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Against the Tide

Heterosexual mayoral candidate's queer supporters come out en masse

by Stephen Marc Beaudoin

Sho Dozono gets queer votes. That is, if a coterie of power-player sexual minority leaders—who are appearing in TV endorsement ads, throwing top-dollar house parties and blowing through their Blackberrys to drum up support for their Portland mayoral candidate of choice—have anything to do with it.

As the Oregon primary election ballot deadline fast approaches—it's May 20, in case you missed that—a number of A-list gays, lesbians and equality allies have emerged as an important nucleus of support for the Azumano Travel CEO. Dozono, who is heterosexual, is a longtime financial supporter of gay rights groups like Basic Rights Oregon and Equity Foundation and an award-garnering leader on equality issues—he led big phone-banking efforts during 1992's No on 9 campaign—so perhaps it's no surprise that many queers want to help elect a mayor who has worked shoulder to shoulder with them in the trenches.

But what's also striking about many of Dozono's sexual minority supporters is this: Several of them are longtime friends of his prime opponent, out gay City Commissioner Sam Adams, and some have decided to break with Adams in whole or

part to throw their support behind Dozono. The growing list of prominent Dozono queer supporters includes the likes of Portland Japanese Garden executive director Steve Bloom, Wells Fargo vice president Ted Fettig and longtime activist Susie Shepherd.

"What makes it difficult as a gay man is Sho's been incredibly good on our issues," said Brian Wilson, a longtime Adams ally and supporter who says he's leaning toward Dozono but is undecided on who will get his vote in the primary. Wilson's family real estate business, Kalberer Company, has given financial contributions to both candidates. "Sho has all of the community credentials. There's a certain veracity to his claim that being an outsider to City Hall, he can bring fresh ideas."

In a primary election season where the game of dice-'em-up demographics—blue-collar white voters, white-collar black voters, college-educated gay Hispanic female voters older than 60—is de rigeur in national election polls, it's easy to try to play the game on a smaller scale in the Portland races. Will Dozono exert a stronger voter pull on minorities and business leaders? Will Adams automatically lock up support from the young adult, DIY, immigrant and queer factions?

That last group, at least, appears to be very much in flux of its support for Adams, who stands to make history as the first openly gay mayor of a Top 40 U.S. city. "There's no question that on a very personal level there's some appeal" to the notion of the historical nature of Adams' candidacy, Wilson said.

"Of course, we would be making history with Sho, too," said Shepherd, who says she has "very strong feelings" about his candidacy. "History's going to be made either way, and it's wonderful," she continued, adding soberly: "I'll be disappointed for Portland if Sho doesn't win. And I don't believe that Sho won't win."

For some queer community leaders, the decision to move their support from Adams' column to Dozono's was about ensuring the election campaign didn't grind to an early halt May 20. "I read this op-ed in *The Oregonian* about maybe not making this a slam dunk for Sam," said Kregg Arntson, who has known and supported Adams in previous elections. "Perhaps not as many people know Sho or what he stands for." Arntson said he hoped his vote would help Dozono gain traction to continue his campaign into the fall general election.

Others are more direct in their criticisms of



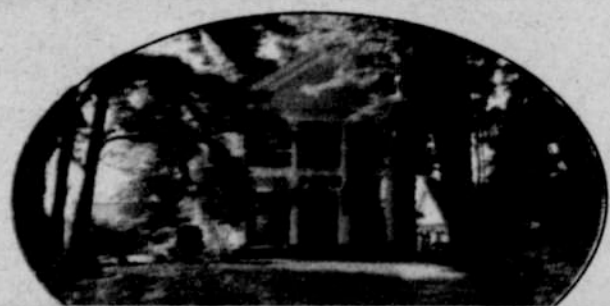
Gay rights activist Susie Shepherd says Portland will make history by electing Sho Dozono.

Adams. "I like Sam; he's a nice guy," said Eric Steinhauer. "We've known him for years, and we're supporters."

He's interrupted by his partner of 13 years, Gregg Macy. "In the previous election we were supporters," Macy says, shooting daggers. (Indeed, Macy raised a few thousand G's for Adams in his 2004 City Council bid and is now doing the same for Dozono.) "I'm just not impressed with the way he's handled his office," Steinhauer concluded.

For the Adams campaign, this shift of support—small but critical—doesn't seem to faze them a bit. "Did you look at all the supporters on our list?" asked Jennifer Yocum, Adams' campaign manager. "Sam has strong support among progressives and Democrats.... That includes leadership of the LGBT community as well as people that are straight and are strong advocates for basic rights."

"It's been a rigorous campaign. There's been great debate on the issues; the candidates get put through the wringer," Yocum said. "We just know the work we have to do." ☐



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