

Board Game

Pride Northwest: Stopped bitching and started organizing!
by Sarah Dougher

It is always easier, when visiting an event like Pride, to conjecture about how you might have done it better if consulted or given the opportunity. The board members of Pride Northwest all have felt that way, too, and instead of sitting, year after year, griping to their friends and families about how it might work better, they have gotten together to take on the biggest queer community event of the year.

"I'm most looking forward to the event going off with as few problems as possible," comments board president Tobin Britton. "I think we are creating an event where each individual can find something of themselves inside."

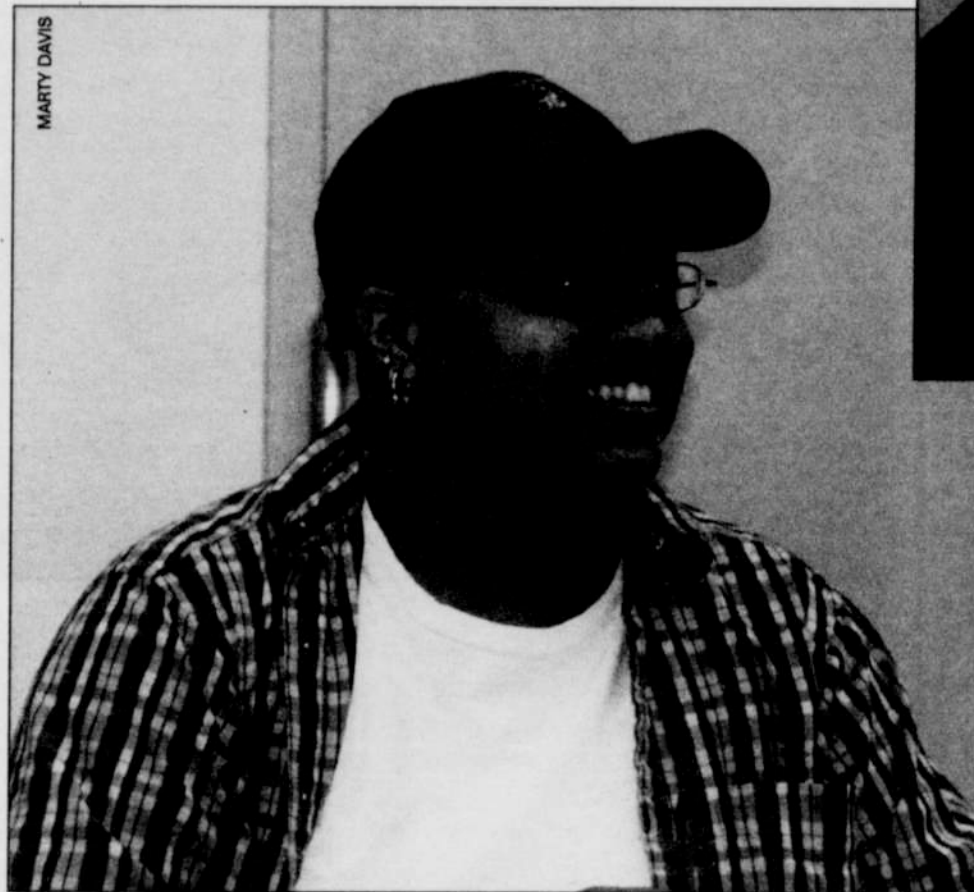
Active with Pride events for the past six years, Britton started as a volunteer doing security. Eventually she was persuaded to get involved with the entertainment for the event, and with the high board turnover, she was nominated to become president for the 2005 event.

"The most important part of it for me is participation," Britton says. "I just saw myself as one of those people who had ideas about how things might work better at Pride, and so I got more involved."

Treasurer Pat Olson felt the same way. Last year, he drove the stagecoach for his employer, Wells Fargo, and hosted the grand marshals in his vehicle.

"I just didn't think it was organized enough, from a participant's perspective," he notes. After that experience, he decided to act instead of bitch. Even though it takes up countless hours and untold menial and minuscule tasks, Olson finds working with Pride Northwest to be incredibly rewarding.

"I think the most important part of Pride is that anyone and everyone can come out to the



