

northwest

Thorn of the Rose

Gay travel writers advise readers to stay away from Portland

by Jaymee R. Cuti

One only needs to check lists of livable cities to learn that Portland is hot. It's been the subject of many glowing reviews in publications including *The New York Times* and *Gourmet* magazine, among many others.

Yet based on the experiences of two gay travel writers, their editors and publishers are considering a national boycott of Stumptown.

Don Pile, 64, and his partner of 36 years, Ray Williams, visited Portland last month during a four-week road trip from their home in the greater Kansas City, Mo., area to Denver; Salt Lake City; Reno, Nev.; San Francisco; Portland; Seattle; and Montana. The couple complained about the Rose City's inattentive Portland Oregon Visitors Association (POVA), poor service in bars and the "seediness" of gay-friendly neighborhoods.

Their negative review was printed in *Talk*, a Palm Springs publication with distribution throughout Southern California. According to Pile, his travel column, "Traveling Our Fabulous Gay World," has thousands of readers and is syndicated nationally in queer magazines.

"We've written bad reviews about bars, restaurants, movies, concerts. This is the first time in seven years that we've written bad things about an entire city, and we're not happy doing it," he said.

POVA spokeswoman Deborah Wakefield says her organization would have responded immediately to the writers' request for information, but they never received an initial e-mail and only learned that the writers were in town the evening before they left. "We fully realize that not all cities want gays traveling to their city," Pile responded.

POVA president Jeff Miller, who is gay, wrote to the writers Oct. 17, after Pile and Williams were dissatisfied with correspondence from the organization's communications department.

Miller gave several examples of the city's gay-friendliness, such as

Cascade AIDS Project's AIDS Walk in October, which raised more than \$350,000 with more than 10,000 participants, including state and city politicians. He apologized for the couple's bad experience and explained that POVA did not receive their initial e-mail. He said in the correspondence, "We pride ourselves on our prompt response to all journalists."

The travelers' itinerary began with a complimentary stay at the gay-owned Lion and the Rose Bed and Breakfast in Northeast Portland. Owners Steve Unger and his partner took them to a Portland Gay Men's Chorus performance. The writers gave rave reviews to the chorus and the inn.

They also attended a performance at Darcelle XV Showplace and referenced C.C. Slaughters, Hobo's, Escape and the Eagle PDX in their article.

After a visit to Powell's City of Books, Pile and Williams discovered that someone had broken into their car and stolen some CDs.

In the article, the men also wrote about high rents in Portland that made travel cost-prohibitive.

"Housing costs are extremely high in Portland, and most of the people that we talked to said they could not afford to travel," according to the article.

The men were also insulted by POVA's material written specifically for queer travelers. They received the group's "Gay Portland" brochure, with a photo of local celebrity Wade McCollum dressed colorfully in a feather headdress on the cover.

"I have no idea who or what he is," said Pile. "Gay people are doctors and lawyers and businessmen. If this is how all gays look in Portland, we don't want to go there."

Inside, the guide referenced two gay-friendly neighborhoods, the Pearl and the Hawthorne District.



Gay travel writers Don Pile (left) and Ray Williams did not enjoy their Portland stay.

Pile and Williams took this to mean that the city's other 10 districts were gay-unfriendly.

"In the packet they sent out, they go into great detail about 12 different neighborhoods, saying only two are gay-friendly," Pile said. "My partner and I looked at each other and said, 'Why would anyone want to go to that city?'"

According to POVA, the guide was meant to point queer travelers to neighborhoods with a high concentration of gay-owned shops and restaurants—not to imply that other sections of town were unsafe or unwelcoming.

"We felt those were neighborhoods that had a lot to offer to travelers in general, not just to gays and lesbians," said Wakefield. "To not point them out would be a glaring omission."

Pile and Williams have promised that their December column will preach the weaknesses of Portland. They say their editors and publishers have suggested a national boycott.

"If the city cannot get it's [sic] act together concerning having gay tourists and gay dollars come to their city, perhaps a national boycott against the city might, just might, help them realize they need to be more sensitive to gays," wrote Pile and Williams to 23 Portland-area businesses and organizations, including this publication. **10**

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