

# JUSTOUT *at 25*

for the Illinois senator during his primary and general election campaigns.

Redwing's Oregon legacy as a mild-mannered organizer and peaceful activist seems firmly entrenched. She looks back on it now in awe. "Those 10 years were so extraordinary—every day was profound."

## KATHLEEN SAADAT

### *Fighting/scared*

**Claim to Fame:** Leading the fight against Oregon's Ballot Measure 9, a vitriolic anti-gay ballot measure in 1992.

**So They Say:** "If undressing in public gets the job done, I'm willing to play Lady Godiva this one time." (November 1991, on how she intended to rally supporters to fight Ballot Measure 9)

**Who's Next:** Activist Stephen Herrera and Dan Ryan of the Portland Public Schools Foundation.

Fear is a powerful thing. And with her diminutive linebacker's frame and famous baritone growl of a voice, Kathleen Saadat has an uncanny ability to make even the most hard-shell A-list activists quake in their boots. Activist Donna Redwing (see Page 29) recalls meeting Saadat shortly after arriving in Portland in 1989. She says Saadat, quite simply, "Scared me to death!"

It's part of what makes Saadat's status as a leader

in the sexual minorities and African-American communities close to legendary. After toiling in the trenches to fight back Oregon's infamous Ballot Measure 9 (the documentary of which, by the same name, is an absolute must-watch), she was director of the Portland Rainbow Coalition/African-Americans for Human Rights. She retired at 60, then came out of retirement in 2005 to join the ranks again for a senior-level position at Cascade AIDS Project.

"I'm often held up as the black person who was the activist," Saadat says with typically alarming candor. "It is the history of the gay and lesbian movement that it does not look at communities of color as a resource except when it comes to a campaign, and that," she says, "hasn't changed that much."

What exactly was it about Ballot Measure 9 that started Saadat on her passionate path of education and activism? The answer, she says, is



simple: "I believe in democracy," adding, "and it scared the hell out of me."

## JERRY WELLER

### *Pioneering old-school activist*

**Claim to Fame:** Founding board member or director of queer political organizations like the Human Rights Campaign, Portland Town Council and Right to Privacy Political Action Committee.

**So They Say:** "Two tents. I mean *camping* tents." (June 1986, on the tiny size of 1976 Portland Pride festival)


Jerry Weller's living room walls are covered in plaques, plates and posters, bearing witness to the Rose City's early gay organizing: the Sanford Director award, the Lucille Hart award, a 1979 poster for the Portland Candlelight March for gay rights.

Weller, now in his late 60s, was the first executive director of the Portland Town Council, one of Oregon's earliest gay rights political groups. He went on to become a founding board member of both the Human Rights Campaign Fund and Gay Rights National Lobby, which in 1986 merged to create what is now the Human Rights Campaign.

He also helped found the Right to Privacy Political Action Committee, which organized fund raising and volunteers to bat back the

Oregon Citizens Alliance's series of anti-gay ballot measures in the 1980s and '90s. Because of his work, Weller landed one of HRC's largest six-figure donations in the '90s, without even being

aware of it. The gift came from a reclusive closeted gay man named John James Vasey, who had read about Weller in *Just Out* and Right to Privacy's newsletter, and arranged to have his entire estate, worth several hundred thousand dollars, split between Phoenix Rising and HRC, with Weller as the estate's executor. The donations were major landmarks for both organizations.

Weller, who has since retired from organizing, now works as an Occupational Safety and Health Administration compliance officer, which he's done for the past 21 years. Even now, having moved from the center to the periphery of the queer equality fight, he acknowledges the gains that have been made: "I feel that we have gone further, faster than I expected in my lifetime." 



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