

"APPARENTLY I NEED TO BE MORE FLAMBOYANT."

—SAM ADAMS, ON OCCASIONAL CONFUSION ABOUT HIS GAY ORIENTATION

What was going on was this: At all of 16 years old, Adams was living on his own in a Eugene apartment and working full time (bus boy to fry cook to lead cook at Mr. Steak, starting at minimum wage, \$3.35 an hour in 1981), in addition to his high school studies, to make ends meet.

Leadership and independence, it seems, was already on the young man's mind, and in an Oct. 3, 1980, *Axe* column titled "Champion Theme Overemphasized," Adams and Beres wrote this:

"Although striving for excellence is a goal worth merit, South [Eugene High School] has let itself fall into the trap of overemphasizing the dubious title of champion. By definition, a champion is a minority of the population. Is it right to present as a goal to all a title that can be attained by only a few?

"Sports have changed from their original intent of recreation to one of glory...AP courses at South have become champion factories. What should be done about the champion syndrome? If we want to strive for excellence, we should try to eliminate it...for a society of champions is one that could never exist."

Forceful and Arrogant

Already in college, people were pawing for a piece of Sam.

As a semi-closeted University of Oregon undergrad—he'd come out to his mom at age 18 over a sushi dinner in the summer of '82 in New York City but was not openly gay on the Eugene campus—tall, handsome Adams "had women throwing themselves at him," according to Beres. "I'm talking gorgeous women on campus," he continues, "and he'd never go out with them. He could have had any girl on the University of Oregon campus, and he didn't give a shit."

Putting his sexuality on the back burner, Adams instead started "giving a shit" about politics, and after hawking his aspirations to a towel-clad aspiring politico named Peter DeFazio in a YMCA locker room, Adams managed media for DeFazio's 1984 congressional bid. Working for peanuts, Adams bedded down in the DeFazio campaign headquarters and, after an election win, worked for the congressman in Eugene until 1987. Shortly thereafter he was introduced to Vera Katz and, in 1991 at all of 29 years old, became the Portland mayor's chief of staff, the youngest in the city's history.

But in his high-profile new position, he didn't

necessarily make fast friends. Forceful and arrogant; opinionated and aggressive; stubborn and cold are some of the ways colleagues and friends from those years describe the early-career Adams. When Joe D'Alessandro, then director of the Portland Oregon Visitors Association, first met Adams in the late 1990s, he says he walked away thinking, "That guy's kind of a bleep!"

But he knows that, as an elected official, that's how Adams operates: "What do you want? A mayor that gets along with people and shakes hands and kisses babies? Or a mayor that's willing to piss somebody off in order to get things done? That's Sam."

Over a decade-long friendship, D'Alessandro and Adams eventually grew closer, and both men say Adams fulfilled a critical role for the slightly older D'Alessandro: that of out gay mentor for the closeted queer married dad. Adams was the first person to whom D'Alessandro came out, and shortly after he divorced his wife to begin living life as an openly gay man. (D'Alessandro has since moved to San Francisco.)

Adams says he's approached "constantly" by gay men of all ages and stages of the coming-out process seeking just this type of queer mentorship. At the same time, he says he encounters just as many colleagues and supporters who have no idea he's gay. "Apparently," he says, "I need to be more flamboyant."

No Dress? No Problem

"That's quite a performance!"

Adams is straining to make himself heard over a thudding electronic beat at an inner Northeast Portland warehouse, stuffed to the ceiling with swaths of red silk. He's surrounded on all sides by attractive gay guys, ages 21 to 50-something, several of them elbowing their way to Adams' side.

Adams is at Portland's annual Red Dress Party, a notoriously debauchorous bash involving a few thousand gay men—some ladies, too—letting loose on a Saturday night orgy of dancing and drinks. It's just after 11 p.m., and Adams has arrived solo while an impressive show of what might best be described as "aerial boy porn" is in full sweat-soaked-thong swing. Red dresses are de rigeur for party admission, but Adams is admitted in spite of his off-topic stylish formalwear outfit: koolatts pants and a tux shirt with top hat, miles away from the fantastical dress creations of

his queer colleagues at the ball.

Going stag has been standard for Adams, more or less, since the very public split in 2006 with his partner of 11 years, Greg Eddie. It's a good thing David Zagel is around.

