

northwest

No Tem Like the Pro Tem

Straight ally runs for Multnomah County Circuit Court judge

by Malka Geffen

With nine candidates on the ballot, including gay attorney Christopher Wright (who was profiled in the Sept. 15 issue of *Just Out*), the race for Multnomah County Circuit Court judge for District 4, Position 28 is rich with opportunities.

One option for Multnomah County residents is straight ally and former pro tem judge Mary Overgaard.

A Portland attorney who grew up in Lincoln, Neb., she is the first nongay board member and co-chairwoman of the Oregon Gay and Lesbian Law Association. She also received OGALLA's endorsement in this race.

"I joined OGALLA because I wanted to join my gay and lesbian colleagues in creating a healthy and welcoming atmosphere in the legal community for GLBT law students, attorneys and those associated with the law," she said.

Overgaard fought for gay rights during the campaigns to defeat 1992's Measure 9 and its progeny. She and her husband, David Cook, actively participated in fund-raising events to defeat the anti-gay ballot measures because "I firmly believe that the GLBT community deserves the same civil rights as are afforded people of color, different sexes, religions and nationalities."

Overgaard first became a community advocate as

a freshman at University of Nebraska when she learned of a relationship between her male high school teacher and another man. "My former teacher was my mentor and friend. I could not, nor would not, abandon him," says Overgaard. "I have always felt lucky to have had this wonderful man in my life and to open my eyes to the fact that one's sexual orientation is irrelevant to who they are as a person."

In Nebraska, Overgaard worked as a private practice attorney who handled cases in family law, minor criminal matters, contract work and estate planning. She also worked as counsel to the Nebraska Department of Education.

In Oregon, she has worked for the Bureau of Labor and Industries, where she advised on wage and hour matters, civil rights and trades. For nine years, Overgaard was a Portland Police Bureau legal adviser and deputy city attorney. On call for 24 hours a day to 1,000 police officers, she made recommendations for all complaints of discrimination and provided contract interpretations for four unions.

Overgaard cites her three years of experience as judge pro tem in Multnomah County as one of her most significant qualifications for the bench. "I am the only candidate with judge pro tem experience and therefore fully understand the workload, the need for decisiveness and the temperament required to be effective on the bench," she explained. Her duties included presiding over mis-

demeanor criminal matters including arraignments, appointment of counsel, probation violations, motions, trials to the court and six-person jury trials. She mediated pretrial settlements between parties and presided over trials when mediation was not successful. She also presided over violation trials and animal offenses.

Overgaard, who came in second in the Oct. 2 Oregon State Bar poll, says her many years of experience as a human resources manager also makes her a candidate with a unique perspective. "As a human resources manager, I mediated union grievances, worked with employees and managers on issues regarding employee performance and discipline, and partnered with outside counsel on litigation. There are many stages in litigation where it is appropriate for a judge to work with the parties toward an out-of-court solution. My human resources experience gave me a different perspective for these opportunities, which I believe would enhance my effectiveness."

In 2006 Overgaard began working as the community development coordinator for Start Making a Reader Today, Oregon's leading early literacy nonprofit organization. "I started with SMART as a volunteer reader after learning about the program from a fellow deputy city attorney who was a volunteer. Once I started, I was hooked. The program makes a real difference in children's lives,



Mary Overgaard and her mother, Claudia, pose with Mr. Gay Pride 2004.

helping them to become better readers and showing them that reading is fun."

Overgaard says that although she has participated in a number of Pride parades, the most meaningful for her was in Portland in 2004. "My 92-year-old mother was in Portland and asked why she couldn't join me and my husband as we walked with the Kaiser Permanente contingent. She met some of my friends and even had her picture taken with Mr. Gay Pride. She returned to Nebraska with a more open mind, and she shared her experience with friends. My belief is that small steps like this will help in our overall effort." 10

For more information about MARY OVERGAARD's campaign for Multnomah County judge for District 4, Position 28, visit www.maryovergaardforjudge.com.

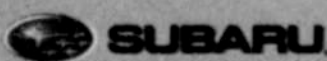
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