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culture

Coming Together

Gay men's wellness movement takes off in Portland
by Malka Geffen

You're tired of the bar scene. You aren't looking for sex right now but still desire touch. You haven't been feeling great, but you think men shouldn't look for help unless it's serious. You hate your job and the ways you've tried dating, but you have no idea how to make a change.

January marked the third anniversary of Queer Love Action Network for Discovery, a nonprofit organization that empowers diverse men in the Portland area to discover and manifest their individual and collective potential for wellness, community, friendship/intimacy, spirituality, service and play.

According to program coordinator Bart Church, Q-LAND helps men live and love well through a variety of affordable, volunteer-driven, peer-led programs. Men of all sizes, ages, backgrounds, colors, incomes and orientations (including trans men or anyone who identifies as male) partake in yoga and meditation classes, healing touch events, wellness and career coaching, as well as arts and social events, to name a few.

Church estimates that of the 2,000 men in the Portland metro area (with some in Eugene and Salem) who have attended Q-LAND events, 220 are considered core members who show ongoing interest and come to multiple events. "They tend to be men 25 to 65 who are tired of bars and online hookups and are looking for other ways to connect that don't involve drugs, alcohol or smoking," he says. "Our folks identify as queer, gay, some as bi and married, and a few who are just tired of labels. We don't ask, and we're very careful not to because we want to encourage men's community. We're queer-identified as an organization but serve all men."

Q-LAND's mission states that when men are empowered to be well in mind, body and spirit and to help others be well, they are able to give their most important gifts fully. "When we empower men to heal from the challenges of sexism, homophobia, isolation and chronic illness, we free them

to be the gifted leaders, healers and artists our community so urgently needs."

Q-LAND's peer support groups draw larger numbers of participants. The Men's Dating Lab, which is held on first and third Thursdays, plays host to a multigenerational group of men. "It's fascinating to hear people in their 50s who have been working their whole lives and are now making intimacy a priority and have no idea how to date and younger men with a whole different worldview find shared interests, figure what they want, meet like-minded people and learn how they structure their intimacy," Church says.

Wayne Bund, a 25-year-old gay man who recently moved back to Portland from New York, was looking for a supportive and welcoming community of queer men when he ran across the Q-LAND Web site. "I was intrigued by a leadership training program they were implementing [now

called the Wellness Allies Network] and called the organization to ask some questions. After a lengthy conversation with Bart Church, I decided to attend one of the events on contact improv/motion massage. From there, I began regularly attending other events such as the yoga class, planning sessions and a Labor Day Retreat," he says. Bund wanted to become a stakeholder in the queer commu-

nity and joined the Q-LAND board of directors.

A kindergarten teacher who is also a writer and photographer, Bund saw a need for a positive and healthy space for Portland's men to talk about intimacy and co-created Q-LAND's Men's Dating Lab. "Most men don't make intimacy a priority in their lives, and the dating lab is a venue where men can value intimacy in a supportive, peer-led environment. The dating lab does this by helping men to articulate their intimacy vision, identify the challenges stopping them from achieving this vision and then highlighting their strengths, skills and interests as a way to take next steps. Each man is then supported by another man who will check in with him in the following weeks. No one is an 'expert' here; everyone is going through the same process, and by working together, we can each reach the goals we want," Bund explains.

Brian Taylor, a 53-year-old gay man, attended his first Q-LAND event—a therapeutic yoga class—in January 2005. "I joined in hopes of helping with some back and mobility problems," he says. "I found much more: a group of gay men who were committed to helping other gay men find healthy alternative answers to important life issues."

The lead nurse for the Multnomah County HIV Health Services Center, Taylor joined the board of directors to contribute his knowledge of the gay and HIV communities he has been close to for the past 25 years. He facilitates Beat the Blues, a depression support group that meets first and third Sundays. "I have battled depression for many

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—Wayne Bund



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