

Mudslinging in Puddletown

Mayoral race causes sudden news surge

Now and then there are times in the media industry when there just isn't a whole lot going on. One will sit endlessly and forlornly, staring at an empty blog page, realizing with horror that the dreaded *slow news week* syndrome has infected the building. Worse yet, I'm quite sure that symptoms of this malaise are visible to our readers. Past outbreaks of slow news week, or SNW as it's called, had found me chronicling such seemingly endless topics as possums being born, sheltered and raised in my garage. Little did I know, then, that the sharing of these deeply personal journals placed my furry guests and myself directly in harm's way. At any moment state wildlife officials might have broken down my garage door, tranquilized the possums and hauled them off in sacks to live their lives in state-approved sanctuaries. I live on the edge, I tell you, on the edge.

Today I can tell you, with much sincerity, that the past two weeks in Portland have most decidedly not been lacking in news to report. Our own news surge began with the kickoff event for the 2008 Portland mayoral election, which started promptly at 11:30 a.m. Sept. 10. This is when Mayor Tom Potter announced that he would not be running for a second term. My immediate reaction to his words was a quick moment of sadness, accompanied by one, just one, sneaky and spontaneous little tear of sentiment. Potter has been a tremendous friend and ally to our community, and we really can't thank him enough for his support and years of dedication. His term as mayor was exactly what Portland needed—a reflective and thoughtful planning period for what lies ahead.

Potter's decision not to run was anticipated to be the starting point for mayoral candidates to emerge and announce their intentions. Portlanders are eagerly awaiting this next round of elections and are keen to participate and choose the next mayor, a person who must be dynamic and vital and possess great leadership abilities.

But before there's even any formally announced candidates for this race, the mudslinging and drama begin. As first reported by *Willamette Week*, Pearl District developer Bob Ball, an openly gay man, was identified as the person questioning a relationship between openly gay City Commissioner Sam Adams and a then 17-year-old youth who had approached Adams for mentoring and advice.

The minute this story hit the *Willamette Week* Web site, all hell broke loose. (For a recap of who-said-what-about-whom, please see Page 6 of this issue.) And as quickly as this story flared up, it also appears to be dying out. In today's age of electronic reporting and immediacy, it could appear that this sudden firestorm of animosity could burn itself out in mere days. That will be in appearance only,

however. Long-term ramifications will be felt. Reputations have been damaged, friendships have ended, and distrust could become pervasive.

All of the major players in "Ballgate" have been interviewed endlessly in the past few days. There's little left for them to say. There does remain one missing piece, however, and that's hearing from the purported former Adams staffer who brought the original concerns (read: accusations) to Ball, who then, well, we all know what he did next.


Allow me now to repeat an oft-told belief of my own. Be wary of the credibility of the "disgruntled former employee." I hold it to be true that this source of information is rarely viable. Indeed, their interests are too often self-motivated and misguided. The "disgruntled" are frequently the employee for whom the employer went the extra mile—only to find that two miles had then become the expectation.

