

CENTERED

New director of Q Center discusses goals, motivation

by Jaymee R. Cuti

Some may not know that Portland's Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Community Center, Q Center for short, already has a home.

The creation of a safe space for sexual minorities—a gathering place for activism and celebration—is officially in phase two, heavy planning. The location resides in the home office of Susan Remmers, the recently appointed interim director.

Remmers has cleared out all other projects, both mentally and physically, to make way for her new charge, tentatively lasting through December. She has vowed to take the center squarely up to phase three, open for business.

"For the next six months, this will be my singular focus and passion," said Remmers, who began working on the center by developing budget scenarios and assessing whether Portland's first queer community center was even a possibility. "We needed someone to drive the process, coordinate and facilitate to get this thing off the ground."

Today, she and a group of committed volunteers say the Q Center will be a reality by this time next year.

Remmers brings nearly two decades of non-profit, campaign and small-business experience to her position.

"I've worn just about every hat in an organization, from volunteer to board member to director to founder," said Remmers.

Most recently, Remmers was executive director of the McKenzie River Gathering Foundation and co-chairwoman of the Funding

Remmers brought to Portland grew out of relationships she made in Louisville, Ky., where she was one of the founders of the Fairness Campaign, a hub for queer political and community work.

"I tend to be compelled to do this work where I feel my skills and relationships meet the need," she said. "I had done many years of this work in Louisville and felt some of the expertise I developed could be shared."

Remmers said she also had much to learn from community organizers in Oregon, which she views as "ground zero for anti-gay attacks."

Remmers names three specific goals for her six-month job: to build leadership in the form of a board of directors, an advisory group, working groups and a founder's circle; to bring already completed data to that leadership and make key decisions; and to write a business plan.

"It may not be completely finalized by Pride '06, but we will be up and going to some capacity by then," she said.

Remmers has set limits on her director position at the Q Center for the same reason she moved around to so many different organizations over the span of her career.

"I think it's healthy to allow new leadership to emerge and to know when you've given what you have to give and when it's time to allow new voices to step forward," she said.

That explains why she's encouraging others to get involved. She can often be overheard raising enthusiasm and recruiting volunteers.

"Voices need to be heard. Ideas need to be shared. We need to develop trust and not focus on the frayed thread from years and years of



The Q Center is currently located at the home office of interim director Susan Remmers.

Exchange, a network of 15 progressive foundations. Before that, she was executive director of Oregon Action, a statewide economic justice group. The No on 13 campaign of 1994 brought Remmers to Oregon as a field strategist. In 1996, she helped in the early stages of Basic Rights Oregon by developing the Fair Workplace Project, a discrimination awareness program still active today.

"Like most seasoned directors, I tend to have a range of skills and experience. I've had a fair amount of success with major donor fundraising work, program and leadership development," she said.

The organizing and activism experience that

attacks by those with an anti-gay agenda. That's a commitment I have to this project," she said.

To Remmers, the Q Center is a labor of pride. Besides conducting original surveys citing the desire for a community center at Portland Pride '03, Remmers said the community deserves a home.

"When I was young, I felt acutely the isolation that comes with being different, and I don't want that pattern to continue, for other young people to struggle with issues of sexual identity. Nor do I want older members of our community to go back where they came from, which is a place of isolation," said Remmers. "We deserve to create a center, a place to call home." **J**

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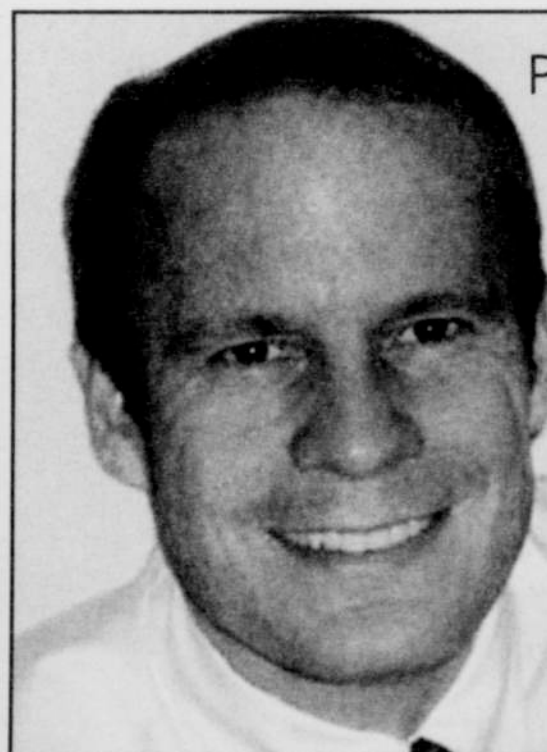
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