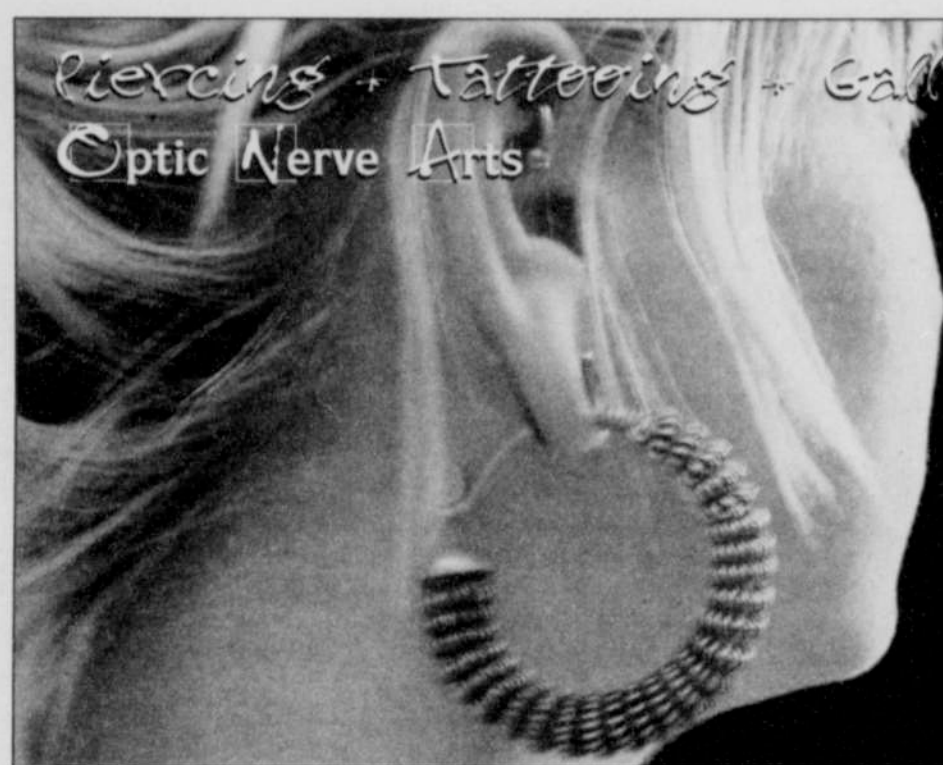


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NORTHWEST news

END OF AN ERA

Cascade AIDS Project's executive director resigns

by Jaymee R. Cuti

It wasn't until Thomas Bruner considered running for public office that he slowed down enough to question his next career move.

Being the executive director of Cascade AIDS Project, the state's oldest and largest HIV/AIDS prevention and education nonprofit organization, required an investment of between 60 and 65 hours each week. Though Bruner decided against running for Multnomah County Commissioner Serena Cruz's seat in the 2006 election, the idea of a career change was exciting enough to prompt his resignation.

"I've been trying to figure out what I want to be when I grow up for about 25 years now," said Bruner, 44. He spent the past two decades in the AIDS nonprofit sector, first as the founding director of AIDS Outreach Center in Fort Worth, Texas, then at CAP for the past seven years. Prior to that, Bruner worked in the mental health field.

Bruner leaves a stable organization with many nationally recognized programs. Under his leadership, CAP's budget has doubled, net assets have increased by 330 percent, fund raising has tripled and numerous high-profile community leaders have joined the board, according to board president Kathleen Cosgrove.

"He has really taken Cascade AIDS Project and the whole issue of HIV/AIDS to a whole new level," she said. "The organization has grown exponentially under his leadership. For the first time, I think HIV/AIDS has a voice in the Oregon Legislature and a regional voice back in Congress."

Cosgrove is chairing an executive search committee to find Bruner's successor. She says the board will compose a diverse group to conduct the national hunt.