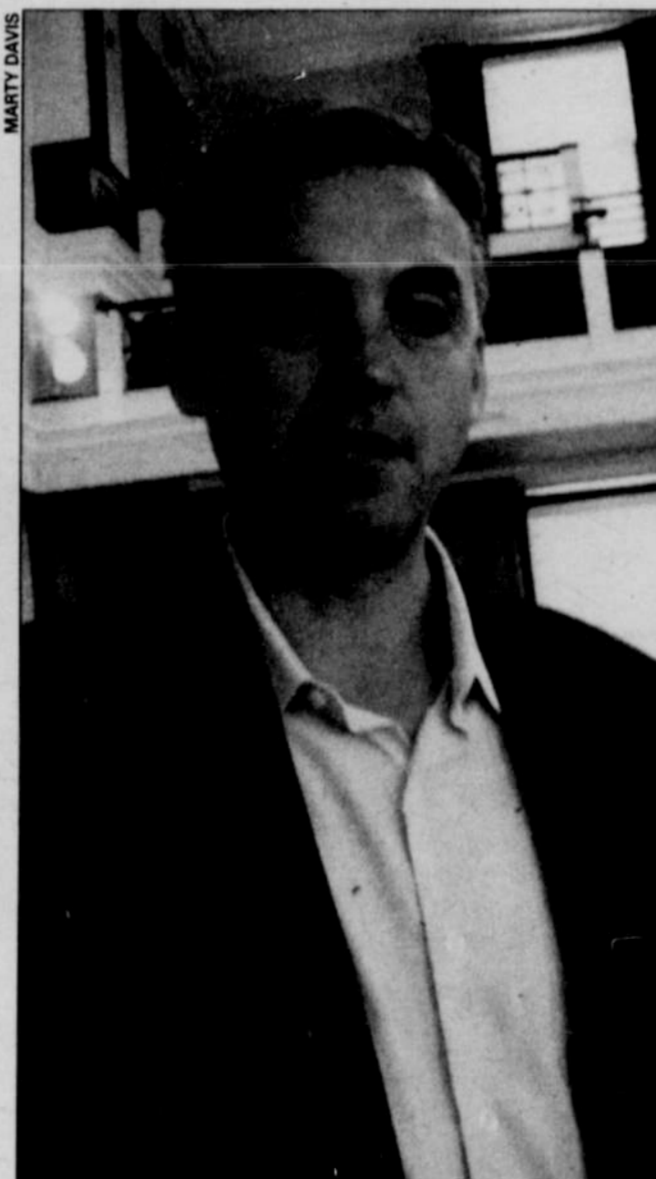
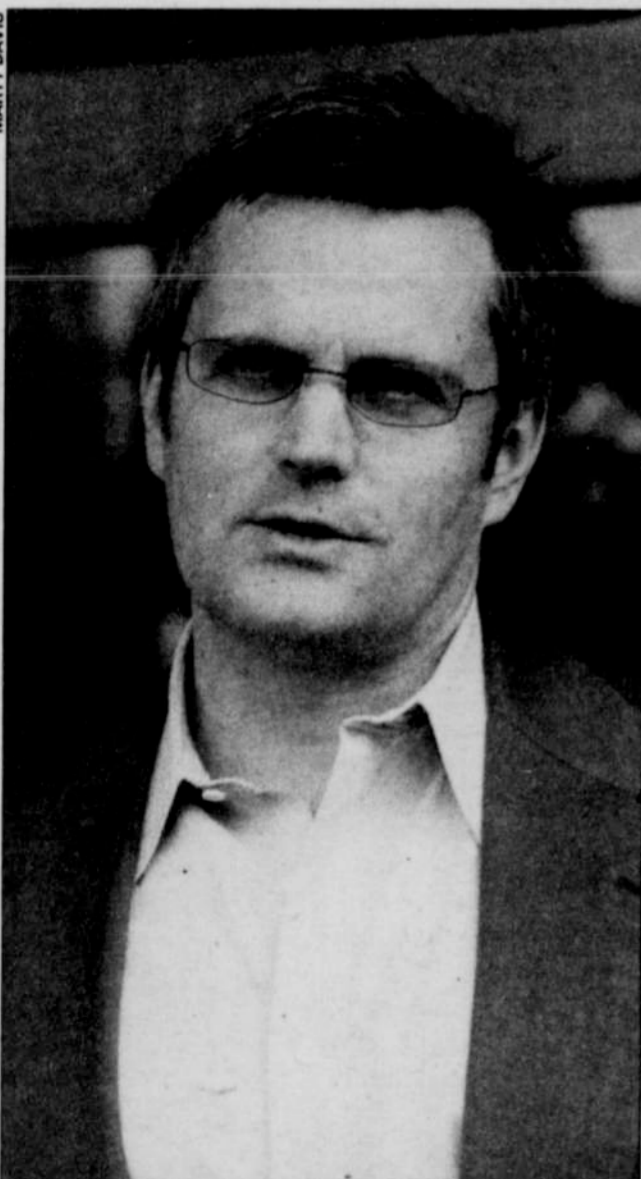
As much as I'd like to use the remainder of this space to discuss the problems other people are having, I would be regrettably remiss if I didn't address a few small brush fires that I managed to set off myself in the past few weeks. On at least two occasions I have been found guilty of careless thought and action. Both instances—one a photo that probably should not have been published and the other a blog headline with perceivable racist connotation—caused or had the potential to cause discomfort for others. I could make a wishy-washy argument for intent—or, in these cases, lack of intent—to cause harm or pain or damage, but the fact is, intent and lack of knowledge are not excuses worthy of hiding behind.

One of the readers expressing her displeasure wrote to me, "Just because you can do something, it doesn't mean you should." She's quite right.

Several times a day, my e-mail system reminds me that I'm about to cause offense to someone. I always ignore it and plow ahead with my immediate thought. Now would be a good time for me to take that reminder and that message and get out there and see what it feels like from the folks on the other end of the messages.

I know exactly who I want to talk to first and what I need to talk about. I know she'll have a lot to say on the subject. How do I know this? Because we've already started the dialogue. In my next column I'll be talking with Kendall Clawson, executive director of Q Center, who will explain to me, again, exactly why "Black Thursday" is not a good headline for a blog entry about an injured Trail Blazer.

In the meantime, I'll see you all Sept. 24 at Gay Skate. 



The commissioner, the mayor and the developer.



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