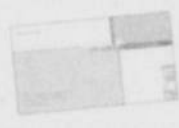


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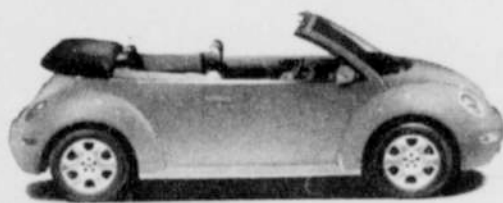
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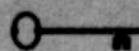
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Corvallis activists at Basic Rights Oregon's Statewide Day of Action count and sort literature to be dropped off at people's doorsteps.

Batter Up: Corvallis

City might join other Oregon jurisdictions in passing an anti-discrimination law

by Malka Geffen

Corvallis has an opportunity this November to show the world that its motto, "We're a city that honors diversity," holds true.

According to Clinton Downs, co-chairman of the Basic Rights Action Team (BRAT) in Corvallis, the city has a strong history of support. Not only was Corvallis the second Oregon city after Portland to institute a nondiscrimination policy in 1992, Benton County was the only other county besides Multnomah County to vote down Measure 36.

"Corvallis has consistently voted in favor of families and rights, so it is exciting for us to ask the people to renew our commitment to diversity," said Downs. Although Benton County passed an ordinance adding sexual minorities to its anti-discrimination laws more than a decade ago, the city of Corvallis is governed by a Home Rule Charter that can supersede county governance.

"The City Council encouraged BRAT to be a part of an effort to add inclusive language to the city charter," Downs said. The amendment would add the "Responsibility to All People" section, which reads: "The city shall exercise its power to ensure the equal protection, treatment and representation of all persons without discrimination including but not limited to age, citizenship status, color, familial status, gender identity or expression, marital status, mental disability, national origin, physical disability, race, religion, religious observance, sex, sexual orientation and source or level of income. Corvallis is a community that honors diversity and diverse interests and aspires to be free of prejudice, bigotry and hate."

According to City Councilor George Grosch, the council could have changed the city ordinance, but making a charter change, which requires a vote, sends a much stronger message. "When it's the entire community and not just nine people, it says to the gay community that Corvallis cares about you and wants you here," he said.

Similar to an amendment to the Constitution, a charter revision is both harder to achieve and more permanent. A revision of the city charter has not occurred in 30 years and involves a series of community meetings and discussion before being put to a vote.

"We're doing a good job organizing the gay and supportive communities, who will come out and vote," said Grosch. "With no organized opposition, I'm really optimistic that it will pass."

Basic Rights Oregon has a plan to go city by city and county by county to pass anti-discrimination legislation until either the whole state is protected or the Oregon Legislature passes a statewide anti-discrimination law.

Corvallis would join the following Oregon counties and cities that have enacted similar laws: Multnomah County, Benton County, Hillsboro, Salem, Portland, Beaverton, Bend, Ashland, Lake Oswego, Eugene and Lincoln City.

BRO communications director Rebekah Orr explained the grassroots effort. "When we came out of the 2005 legislative session without a statewide anti-discrimination bill, we knew we couldn't and wouldn't wait to see gains made across the state, and so we decided to go city by city and county by county to pass that kind of legislation and to build support where we really need it for the next legislative fight."

Whether BRO approaches the city or the city seeks BRO's support in achieving anti-discrimination laws, the work, according to Orr, is happening quietly underground to avoid unnecessarily alerting the opposition. "Generally in this process there's not a lot of organized opposition, but in Bend there was significant opposition and they mounted a repeal campaign," she said. "As we spread out into more challenging areas of the state, we expect the opposition to be as vehement as they key in to what we're doing."

Orr suggested that the grassroots campaign will have a significant effect on the Legislature. "I think it shows lawmakers and people throughout the state that we won't be defeated and won't give up." She explained that in practical terms, BRO is creating a grassroots voter base that will throw power into the effort. "It demonstrates to lawmakers in nonurban areas that there is support in their communities, which makes it an easier vote when they get back to Salem."

"The Corvallis campaign is the first proactive GLBT rights ballot measure campaign in the state's history," Orr added. In addition to the technical support and guidance BRO has provided BRAT Corvallis, she said organizing director Thomas Wheatley has visited nearly weekly for the past few months. As with any grassroots effort, however, the best work is done at home. "There are great folks there who really took a hold of this campaign and have done the hard work on the ground to make it happen," said Orr. 10