

northwest

Westboro Baptist Church Storms Oregon with Anti-Gay Antics

Blue-eyed Libby Phelps, grinning ear to ear, has a special message for *Just Out* readers: "God hates you and you're going to hell."



PSU queer and allied students and supporters swarm the campus to counterprotest Fred Phelps' loony goons.

Phelps, granddaughter of notorious anti-gay Westboro Baptist Church leader Fred Phelps, was in Portland on Nov. 24 as part of a touring quartet of protesters spreading their typically outrageous message of "Days' End" hate across the state. Their first early morning stop: just outside the Portland State University campus, to mock PSU for implementing gender-neutral bathrooms.

Although the church's protest—which fea-

tured its unusually colorful signs screaming "Fag Media Shame!" and "God Hates America!"—attracted 150-plus counterprotesters of PSU queer and allied students, faculty and nonuniversity supporters, reaction was mostly measured.

"Everybody has freedom of speech," Austin, a 23-year-old self-identified queer male, remarked as he stood in the chilly morning air to protest the protesters, "and freedom to live their lives the way that they should without any discrimination towards anybody."

What does he think of the concept of gender-neutral bathrooms, which the Phelps family was protesting? "I think it's a great idea, especially for transgender people. It makes it more comfortable, and I don't get why they don't see that."

Out-and-out hatred seemed less the Westboro message than simply getting Portland caught up in its media circus act. Libby Phelps admitted, "We're not trying to change anybody's mind" with their protests, however ridiculous they might seem. The church's mission, she said, is much simpler: "We're trying to condemn the world, so on the judgment day you can't say you didn't see this message."

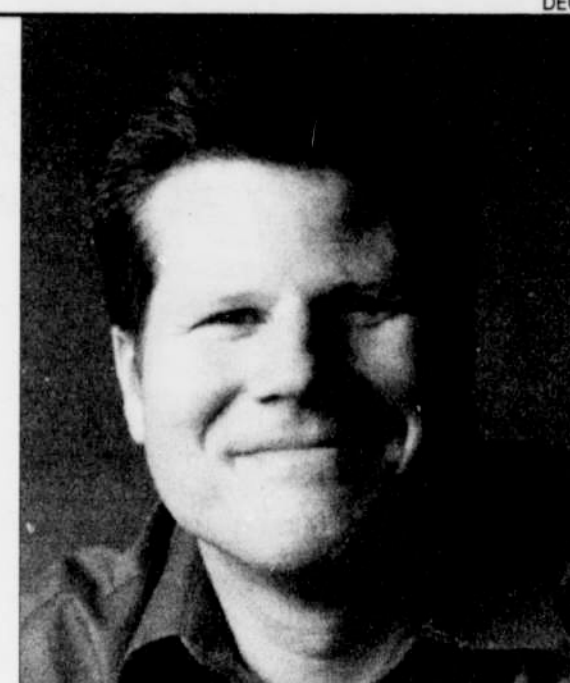
Later that afternoon, the Westboro goons

landed in Silverton to mock the town's historic election of Stu Rasmussen as the first transgender mayor of a U.S. city (a story that *Just Out* broke online Nov. 6 and in print Nov. 7). They were met with a big crowd of Rasmussen supporters in peaceful counterprotest, including *Just Out* columnist Floyd Sklover and his partner, Marc Acito. *The Oregonian* reported on the "counterprotesters...waiting across the two-lane street—men in skirts and boots, moms with babes in arm, lifelong Silverton residents alongside kids playing hooky from Salem schools. The crowd of about 150 waved and drummed and hugged. Their signs, homemade, hurriedly produced on office laser printers and painted on the back of campaign yard signs, focused on the positive. 'My love is bigger than your hate,' read one. 'We love Stu (and so does God).' 'Everyone is welcome in Silverton.'"

Oregon Shakespeare Fest Director Nabs National Prize

Oregon Shakespeare Festival's openly gay artistic director, Bill Rauch, was announced last month as one of only 50 artists nationwide to nab a prestigious United States Artists fellowship award.

The fellowship, which carries with it a



Oregon Shakespeare Festival's Bill Rauch has landed a \$50K arts fellowship prize.

\$50,000 cash award in unrestricted funds for creative projects of his choosing, honors Rauch for his leadership with Ashland's Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Since his appointment in 2007, Rauch—who was profiled in a 2007 *Just Out* cover story—has directed critically acclaimed productions of

both Shakespeare classics and newer works. Earlier this year he launched an ambitious "American Revolutions" initiative, in which the festival will commission 37 new plays based on U.S. history stories from a diverse group of U.S. playwrights during the next decade.

The United States Artists fellowship program was launched in 2005 by a consortium of leading arts foundations and philanthropic leaders as a way of recognizing and supporting U.S.-based artists with onetime grants that encourage and enable the recipients to further their work. Artists nationwide are nominated by an anonymous panel of arts leaders; 50 are selected each year for fellowship grants. Previous Oregon winners have included essayist and short story specialist Charles D'Ambrosio and radio broadcaster Dmae Roberts.

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LYDIA H. COLLINS, MD

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