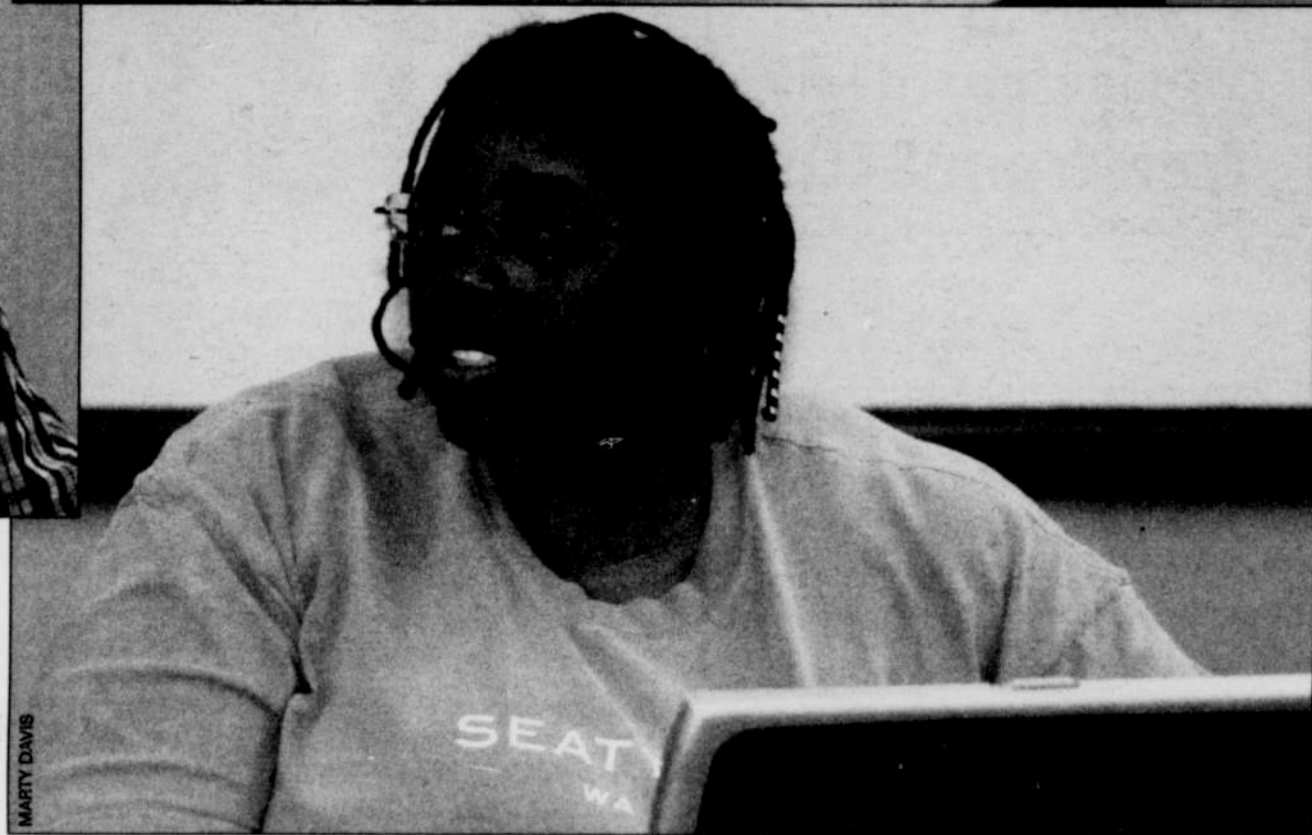
Clockwise from left, Tobin Britton, Ady Oren, Pat Olson and Nicole Browning work together at a Pride Northwest board meeting.

parade and show their pride. I'm looking forward to meeting new volunteers and having a better, smoother-run Pride this year," he says.

Fund-raising and outreach coordinator Steph-Anie Wells calls herself a "volunteer junkie" and has worked with many local organizations with her expertise in event planning. She has planned events for TechnoDyke and Fat Girl Speaks but thought she would try something of a larger scale and got involved with the Pride Northwest board.

"At first I thought Pride was too mainstream for me," she says, "but then I realized the people that we do outreach to just don't take us up on it."

Wells is encouraged by some of the changes at this year's Pride festival. She notes: "I think it will have a bigger-town feel. The sponsors are different. The way the beer garden is set up is different. The food vendors are queer and queer-friendly restaurants from around town. I feel like, on the whole, this Pride engages



more community members to have hands-on participation."

This collaborative approach is what encourages board member Nicole Browning, who is working on entertainment and sponsorship for this year's festival.

"Pride is great for me and for the community because of the interaction we have with city and county officials, as well as local businesses. It gives us visibility that I think is very important."

Although Browning believes there really is something for everyone at this year's Pride, she is also sensitive to criticism about corporate sponsorship. "We have critics that say we shouldn't take corporate sponsorship, but this event is not free. It costs between \$15,000 and \$20,000 for the parade permit, festival ground

and insurance. There just isn't that kind of money in the local community, so we bring in national sponsors."

The real power of Pride comes from the collaboration and input of the community at the event each year. More than 100 volunteers do everything from monitor the parade route to work the gate at the festival ground. About half of those sign up in advance and are assigned tasks according to their abilities.

"I love the weekend," says Browning. "I love the thrill of being involved and watching it all unfold, how excited and happy everyone is." ■

If you would like to volunteer for PORTLAND PRIDE 2005 visit www.pridenw.org for registration information.

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