

northwest

Introducing *Just Out* Scholarship Winners

Congratulations and happy studies

by Jaymee R. Cuti

Just Out is proud to introduce the four recipients of our 2005 *Just Out* Scholarship Fund. Last summer, we received a batch of applications from worthy candidates throughout Oregon and southwest Washington, in what we hope will be an annual celebration of *Just Out*'s anniversary. To be eligible for the scholarship, which was facilitated through Equity Foundation, applicants needed to be either members or children of members of the sexual minorities community and be accepted or enrolled in an accredited educational program beyond the secondary level.

"Special consideration will be given to applicants from rural areas," *Just Out* Publisher Marty Davis said when she announced the scholarships, totaling \$5,000. "I admit I'm projecting my own feelings and memories into this process, but the notion of helping free a sexual minority youth from the confines of Harney County pleases me greatly."

Heather Webb

Heather Webb, a junior student of nursing at Linfield College in Vancouver, Wash., was awarded \$800.

Webb, who is a lesbian, feels being an out student has been important for her own integrity and especially to raise awareness among other students and faculty. "If we don't increase the awareness, we're not going to be able to move forward in terms of being granted full rights," she said.

Webb plans to work in critical care, a field she's familiar with. When she was 22, she was diagnosed with brain cancer. Between chemotherapy, brain surgery and the development of a seizure disorder, Webb can identify with the challenges her patients will have.

"You never realize how much an illness can impact someone's life until you've been there," she said.

Webb has experience working with sexual minorities in a health care setting. She provided counseling and safer-sex education to clients at Cascade AIDS Project for two years as a volunteer. There, she identified some barriers that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people face when seeking health care.

"There are some education barriers, which create employment barriers, which create financial barriers to achieving health care," she said.

Webb also served on the board of directors for the Rose City Softball Association and was named Manager of the Year. "These experiences gave me significant experiences facilitating, organizing and team building with a diverse group of people," she said.

As a nurse, Webb feels she will be in a position to help create equal access to health care for queers. "I



Tyler Smith is pursuing a degree from National College of Naturopathic Medicine, with the help of a *Just Out* scholarship.

really am committed to giving back to the community," she said.

Tyler Smith

Tyler Smith, a senior student at National College of Naturopathic Medicine, was awarded \$700.

Growing up queer and transgender has been a challenge for Smith, but since overcoming the trials of adolescence, he has the confidence to meet his goals and the wellness needs of the sexual minority population.

"I don't think I'm unique in that adolescence was not a fun time for me," said Smith. "Making it through harassment and coming out of it a stronger person helps me use those experiences to motivate myself to make changes."

Smith believes being out and visible helps the community at large.

"As a trans and queer person, I think I can make changes in health care that nonqueer people can't make. I think we need to have actual representation of our community in the health care field," he said.

Smith holds a bachelor's degree from Portland State University and fills his 60-hour work and school week by volunteering as a student physician and medical assistant, mostly assisting queer and homeless youth at Outside In, In Act and Old Town Clinic. He also

works at a drug and alcohol center, helping people with mental health and addiction concerns, and participates in various medical outreach programs.

During the summer, Smith participated in a medical outreach trip to Peru, providing free medical care to communities living in extreme poverty. "It was a privilege to be welcomed with such kindness and to meet so many great people," he said.

Smith has also served as a board member for Love Makes a Family and facilitated trans inclusion and trans health workshops.

Without the *Just Out* scholarship, Tyler may have scaled back on volunteer work to focus only on finishing college and getting a paying job.

"I'm gaining a lot of experience now that is going to help me be a doctor in a community health clinic, which is what I want to do," he said. "With the scholarship, I can continue to keep up with my volunteer-

ing as well as graduate from school so I can serve the community in the future."

Britta Houser

Britta Houser, 22, was awarded the largest chunk of *Just Out*'s scholarship, \$2,000.

Houser is a sophomore nursing student at Samuel Merritt College in Oakland, Calif. She transferred from Portland Community College to what she describes as a pricey private school.

Houser, who is queer and the daughter of a lesbian, described challenges to her education when she said: "Applying to nursing school is a ridiculously prohibitive process, so I had to start thinking of applying to private schools, which I never had envisioned being able to afford. Figuring out how to pay for it, and dealing with the idea of having massive debt, took a lot for me to deal with."

