

NORTHWEST BRIEFS by Ryan J. Prado

Coquille Tribe Enacts Same-Sex Marriage Law

While Oregon continues to compete in a statewide legislative decathlon, on May 24, Kitzen Branting and her partner Jeni Branting overcame a particularly large hurdle when they were married in a Coos Bay, Coquille Indian Tribe plankhouse. The union is being celebrated as the first legal same-sex marriage in Oregon, although those legalities are solely recognized by the Coquille Tribe.

As a federally recognized sovereign nation, the Coquille Tribe remains unfettered by the Oregon Constitution. The tribe adopted a law over a year ago, recognizing same-sex marriage and extending all tribal benefits of marriage to gay and lesbian couples, but the enactment of the law was shelved until the week of May 17, while the tribe worked out specifics regarding child support issues.

According to a May 21 article in *The Oregonian*, assistant tribal attorney Melissa Cribbins said that though no other couples have inquired about marrying yet, "I wouldn't anticipate this will be the only marriage."

For more information on the Coquille Tribe, visit coquilletribe.org.

—RYAN J. PRADO

Big Couple a Positive Model for Same-Sex Mentorship

Big Brothers Big Sisters Columbia Northwest has made substantial efforts to reach out to



Big Brothers. Big Sisters. BIG COUPLES!

the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community in recent years. Through the organization's "Big Brothers, Big Sisters, Big Couples" program, a local same-sex couple has charted a positive course for the mentorship of a very lucky "Little."

Roz Gorski, co-director of community relations with BBBS Columbia Northwest, and Jennifer Jackson, operations manager for Empire Pacific, Inc., met in Little Rock, Arkansas in 2003. After years of each wanting to mentor a child, the pair chose the route of BBBS' Big Couple program.

Gorski had been a Big Sister previously in Little Rock and witnessed the impact that "Bigs" have on children in the community. When the couple moved to Portland, the pieces fell into place to begin again with a Big Couple mentorship.

"I felt as if Roz and I were in a very good place in our life to offer a child some experi-

ences that they might not [have] otherwise," said Jackson.

"We got excited about the idea that we'd both offer a child two totally different perspectives and hobbies and could help one another remain consistent for our Little," Gorski added.

After what Jackson called a "thorough, professional, personal and carefully orchestrated" process, the couple was matched with a spunky, yet shy African-American girl, who shares their love of the outdoors, cooking, animals, and above all, fun!

"When we were told about a little 8-year-old that simply wanted to be outside, have fun, do fun things, have funny Bigs — she really liked the word 'fun' — we agreed she sounded right for us," said Gorski.

Both Gorski and Jackson wanted to make sure that it was recognized by the child's family that they were a couple, and would be hanging out with the youngster as such. The Little's mother felt that Gorski and Jackson were perfect for her daughter.

"There are so many gay and lesbian couples out there with so much to give," said Jackson. "Our process with BBBS was so open and warm that I had to remind myself that this is not the 'norm' in all organizations."

Both Bigs hope that others will hear their story and become involved in a child's life via a mentoring program like Big Couples. Gorski's work at BBBS is currently trying to ensure that more individuals from the gay, lesbian, bi and trans community know that Big Brothers Big

Sisters welcomes every individual to become a Big — as either a Brother, Sister or Couple. Gorski noted that Q Center has been instrumental in helping get the word out; Q Center hosted an evening for the community to learn more about the program and also featured them on its website in the Partner Spotlight section.

"[BBBSCN will] be at Pride this year, again, and welcome anyone to stop by and answer more specific questions," said Gorski.

Those in the gay, lesbian, bi and trans community interested in learning more about becoming a Big have a casual environment in which to do so Friday, May 29.

Big Brothers Big Sisters is partnering with Widmer to put on a "Bottles, Butts and Boots Party," a country-themed benefit for BBBSCN. The hoedown will be held at Nolita's (923 NW 10th Avenue) as the culmination of a larger "Denim Swap," which collected used denim to recycle and donate to BBBSCN.

The "Bottles, Butts and Boots Party" will begin at 5:30 p.m. Guests have an opportunity to purchase one or more \$10 tickets to draw from the "Wall of Beer," with products valued at \$5-\$60 from Widmer Brothers Brewing. Attendees are encouraged to wear jeans and/or cowboy boots. Light appetizers and drinks will be served, and old-country tunes will be played. Tickets may be purchased at the door.

For more information, visit bbbsnorthwest.org.

—RYAN J. PRADO

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