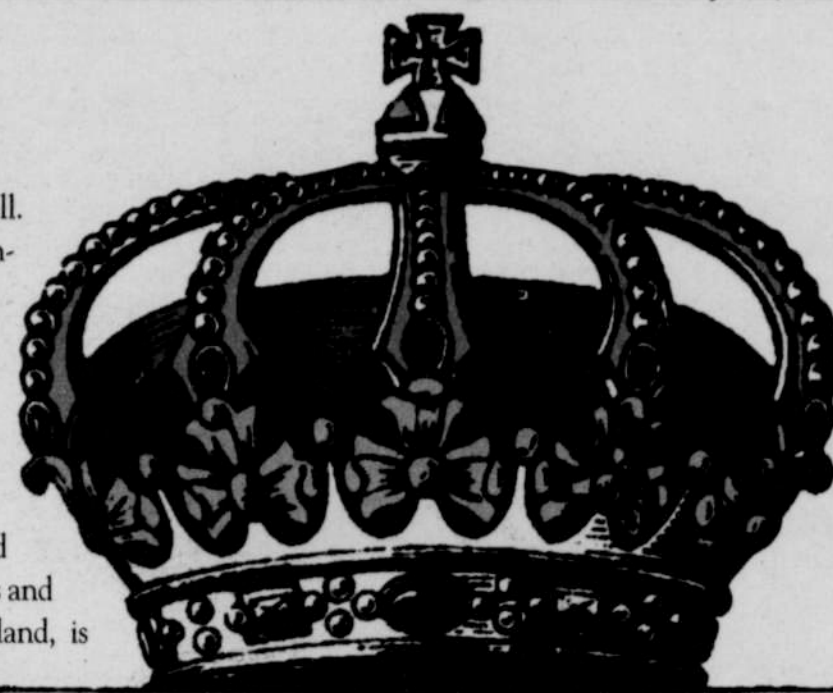
Zagel, a childhood friend of Adams' from Newport days and now his best friend in Portland, is also Adams' de facto "wing man" of choice, often acting as a screen for interested fans before they can more fully access him.

Like many of Adams' friends interviewed for this story, Zagel doesn't worry about Adams' future political career—the prospects seem bountiful and bright. Their concerns center instead on his personal well-being and his ability to handle the pressures of increased scrutiny in the mayor's hot seat.

"I give him kudos when he actually tells me at 9 o'clock at night that he's done for the day," Zagel says. "I'm like, 'All right, thank goodness.' I have asked Sam to take better care of himself. I worry sometimes about just how much he gives. I don't think he's completely satisfied. He's very driven, and he's always going to be want a little bit more."

Q Center executive director Kendall Clawson, an Adams friend and fan, adds: "When you're the first anything, it's always hard to balance people's expectations of you. You have to let people know what it is you can and cannot do, what you will and won't do."

Because of Adams' unbearably busy schedule, a friend, conservative talk show host Victoria Taft, bought him a special gift: a miner's hat that features an extra-bright light for midnight garden-



Gay Mayors Make History

When he takes office in January, Sam Adams will reign as the mayor of Portland, a Top 30 U.S. city (population 568,380), which puts him in a select international class of openly gay elected officials running major metropolitan cities.

Some of Adams' queer colleagues across the globe include:

- **Klaus Wowereit:** Berlin, population 3.4 million (2001-present)
- **Bertrand Delanoë:** Paris, population 2,167,994 (2001-present)
- **David Cicilline:** Providence, R.I., population 175,255 (2003-present)

As well as other openly gay U.S. mayors of recent note:

- **Toni Atkins:** San Diego, population 1,256,951 (acting mayor for five months in 2005, not publicly elected)
- **Denise Simmons:** Cambridge, Mass., population 101,355 (2008-present)
- **Thomas "Mike" Rundle:** Lawrence, Kan., population 80,098 (2004-2005, came out after stepping down as mayor)
- **Guy Padgett:** Casper, Wyo., population 49,644 (2005-2006)
- **Christopher Cabaldon:** West Sacramento, Calif., population 41,744 (1996-present, came out in 2006 after being elected)
- **Craig Covey:** Ferndale, Mich., population 22,105 (2008-present)
- **Ron Oden:** Palm Springs, Calif., population 42,807 (2004-present)

ing, one of his self-identified "addictions." He also says he goes to the occasional service at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral or Metropolitan Community Church, although when an MCC member was asked about Adams' attendance, the member said he was conspicuously absent as a congregant, "except of course during election season."

A few weeks ago on the campaign trail, Adams decided to take a much-needed break and head to Zagel's for coffee; he stood in the driveway chatting while Zagel worked in the yard, "and 10 min-

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