In Oakland, Houser continues one of the projects she was dedicated to as a Portlander. She is a volunteer for Act for Action, a Portland-based social justice theater group. The interactive play *A Leap of Faith* is traveling to Oakland, and Houser is acting as well as encouraging groups at her school to see the mind-expanding performance.

"The play started during the granting of marriage licenses to same-sex couples in Multnomah County and the subsequent backlash from conservative Christian churches," she explained. The interactive play encourages audience members, primarily from communities of faith, to interrupt the actors and replay the scene with positive outcomes.

"The play is designed not to demonize or alienate folks who are struggling with faith and marriage but rather to foster dialogue and create positive change," she said.

Houser came out at the age of 12 while living in a small town in Wyoming. Shortly after moving to Portland a year later, she became a founding member of the Sexual Minority Youth Resource Center.

"I experienced the extraordinary power of effecting change in an unjust world," said Houser, who has also worked as an emergency medical technician. "I have continued to work for justice and will be a dynamic member of the nursing profession, fighting for access to health care for all and working to make

health care relevant and effective, with an analysis around oppression and a vision for social change."

Ly Nguyen

Ly Nguyen, a freshman attending Stanford University, was awarded \$1,200 from the *Just Out* Scholarship Fund.

Nguyen is keeping her future career options open and has not yet declared her major but is considering double-majoring in English and Japanese and minoring in either feminist or queer theory. She also plans to attend law school. Being an out bisexual of Vietnamese heritage was a challenge for Nguyen, who grew up in Beaverton.

"One of the main conflicts I've had is my own heritage as an Asian American and my identity as an LGBT individual," she said. "The two are minorities that society likes to overlook. At the same time, the Asian community tends toward traditional beliefs. There hasn't been a melding yet of these two communities, yet I always get this feeling that they're looking at the same goals: acceptance and understanding."

Nguyen, a tireless student in academics and extracurricular activities, didn't take this conflict lying down. At Stanford, she is organizing East Fest, a cultural festival, and at Aloha High School, she established a Gay Straight Alliance and organized the first Day of Silence and a well-attended forum to discuss Measure 36.

"I noticed this atmosphere at my school that wasn't hostile, but it was kind of apathetic to LGBT issues," said Nguyen. "It was just an issue that needed to be brought to the attention of the school because no one was really thinking about it before."

Though discussions about race, class and gender were part her education at Aloha High, Nguyen said her school preferred to breeze over taboo subjects such as sexuality. "The Day of Silence really showed that people were willing to step up and face the bias or the views they had of the LGBT community."

She says her future profession will include bringing issues of the sexual minorities community to people who

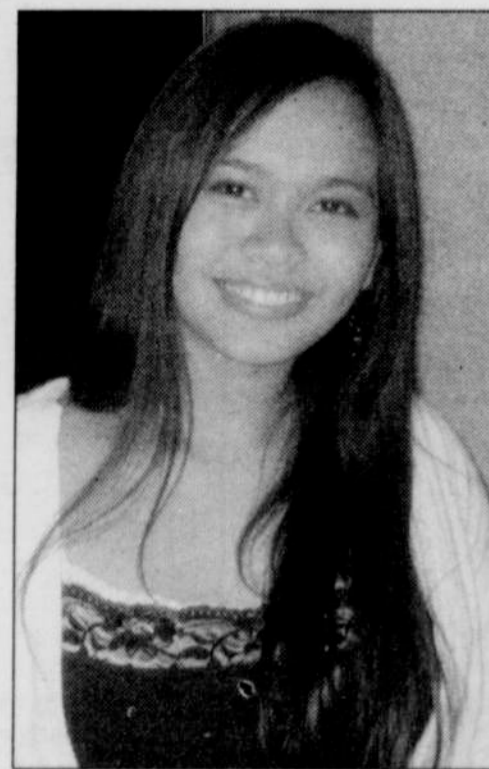
would normally be apathetic, just as she did in high school.

According to Nguyen, she would not have been able to attend Stanford if not for the scholarships she's earned.

"There's only so much you can do with a part-time job while being a student," she said. "Scholarships help immensely." 10



***Just Out* scholarship recipient Britta Houser, a nursing student at Samuel Merritt College, took top dollar at \$2,000.**



Ly Nguyen is studying English, Japanese and feminist and queer theory at Stanford University.



Heather Webb, a nursing student at Linfield College, was awarded \$800.