

The Pride of Portland



BY STEPHEN MARC BEAUDOIN

It finally happened. And now queers everywhere are celebrating: Long live Sam Adams, the Gayor of Portland! Adams wrote himself into history May 20, after emerging victorious from the 2008 primary as the first openly gay person to be elected mayor of a major metropolitan U.S. city. International news media buzzed with the story, Basic Rights Oregon's Jeana Frazzini called the win "a major achievement" for the queer movement, and celebturne blogger Perez Hilton even screeched about the win on his Web site, writing, "Now Sam can lead the fight for equality!"

The question now is whether the 44-year-old city commissioner, in his tenure as the Rose City's Citizen No. 1, will be known first, last and always as Stumptown's historic King of Queer, or if he can transcend his place as a homo history footnote. Adams himself has said the mayor's role provides him "a bully pulpit...an opportunity to push for queer rights."

So will Sam Adams—likable, sexy, bike-riding Commissioner Sam—be a good mayor for Portland, as he says he wants to be, or simply our Gay Mayor? His biography to this point holds a few hints.

The Champion Theme

"Growing up as a gay boy" in rural Newport, Adams says, "you learn to keep to yourself." It's where Adams, the third of four kids in a lower-middle-class hardscrabble household, spent his formative years: hanging out in the neighbors' kitchens or the front yard of his parents' federally subsidized housing; racing with his brothers to be first in the food stamp line; or dipping a big spoon into a jar of his favorite junk food splurge, Miracle Whip.

Fracturing family pressures forced a divorce in the Adams house, and the 14-year-old and his mom left scrappy Newport for the up-and-coming bedroom community of Eugene. Nick Beres, a Roosevelt Junior High classmate, became a fast friend.

Adams' mother didn't have the money to fund typical teenage endeavors: no arcades, no movies, no mall. Instead, Beres and Adams would



"grab these big inner tubes and go to the Willamette River, and we'd float down the river and through the rapids all day long."

Into his later teens at South Eugene High, Adams says he began to come out of his shell, if not yet the closet. He won his first election (communications coordinator on the school student council) and fell in love with journalism; he and Beres—today a television reporter in Nashville, Tenn.—became co-editors of the editorial page of the student newspaper, *The Axe*.

Although "well liked" by other students, Adams "was not in the popular clique like the high school quarterback," Beres reveals. And although Beres was one of Adams' two close friends in his high school years, he says he "never fully understood what was going on with [Adams'] family situation. He kept a lot to himself."

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