"We'll make sure that we have people of color on the committee, because HIV/AIDS is disproportionately hitting those populations. We also want to make sure we have strong representation from the core gay male community, too. Sixty percent of the people we serve are still gay white men even though the face of AIDS is changing, affecting women and children," Cosgrove said.

Community groups will get the chance to weigh in on the selection through various meetings after the panel narrows down the applicant pool.

"We'll invite different groups in to meet with the top candidates and give us some feedback because this has to be a person who is able to work with a whole range of agencies," said Cosgrove.

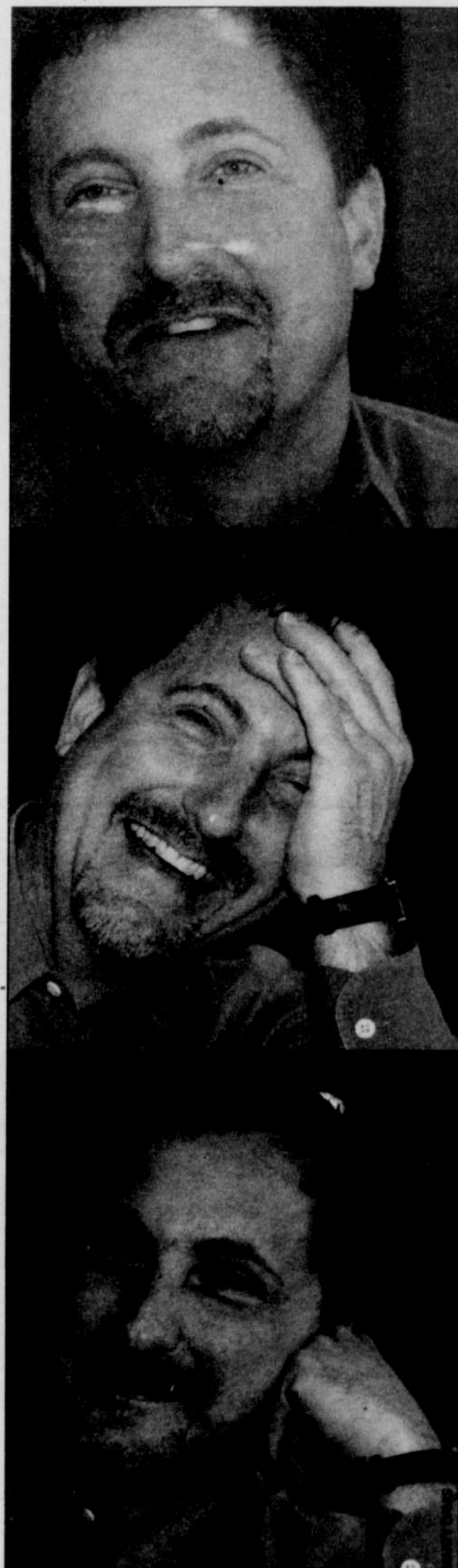
Bruner, meanwhile, has agreed to remain with CAP in a consulting capacity for a few months, after stepping down Aug. 20.

He will then pursue a new career, to some degree influencing public policy.

"When I think about my career over the last 20 years, I really enjoyed government affairs, lobbying, advocacy and public policy work because I believe in the power of government to do good or to do ill," said Bruner, who vows to stay local.

He also feels he has much to offer nonprofit organizations in terms of consulting.

"I could get very excited about working as a consultant with nonprofit organizations about how to be stronger, smarter, better, more effective, more strategic and ultimately have a bigger impact in their field," he said.



Thomas Bruner resigns from Cascade AIDS Project.

Although Bruner, the administrator, has been bogged down with budgets, fund raising and personnel matters, he says his work in the HIV/AIDS arena has always been driven by those most affected by the disease.

"The reason I did this and continued to do this was because of the people in my life who I've lost, who I loved, who I miss," he said.

Bruner will be replaced by CAP associate executive director Rebecca Harmon in the interim. **J**