

northwest Neighborhood Watch

One organization wants to hold petition signers accountable

by Julie Sabatier

Know Thy Neighbor Oregon made a big splash when it launched a Web site late last month, announcing its intent to publish the names and addresses of those who sign petitions seeking to refer Oregon's new domestic partnership law (House Bill 2007) and nondiscrimination law (Senate Bill 2) to the 2008 ballot.

"After some of the rhetoric we felt in the hearings and also how they are really mobilizing around hate and really attacking our families after we've been fighting for so long, we couldn't just sit by while they tried to repeal these two measures," said 23-year-old Brandon Berg, the spokesman for Know Thy Neighbor Oregon.

Berg, who is gay, grew up in Idaho and moved to Oregon five years ago to attend Lewis & Clark College. The former Basic Rights Oregon intern says he was active in grassroots efforts to support the legislation. In addition to holding down a full-time job as an event manager for a small company, Berg says he volunteers 15 to 20 hours a week to the Know Thy Neighbor effort.

The group has yet to incorporate as a nonprofit and has thus far raised less than \$500, he adds. He estimates he has spent \$200 out of his own pocket on expenses like phone lines and Internet hosting for the organization.

not afraid," she continued, adding cryptically, "I'll just say two can play the same game, but I'm not going to say anymore. There's a lot of information you can put on the Internet."

Berg says Shannon has the wrong idea about Know Thy Neighbor's intentions. "This isn't about violence or intimidation; it's about a democratic process," he said. "We want a level of responsibility that some people don't realize comes with the initiative process."

Know Thy Neighbor Oregon has elicited mixed reactions from those who support both domestic partnership and nondiscrimination laws. "It's very confrontational," said Kendall Clawson, who relocated from Massachusetts with her wife to take over as executive director of Q Center. "While I love the idea, I get a little nervous about how people will choose to use the information and whether there's risk involved with that."

Brian Grose, former bias crimes detective for Portland, said he does not think publishing names and addresses online will lead to violence. "On a professional level, I don't foresee any problems happening because of it," he explained. "I personally think if you're going to sign something, stand up and say you signed the damn thing."

According to Toleos, Know Thy Neighbor groups in Massachusetts and, more recently, in Florida have

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Know Thy Neighbor is shedding light on petition signers.

According to Berg, Know Thy Neighbor Oregon started with a small committee of five people but now has a growing roster of volunteers. Although it is a largely local effort, the group has gotten a lot of help from Aaron Toleos and Tom Lang, co-founders of the flagship Know Thy Neighbor organization in Massachusetts.

Toleos and Lang launched a Web site in September 2005 in response to a petition drive by Vote on Marriage, a group that collected signatures for a bill that would have outlawed same-sex marriage in the Bay State.

"It's a veiled threat," said former state Sen. Marilyn Shannon, R-Salem, who is part of Defense of Marriage and Family Again, one of the groups circulating petitions to refer HB 2007 and SB 2 to the 2008 ballot. "We're not Massachusetts. We're

served a secondary purpose: uncovering fraud.

The signature-gathering effort in Oregon has already garnered one serious complaint, which Know Thy Neighbor Oregon has featured prominently on its Web site. Political activist and former lobbyist Ellen Lowe filed the complaint with the secretary of state's office Sept. 4, stating that groups gathering signatures were misleading potential donors by calling themselves a political action committee.

The signature gatherers have until Sept. 26 to collect the 55,179 signatures required for each successful referendum. Shannon and David Crowe, executive director for Restore America, another organization working to gather signatures, are keeping mum about how close they are to that goal. Watch the Just Out blog at www.justout.com for updates.

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