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"I'd been up to visit a few times," says Hanna, 34, "and I always enjoyed myself here. When the business opportunity fell into my lap, I decided to move."

Hanna admits that Bend is a smaller town than he is accustomed to, having lived in both Phoenix and San Francisco. He sees the gay scene as small, but growing.

"It is not formal; there is no center or club or bar. Here a lot of people meet through the Internet or at informal gatherings. You have to be introduced into the scene."

He enjoys going to a monthly gay men's dinner, which is held at a local restaurant and generally attracts 25 to 30 people.

"I'm noticing a lot of people who are moving here identify as gay or lesbian, but there still isn't a kind of central meeting place. I'm not accustomed to being an organizer, but I may have to do something here."

Hanna hopes to start a Frontrunners chapter in Bend, and maybe even hold a fun run as a Pride event next year.

"As far as I know, this year there may be someone organizing a picnic, but that's it."

In terms of the drawbacks of life in Bend, Hanna notes that although it appears very liberal, there is a strong and well-organized Christian right community, fueled by a right-wing radio station.

"I've had conservative people come to my business wanting me to write letters against Ben Westlund [the Republican House member who sponsored civil union legislation]. Sometimes I wonder how out I want to be here. It is very different from places I've lived before. I've never lived in a rural setting like this where I depend on customers, gay or otherwise, for the life of my business. It's a challenge."

Derek Hanna is willing to take that challenge, and it seems apparent that small-town life will make an activist out of him.

BUILDING COMMUNITY IN ASHLAND

In the morning I took Highway 97 south through the flat high desert. I turned west toward Crater Lake and

ascended through the Cascades, where a spring snowfall had dumped 8 inches on the woods around me. It was snowing heavily, but the roads were relatively clear from the passage of log trucks. The Ponderosa pine trunks stood reddish-orange and were covered on their western surfaces by a dense powder.

As I followed the Rogue River down toward Medford, the snow turned to rain, and the trees turned dense and shaggy—Douglas firs and Sitka spruces covering dark, ferny undergrowth. The river was animated with rain and full of fishermen seeking trout with slow sinking lines.

At Medford, I stopped for coffee and called Jeffrey Foust, the Southern Oregon field director for Basic Rights Oregon. He invited me down to Ashland for lunch, so I headed south and was greeted by a congenial group that had assembled to have lunch and talk about life in queer Ashland.

Foust is a tall, gregarious man who was dressed in an "I Support SB 1000" T-shirt. He went to Eagle Point High School in a small community outside Ashland and describes the florescence of the queer community in Ashland 20 years ago, before it was decimated by HIV and AIDS. When his friends started dying, he became active with ACT UP and Queer Nation and spent time in Boise (where he helped start the Idaho capital's first gay Pride Parade), Portland and Los Angeles. When he became sick himself, he moved back to his hometown. In Ashland, he has been active with Jackson County Democrats,

helping with John Kerry's presidential campaign, as well as spearheading the No on 36 movement there.

"We didn't do ads or radio spots. We did direct mail and knocked on a lot of doors. So many doors. We got about 37 percent of the vote in Jackson County, which I consider a great victory," he recalls.



Grants Pass' finest can be found hanging out at the Green Room.

Despite the fatigue associated with his sickness, Foust works doggedly for queer visibility in Southern Oregon. His devotion is evident, and he is quick to laugh despite the obstacles of organizing in a conservative area of the state.

"Things just keep coming up. I can't drop the ball. There has to be persistence in the movement, as well as consistency. We all feel like second-class citizens

in this area, and that has to change. We've made a choice to live here, and the work is more important here."

Most recently, the Ashland community has had to respond to incidences of gay-bashing and hateful notes posted around the Southern Oregon University campus. The tide of right-wing rhetoric and plain old ignorance is generating a challenge for activists in this town, which on the surface looks calm and relatively liberal.

Over lunch, I got to know the majority of the Abill-Ellis Community Center's board. Chairwoman Danielle Mancuso is also head of the Queer Resource Center at SOU. Originally from New York, the 27-year-old lived in Seattle before she made her way to Ashland. At first she was scared to move to a small town, and found a small community of queer people, many older and partnered.

"I've never been more conscious of how we come out every day," she says. She acknowledges that her political work around visibility has also caused her to get back in touch with anger she knew as a younger person.

"When something happens to challenge my identity, I feel angry again," she says. "But this work doesn't take anger, it takes compassion."

Matthew Reynolds is attending graduate school in Ashland, in preparation for teaching high school drama. He is from a rural community in Minnesota, and hopes



Jeffrey Foust and Danielle Mancuso work together to keep Ashland the kind of place where they want to live.



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—WALT WHITMAN

