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## northwest

# Introducing Ted Wheeler

Meet the incumbent's challenger for Multnomah County chair

by Jaymee R. Cuti

Sixth-generation Oregonian Ted Wheeler, who is running for Multnomah County chair, says it would be a tragedy if this race split gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people. He says both he and his opponent, incumbent Diane Linn, believe in equal access for queer people and support same-sex marriage.

"As an elected leader, I'm going to stand up for all citizens, including LGBT people, not just at the county but at the state level," said Wheeler. He stresses the importance of this election to queers because the county is one of the biggest providers of human services and makes many decisions relevant to the sexual minority population.

For example, \$3.5 million of the county's budget is earmarked for HIV/AIDS services through its health department, and \$5 million is spent on sexually transmitted disease prevention.

"I want to do my best to keep these programs running. When leadership is lacking, all programs are threatened," said Wheeler.

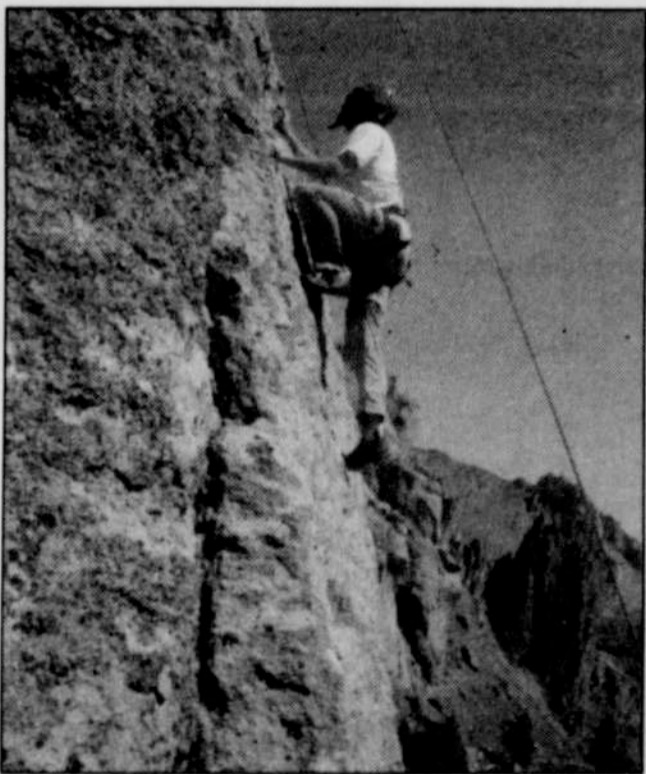
He references the importance of clarifying policies surrounding visitation, inheritance, housing, employment and child support in same-sex relationships among other issues germane to the queer fight for civil rights.

"There needs to be a clear and unequivocal policy of equality on those issues and others," he said.

Despite the risk Wheeler's challenger took to offer same-sex marriage in Multnomah County, facing death threats and a recall campaign, Wheeler has already racked up endorsements from prominent queers and gay rights supporters.

Most notable on that list are Commissioners Lisa Naito and Maria Rojo de Steffey, who also played a hand in the county's decision to grant same-sex marriage licenses.

"I think Ted can bring credibility back to this organization. He has good business experience, and he also has done social service volunteer work most of his adult life," said Rojo. "I truly don't believe Diane [Linn] has offered the kind of leadership that we need in this County."



Ted Wheeler demonstrates his Eagle Scout prowess while challenging the Boy Scouts on their homophobic policies.



Ted Wheeler stands for equal rights with his campaign manager, Barbara Willer, who is a lesbian.

Rojo says she is confident that Wheeler supports equal rights for sexual minorities.

"There's no question in my mind. I know that he will step up to do the right thing," she said.

The commissioner is hosting a meeting 5:30 p.m. Dec. 7 at No Fish Go Fish, 3952 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd., to introduce queers to Wheeler.

Despite self-proclaimed gay-friendliness, Wheeler lacks accomplishments and participation in queer-specific causes. Wheeler himself points out a difference between what he has done for queers and what he plans to do. His most measurable accomplishment fighting for queer rights is within the Boy Scouts, an organization that rejects gay participation. Wheeler, who is an Eagle Scout, says he has repeatedly pushed both local and national leaders to be more inclusive to gays. He is also a past supporter of Cascade AIDS Project.

Wheeler says he is running for public office because of a leadership vacuum and reportedly low morale among county workers.

"I want to bring common sense, accountability and leadership to the chair's office," he said. This includes a transparent and easy-to-follow budget, closer bonds between the nonprofit and business sectors, a collaborative relationship with all county commissioners, environmental responsibility, a holistic look at public safety with sensitivity to mental health care and elevated attention to queer youth.

"The best dollars we can spend on public safety are the dollars we spend to keep the mentally ill out of jail," he said.

As the child of a recovering alcoholic, Wheeler is tuned in to the plight of homeless kids and understands the relationship between being homosexual and homelessness, as approximately 30 percent of homeless youth identify as queer.

"I grew up in an alcoholic household. That's why I know the consequences of not reaching out to kids who are affected by drug and alcohol issues," said Wheeler, who has volunteered at the Goose Hollow Family Shelter for the past six years. "If we reach out to them at an early age, it saves both them and the county costs in the long run."

Wheeler works as a business consultant and says

he will happily return to that position if his skills are not needed as county chair.

He has worked to grow and manage a Portland financial services company, Copper Mountain Trust, into the largest of its kind in the Pacific Northwest. Managing a budget of \$6 billion—more than six times the size of Multnomah County's annual budget—has helped prepare Wheeler to lead. The company was counted among the top 50 companies in Oregon to work two years ago when it merged with Union Bank.

According to the former human resources manager at Copper Mountain Trust, the company offered domestic partnership benefits and had a nondiscrimination clause in place, including sexual orientation.

"I would like to encourage local businesses to offer domestic partnership benefits," Wheeler said.

Among Wheeler's work with local nonprofits, he volunteers for Portland Ambassadors, an organization aiming to attract new jobs and keep existing jobs in Oregon; helped lead an effort by philanthropic leaders to create a statewide nonprofit association; and has been an executive committee member for the Cascade Pacific Council, the group that oversees the Boy Scouts of Oregon and southwest Washington. He was a citizen's representative appointed by Mayor Tom Potter to help craft Portland's \$1.8 billion city budget and plans to use that process as a model to create the county's budget.

Wheeler is an outdoor enthusiast and active volunteer rescuer with Portland Mountain Rescue. He founded the Walk for the Wildwood Trail, the largest annual fund-raiser supporting Friends of Forest Park.

Wheeler attended Portland Public Schools and graduated from Stanford University with a degree in economics. He also earned a master of business administration degree from Columbia University and a master of public policy degree from the John F. Kennedy School of Government.

After his formal education, Wheeler wrote a book called *Governments That Work: Innovations in State and Local Government* and was invited to teach local government courses at Northeast University. ©

For more information about TED WHEELER visit [www.wheelerforcountychair.com](http://www.wheelerforcountychair.com).

MARTY DAVIS