

justout

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letters

Tiara-Shaking Good Times

TO THE EDITOR:

We, the youth of the Sexual Minority Youth Resource Center, are writing in response to the letter "SMYRC Youth Underwhelmed" in the Nov. 2 issue. Here is why we love SMYRC:

SMYRC is governed by a youth steering committee, which is open to all youth. We invite and encourage every youth who accesses the space to vote on all issues, rules and activities. Rules are proposed and written by us and are approved or changed by at least an 80 percent youth majority. We propose rules we feel are necessary in order to create a safer atmosphere. SMYRC is open to all youth 23 and younger, and we strive to create a hate-free zone with our first rule being "Respect for all people at all times."

At SMYRC we have access to countless free resources, including counseling and crisis intervention, food, clothing, educational and informational workshops, support groups, exercise programs, drag shows, open mikes and more fun than you can shake a tiara at!

SMYRC has saved hundreds of youth during the past 10 years, serving and empowering approximately 1,000 youth a year. Nowhere else in Portland have we cried this much, laughed so hard and cried so much from laughing so hard. Together we've built the biggest and most supportive family any of us have ever had.

TORI SCOTT, AARON GUERRERO, DOM BOLDS, AMY CLARK, ELI CORBIN, MOLLY NORRIS, MARTHA SMITH, ANGEL VERDUGO, CONNOR GREENE, ENRECHE BUCKNER, GRAE

BERHAUSEN, CHRIS KING

SMYRC Youth

Raves for the Rose City

TO THE EDITOR:

I read with shock the recent piece in *Just Out* regarding two gay travel writers and their proposed boycott of Portland ["Thorn of the Rose," Nov. 16].

Did they visit the same Portland I have? Did they interact with the same staff at the Portland Area Visitors Association that I did? I can't see how that's possible, given their article.

I'm the editor in chief of *The Out Traveler*, the world's largest publication serving gay and lesbian readers (with 275,000 subscribing households), as well as the corporate director of travel media for PlanetOut. As such I oversee all travel content at the world's largest media and entertainment company for gays and lesbians. PlanetOut's combined media network gets approximately 5 million unique monthly visitors.

In addition, as a widely respected gay travel expert, I am invited to speak about the subject frequently (including travel shows sponsored by *The Miami Herald*, *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, *The Boston Globe* and *The New York Times*). I have regular radio show segments on Sirius Satellite Radio, XM and WFNX in the Boston area. I also oversee three syndicated newspaper columns.

In my visits to Portland, I've never had anything short of a completely delightful time. The neighborhoods that I visited, including the Pearl, were vibrant and interesting. The welcome I received from locals and official tourism representatives alike were warm and friendly.

The folks at POVA were the utmost professionals. In fact, Deborah Wakefield is widely regarded in the industry as one of the smartest, nicest and most helpful and responsive executives in the busi-

ness. If she said she didn't receive their e-mails, I'd take her at her word and trust she'd bend over backward to accommodate their (or any visitor's) reasonable needs.

ED SALVATO

The Out Traveler

Praise of POVA

TO THE EDITOR:

I was astounded to read about travel writers Don Pile and Ray Williams' boycott of Portland and their complaints about the Portland Oregon Visitors Association. As a travel writer and editor with some of the most widely read LGBT publications, I have been fortunate enough to visit hundreds of cities. I rate Portland as one of the most LGBT-friendly destinations in the United States.

I have nothing but praise for POVA. Every call or e-mail I have ever made to Deborah Wakefield and her staff has been returned within hours. They are a pleasure to work with. I have visited Portland dozens of times, including on two POVA-hosted gay press visits. The POVA staff could not have been more attentive, helpful and enthusiastic about showing me their city.

