

outstanding

An Activist's Calling

Alisa Simmons, 29, has worked in activism her entire adult life. She sits on various boards focusing on queer civil rights, including the Oregon Democratic Party's GLBT Caucus and Brother to Brother. Simmons recently accepted the position of regional field manager for Independent gubernatorial candidate Ben Westlund and resigned from the Basic Rights Oregon board. She was also BRO's political action committee chairwoman.



Alisa Simmons is temporarily relocating to Bend to help Ben Westlund with his gubernatorial field campaign.

"It was time for a change," said Simmons about the move. BRO's PAC endorsed Westlund's opponent, Democratic incumbent Ted Kulongoski, July 20.

"Organizing came naturally to me," said Simmons, whose first fight in the civil rights arena occurred when she supported a group of custodians subcontracted by Southampton College in Long Island, N.Y., which she attended. "We formed a coalition for justice, supported the custodial staff and won. The custodians were rehired as employees of the college and regained their benefits."

Simmons is coming off the toughest race of her career, as campaign manager for Multnomah County Chair Diane Linn's re-election. Though the run was not successful, she describes the experience as the best job she ever had.

"To work for [Linn] is to always be on the side of right. As hard as it was, it was always an inspiration," said Simmons.

From leading Linn's campaign, Simmons says

she gained valuable experience to propel her into Westlund's campaign. "I'm still learning, but I learned how to be completely brave. I learned that after the loss."

Although she acknowledges that Portland's queer community is divided between Westlund and Kulongoski, Simmons says her role in Central Oregon will be to siphon conservative votes from Republican opponent Ron Saxton.

"The state of Oregon is not a welcoming place for black or gay people," Simmons said. "We need a governor to represent the progressive values of our state who can work across party lines and help bring those compromises to a bill that's passable."

Simmons says she hopes to always do campaign work, her calling since she learned in college that she could actually make a living as an activist. "It's how I make sense of myself in the world, so I have to do it." **10**

—Jaymee R. Cuti

just asking

How does it make you feel to read the word "queer" in the pages of *Just Out*?



DEBBIE MAN
Woman with Magic Hands

"I'm proud of the word 'queer.' If we all embrace it, it just becomes powerful."



ELLIOTT STILLWATER
Portland Gay Men's Chorus Pitcher

"It's probably a generational distinction, but it's not a word I use. I don't think it reflects my lifestyle or my sexual identity, which I think 'gay' encapsulates quite clearly."



CHRIS BEAM
Manager

"I think it's degrading. There are words that can be used besides 'queer,' preferably 'gay' or 'lesbian.' 'Queer' encompasses too much."



MARY FERRIGNO
Photographer

"I think it's good because it's reclaiming the word, putting a positive spin on it."

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