

northwest

Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts

PFLAG Oregon takes stock of its chapters statewide

by Malka Geffen

Parents, Families and Friends of Gays and Lesbians got its start in 1972 when one mother marched with her gay son in New York's Pride parade. The nonprofit organization for people who know and love members of the sexual and gender minorities community now has more than 200,000 members and more than 500 affiliates in the United States. Oregon has the oldest and most viable PFLAG council structure in the nation.

The state council is made up of representatives from Oregon's 12 PFLAG chapters. At its annual meeting in May in Corvallis, the council elected Teri Noble of Forest Grove PFLAG as president, Vickie Read of Pendleton PFLAG as secretary and Jan Belcher of Corvallis PFLAG as treasurer. After two terms as president, Patricia Keeney retired and remains a consultant and ambassador.

equality is—not only to our Pendleton children but folks all over the state—they have become much more open to the equality position," she said. "The first time we lobbied Sen. Nelson, you could sense his uncomfortableness with the issue. That was SB 1000, and he was the only Republican to walk during the actual vote. We saw that as encouraging. [Nelson's] 'yes' votes on SB 2 and HB 2007 were welcomed with extreme pleasure. We are very proud of Sen. Nelson and Rep. Jensen."

According to Noble, PFLAG love is in action all around the state. "One of my greatest joys is to share information about someplace like Bend, Pendleton or Coos Bay and see people be encouraged and uplifted by the fact that, way out there, loving people care deeply about equality for all and are putting their love into public action," she said.

Despite the best efforts of these supportive

Pendleton PFLAG recently established a body of queer-related library materials. "The idea was brought to us by one of our members who had gone to our local city library and could not find any resources," said Read. So far, 75 books have been purchased and placed in the Pendleton City Library, Blue Mountain Community College Library, Pendleton High School, Sunridge Middle School Library, Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Library and the small, rural high school in Milton-Freewater.

"Each book has our PFLAG Pendleton sticker on the inside cover with our P.O. box number and our phone number," said Read. "We feel really good about this accomplishment and check back with the libraries to make sure the books are either still there to check out, or if they have walked off, we immediately replace them."

In Portland and Salem, PFLAG chapters are focusing attention on Gay Straight Alliances at the middle school level. Salem PFLAG recently received a grant from Pride Foundation to educate staffs of the 11 middle schools in the Salem-Keizer area about queer youth. According to Salem PFLAG president Diane Wolter, the hour-long presentations include personal stories and information on anti-gay bullying and how to start a GSA.

Portland PFLAG has been invited to present a workshop at the Beaverton School District's Diversity Summit in August. But according to chapter president Dawn Holt, starting GSAs in metro-area middle schools will take a lot of work: "Without administrative buy-in, it won't happen at all."

Statewide, PFLAG is growing and making important connections and alliances on the way. In May 2006, Pendleton Mayor Phil Houk met with the local PFLAG chapter. In November 2006, Mayor Tom Potter (a PFLAG dad) met with Portland PFLAG, and in May 2007, Mayor Charlie Tomlinson of Corvallis visited the PFLAG chapter there.

"Mayor Tomlinson, who has had education in counseling, told us about purchasing a bed and breakfast 20-some years ago. The phone number there had served as the local PFLAG support hotline," Noble said. "For years afterward, he continued to get and offer support to folks calling that number! That experience was reflected in the warmth with which he addressed our gathering; having heard the stories, he well knows what PFLAG work is all about and was eager to share efforts in support of diversity by his city government."

Noble said the state council intends to continue this outreach effort by reaching out to mayors in every city where PFLAG meets. "In some cases it will be a visit with an old friend," she said. "In others it will be an introduction for them to PFLAG, its mission and their constituents who are making it happen in their home town." ☐

To reach the PARENTS, FAMILIES AND FRIENDS OF LESBIANS AND GAYS chapter in your area, visit www.pflag.org and go to "chapter information." A PFLAG Oregon State Council Web site is slated for later this year.



Members of the PFLAG Oregon State Council and others attended the May meeting in Corvallis.

Council members celebrated the passage of Senate Bill 2 and House Bill 2007 and noted their relative influence in the matter. "In those districts where a Republican voted in support of LGBTQ rights, it is no coincidence that there is an active PFLAG presence," Noble said. Republicans who voted in favor of the measures include state Reps. Vicki Berger of Salem, Chuck Burley of Bend and Bob Jensen of Pendleton as well as Sens. Frank Morse of Albany and David Nelson of Pendleton.

"Central Oregon PFLAG was very instrumental in the passing of SB 2 and HB 2007," said PFLAG Central Oregon president Becky Groves. "We had several members who wrote letters, called our senators and representatives and lobbied at the Capitol. We are very proud of Chuck Burley and the stance he took on this. He credits a parent of a gay child for educating him and changing his mind on this issue."

Read said PFLAG Pendleton members also wrote letters, made calls and went to lobby in Salem. "I am convinced that because of our contacts and constant reminders of how important

people, many in Oregon's queer community have never heard of PFLAG. "There is a need to make the PFLAG name more familiar," Noble said.

In Bend, Central Oregon PFLAG ran an animated ad that ran through the holiday season in two of the city's movie theaters. According to Groves, the ad asked: "Do you know someone who is gay? We do!"

Groves explained: "We received a grant from the Pride Foundation to do this.... We hope that it planted seeds in people's minds that we are active in Central Oregon to provide support, educate and advocate on behalf of our friends and loved ones."

According to Groves, PFLAG has been a welcome presence in Central Oregon for a lot of people. She described a young heterosexual family that stopped by the PFLAG booth at Bend Pride.

"The father had a baby in his arms, and he said to him, 'You are too young to know your sexual orientation, but whatever it is, it's fine with us!' This makes our work all worthwhile!" she said.

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