14,000. More than \$500,000 will be awarded this year.

Vail was born and raised in Portland with his identical twin, who is heterosexual. While his brother's girlfriend attends family events, he says he is not allowed to have even a gay friend come over to the house.

"Last year, my brother invited his girlfriend to spend Christmas Eve with my family," Vail said. "Everyone was curious about the girl who had made my brother so happy. I was also in love, but great care was taken to never mention his name."

Despite a less-than-desirable family situation, Vail is a high achiever academically, earning a membership in the National Honor Society and graduating from high school with perfect grades after spending three years on the honor roll. He is also the co-founder and president of his school's Gay Straight Alliance. He is attending Sarah Lawrence College to work in public education and social services.

The foundation selects a range of students who are racially, ethnically, geographically and academically diverse. They are matched with mentors from the professional world who serve as positive role models and provide personal support, ensuring that scholars build a foundation of leadership skills they can use throughout their lives.

"Because of homophobia and transphobia in their hometowns, and often within their own families, Point Scholars lack access to traditional sources of college funding. The Point Foundation acts as a lifeline for outstanding LGBT students and is the only organization that covers the cost of tuition, books, supplies, room and board, transportation and living expenses in a substantial manner," executive director Vance Lancaster said.

QUEER ADVENTISTS MEET IN OREGON

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, a support organization for queer members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, will hold its 25th annual conference from Aug. 15 to 22 at the Menucha Retreat and Conference Center in Corbett, 20 miles outside Portland. It is the fifth time the event has been held at this venue.

"While planning where to celebrate our 25th

gathering, we soon decided to return to Oregon," said kinship president Bob Bouchard of New York City. "Oregon has been one of our favorite locations, and we are excited to return to celebrate this anniversary."

The conference, which the kinship traditionally calls "kamppmeeting," is modeled after weeklong, regional retreats the church has held for its members since the mid-1800s. For many years the gatherings were held in rural areas under large tents with church members camping outdoors; the event soon became known as "kamppmeeting."

Kinship members have gathered annually since 1980 throughout the United States, Canada and Europe. In addition to Christian faith and spirituality, guest speakers discuss health, well-being, civil rights and other topics. Music also plays an important role throughout the week, especially during the closing events.

Among this year's speakers, Ron Oden will speak Aug. 20 about his journey as a black gay man with Adventist roots. Oden, who in 2003 was elected mayor of Palm Springs, Calif., is a graduate of Oakwood College, an Adventist liberal arts school in Huntsville, Ala., where he studied to be a minister. He also holds master's degrees in theology and ethics studies with post-graduate courses in marriage, family and child counseling.

Kinship members attend the conference for various reasons, including spiritual rejuvenation, support in coming out to their families and comradeship with others who share a similar experience of growing up in the church and then realizing they are gay.

"Kinship provides a safe and supportive space for our members who need us for various reasons," Bouchard said. "We have members who are very interested in creating change within our church and others who feel too hurt by their church's rejection to remain very connected. When we all get together, though, it's very clear we're a supportive family that share cultural and spiritual ties to Adventism."

The church, like other conservative Christian denominations, believes homosexuality is immoral. This creates a conflict for kinship members, who often feel hurt and betrayed by their church's rejection yet value Adventist beliefs and their history with the church.

To register call 866-732-5677, e-mail office@sdakinship.org or visit sdakinship.org.

NEWSPAPER SPOTLIGHTS "EX-GAY" MINISTRY

The July 28 cover story in *Willamette Week* spotlighted Portland Fellowship, an "ex-gay" ministry that attempts to "cure" 50 queers annually through its two-year "reparative" therapy program.

The article focused on ministry assistant Drew Berryessa, a 27-year-old who believes a weak father figure kept him from learning to play sports and relate with other boys. "Instead, he bonded with girls and gossiped with them about TV shows and school," the report said.

Berryessa married a woman six months ago. Fellowship executive director Jason Thompson refused to detail the ministry's success rates, claiming that's not the point.

"Portland Fellowship exists to draw people into a closer relationship with God," he said. "A byproduct is that you regain the heterosexual orientation." □

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