

northwest

BRO Seeks Leadership

Seven months have passed since the state's most powerful gay rights organization, Basic Rights Oregon, lost its executive director, Roey Thorpe.

Since the dynamic leader resigned June 30 to become the program director for the national nonprofit organization Freedom to Marry, BRO has had two interim executive directors and sustained another resignation to its core staff.

BRO took on Aisling Coghlan, former campaign manager for No on 36, and board member Frank Dixon as interim co-executive directors in July. Dixon has since returned to the board, and Coghlan will continue to lead the organization until February, when she plans to temporarily return to her native Ireland.

The BRO search for a new director was almost complete in August, when a national search narrowed the field down to three candidates, but ultimately insiders say none fit the part just right.

Meanwhile, communications director Rebekah Orr announced her resignation Dec. 28 and has accepted the same role for the Oregon House Democrats.

Orr's replacement is also temporary. Melissa Chernaik took on Orr's tasks Jan. 22, but only in an interim capacity.

Chernaik, who identifies as bisexual, has worked on campaigns for the past 11 years, most recently against the controversial parental notification Measure 43. She was also a direct mail consultant and volunteer for the legislative campaigns of lesbian state Rep. Tina Kotek, D-Portland. Chernaik got her start in political work through the

nonprofit sector at the National Abortion Rights Action League in 1996.

"I started immediately to give Bryan [Boyd, BRO's communications coordinator] the support he needs to keep the trains running on time," said Chernaik during her third day on the job. "It's a huge year."

Coghlan, 35, moved to Oregon in 1992 and has managed numerous statewide campaigns for bond and school funding measures. She is still tender over losing the No on 36 campaign, which limits marriage in the state to one man and one woman.

"I felt a great sense of responsibility to people that were willing to open their lives to bigotry, but as a campaign, we knew we had worked the hardest we could and did everything we could do," said Coghlan. She said more time would have made a difference in the outcome of Measure 36.

Coghlan, who is heterosexual, said she would like to see the organization led by a member of the sexual minorities community.

Thorpe has also confirmed an intention to change jobs. She resigned from Freedom to Marry and plans to leave at the end of February. She has not yet revealed her next move.

"I'm staying in Portland, continuing to work in

MARTY DAVIS



Aisling Coghlan (left) and Melissa Chernaik are interim Basic Rights Oregon staff members.

MARTY DAVIS



the GLBT rights movement on the national level, can't say yet what my new position is because details are still being worked out," Thorpe said via e-mail.

A search firm continues to hunt for a permanent BRO executive director and aims to have one in place this month.

Celebrate for Justice

The McKenzie River Gathering Foundation, a community-supported organization that links donors and grantees working for human rights, environmental protection and economic justice,

has awarded more than \$9 million since 1976. It's about time to party.

"This event—filled with political art and music and great food—is a celebration of our accomplishments and a time for us to envision our future while we continue to work to create a better world," said Amy Smith, Justice Within Reach committee chairwoman and foundation board member.

Entertainment includes Atlas DJs Anjali, The Incredible Kid and E3. There'll also be a per-

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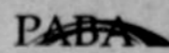
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