A Pair to Remember

Senior focus on Eric Marcoux and Eugene Woodworth

BY AARON SPENCER

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Eric Marcoux, 80, and Eugene Woodworth, 82, are somewhat of local celebrities in the Portland gay community.

They were featured in recent television ads by Basic Rights Oregon as a part of the nonprofit's campaign for marriage equality. But that's not the first time the two have been in the media spotlight for their relationship.

The couple have been in a previous incarnation of the BRO ad, as well as featured in several local newspapers. They were even featured in a 2006 documentary about gay relationships called *The Man You Had in Mind*.

In the most recent BRO ad, which includes straight, lesbian and gay couples talking about why everyone should be allowed to get married, Marcoux and Woodworth sit side by side. Marcoux says, "Next month, we celebrate our 57th anniversary together."

By now, Marcoux and Woodworth are approaching their 58th anniversary, and the two have become poster children for long-term gay relationships. The BRO ad is only the latest reason for people to stop them on the street—or more commonly, in the gym.

"Eugene and I go three days a week to a gym," Marcoux says, "and you know how you know a lot of people by sight but never talk to them? A lot of those people have mentioned the ad."

Even in the locker room, a place where being gay can at times be a touchy subject—especially when Marcoux and Woodworth were younger—the two find camaraderie.

"There have been a lot of naked men standing around me saying, 'That is a great commercial,'" Marcoux says. "And, of course, a lot of women said the same thing, but they weren't naked," he quips.

The two find attitudes toward same-sex marriage to be fairly positive in Portland. That isn't much of a surprise to them. What is unexpected is the enthusiasm they find around the topic as they run into people during their daily routines. This happens at least five or six times a day, they say.

"People every day at the Starbucks have come up to us," Marcoux says. "They don't just say that the ad was nice, but they engage us in conversation. We have a lot of allies out there."

Marcoux and Woodworth say they're doing what they think every gay couple should do: Be out and open about who they are. But they say people they know, even longtime couples like them, are reluctant.

"When we talk to especially older men, they don't want to do it. They don't want to do it, period," Woodworth says.

Marcoux and Woodworth don't necessarily want to be famous, but they do welcome the media attention and the public attention that follows. If other couples like them would do the same, though, they say they wouldn't be such a novelty in the public eye.

"People keep asking us over and over again to be public in some way," Woodworth says. "We wish we weren't the only ones."

The two aren't afraid to set an example for gay relationships because they believe marriage is important, especially as they approach their twilight years.

"The end of life is not likely to be the most luxurious and easiest thing for any of us," Marcoux says, but growing old can pose additional challenges for LGBTQ seniors, he adds.

Without being legally married, couples like Marcoux and Woodworth aren't automatically entitled to the same Social Security benefits that straight couples are. And for some LGBTQ seniors, the death of a partner means the surviving partner must enter a senior home, where some feel discrimination because of their sexual orientation.

Marcoux and Woodworth do not personally feel that will happen to them—they have a strong network of family and friends, they say. And they have a strong network with the people they've met at the Gay & Grey program.

So while they admit aging won't be easy, they embrace it, because over the years, they have grown closer.

"There are things about living and working with another human," Marcoux says, "being bored with them, being tired with them and yet being committed with them, being passionately in love with them ... moving through those things. There are times that we go through as people that when I was 20 I couldn't have understood."

CONTINUED ON PG. 22 >

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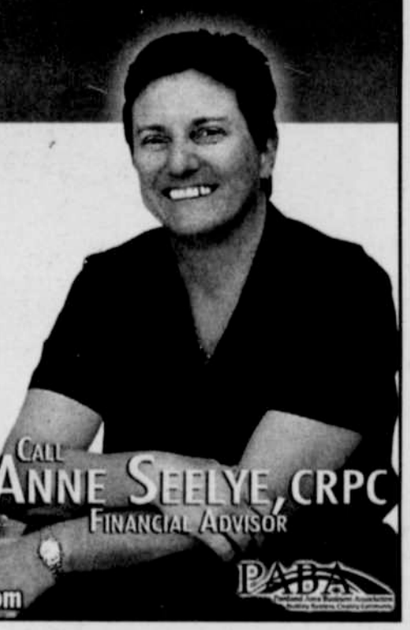

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