I would be most interested to know where these "celebrity travel" columns appear. I've been writing about travel for more than a decade and have never heard of either of these writers. I eventually found a column in Palm Spring's *Talk* magazine. In the column Mr. Pile and Mr. Williams complain about many things in Portland, including people reading books, talking on cell phones or using a "lap top [sic]" in bars when, they proclaim, "the purpose of going to a bar is for social interaction." As one who has happily whiled away hours on my laptop and read Powell's purchases in Portland's bars, I hang my head in shame.

They go on to comment on "homeless and poor people right downtown on the streets and sidewalks and sleeping in door entry ways [sic] with their grocery carts, etc." and then declare this "a rather disgusting site [sic] to see." If people this shallow choose to boycott Portland, it doesn't seem like a terrible loss.

AEEA MULHOLLAND

Vancouver, British Columbia

Loving the Locale

TO THE EDITOR:

As a widely published gay travel journalist who visited Portland for the first time earlier this year and instantly fell in love with the place, my only thoughts upon reading "Thorn of the Rose" (highlighting a Missouri couple's recent sour take on the city) were a) how very bizarre and b) how very wrong. Not only did I find Portland denizens to be overtly LGBT-friendly, but the folks at POVA were honestly among the most responsive and indulgent I've ever encountered.

Of course, people experience different places differently, and travel writing is consequently often subjective. But many of Pile's and Williams' highly personalized perceptions about Portland were either seriously skewed, downright offensive or both. To wit, regarding the poor and homeless they comment, "One would think that the City [sic] would do something about that as they do in other cities." (And that "something" would be? Run them out? Snuff them out?) The men also came to the unusual conclusion after reading about

Portland's two especially gay-friendly districts that the rest of the city must therefore be queer-hostile. Apart from making no sense, this betrays a certain blindness to contemporary American civic life, wherein forward-leaning and inclusive cities like Portland no longer need to concentrate all of their gays into old-school ghettos.

The gents are certainly entitled to their opinions, and other than their "thousands" of readers, no one would have been the wiser were it not for their ludicrous threat of calling for a national gay boycott of the city. Rather than draw gay attention to their purported "quite dreadful" nature of Portland, however, it seems the men have done little more than to draw Portland's (and POVA's) attention to the quite dreadful nature of some gays.

DAN ALLEN

New York

Opinions from Amateurs

TO THE EDITOR:

I am writing in response to the article about "award-winning" gay travel writers Donald Pile and Ray Williams and their negative experience in Portland.

Personally, I have never heard of these guys. I did a search on the Web for them to find out what kinds of awards they claim to have won, how they are famous, etc. I could barely find anything other than a letter from Elizabeth Taylor on the couple's 35th anniversary. I did find their Web site, www.hometown.aol.com/gaytravelers. I think their amateur-looking Web site speaks for itself.

It sounds to me that they didn't get the "star treatment" they were looking for, but to boycott a city because they didn't get their asses kissed seems a bit ridiculous!

DEBBIE CASELTON

Portland

Bring in the Clowns

TO THE EDITOR:

So you're telling me that—based on the insular experiences of two upper-class, fuddy-dudd queens crowning 60, looking like Corky St. Clair from *Waiting for Guffman* and dressed like the Prom King from 1976's *Carrie*—Portland should be boycotted as a gay destination?

Their evident distaste arises solely from non-immediate and sycophantic service from a city agency and their negative experience on a guided tour. Admittedly, they were working on some misinformation if their packet of gay-friendly destinations did not include Nob Hill or—apparently—any bars on Stark Street. And did they assume the housing costs are high in Portland based upon only their experience talking to a bunch of other older, upper-middle-class queens living beyond their means?

I live in the excluded Nob Hill neighborhood, in between two of the trendiest shopping streets in Portland (guess which two), and I pay as much in rent as I paid back in Boise, Idaho. All over, magazines have praised Portland's cheap housing prices and cited them as a lure for artists and young people.

The fact that they only consider the status of upper-middle-class homeowners is exactly Don Pile's and Ray Williams' problem. Did they consider the experiences of teen, 20-, 30-, 40-something queers, many of whom move from conservative surrounding states such as Idaho or Montana? Were