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Hands Across Hawthorne

Thousands hold hands to protest
apparent anti-gay assault

BY ERIN ROOK

More than 4,000 people of all ages and identities gathered in the rain Sunday, May 29 to hold hands across the Hawthorne Bridge, Ernesto Dominguez of Cascade AIDS Project estimated. The demonstration, pulled together by local LGBTQ organizations in fewer than 72 hours, was an act of solidarity with two gay men who were apparently attacked for holding hands the previous Sunday.

"As beautiful as I think holding Christopher's hand is, I can accept and respect those who disagree," said Brad Forkner, 23, who was assaulted May 22 while walking across the Hawthorne Bridge hand in hand with Christopher Rosevear, 25. "There are too many people in the world to agree with or like everyone. But what I cannot accept is asserting violence on another human being as a way of forcing them into silence, into hiding into fear."

Demonstrators packed into the space beneath the west side of the bridge at about 7:30 p.m., spilling over onto the ramp and stairs to hear from the attack's survivors. Afterward, the crowd filed down both sides of the bridge with hands held. Despite being tightly packed together, some attendees could not fit on the bridge.

"It was truly a beautiful sight to behold and feel so much love and support. We are both very grateful to everyone and hope they are all still holding hands today, and still having conversations with those around them about acceptance," Forkner said the next day.

Q Center, Cascade AIDS Project, Pride Northwest and Basic Rights Oregon worked together to organize the event after they learned about the attack, which happened almost exactly one year after the assault on a group of gay men in drag that sparked the creation of Q Patrol.

Forkner said he noticed a group of five or six men behind him and Rosevear as they walked along the waterfront and onto the Hawthorne Bridge, but thought nothing of it. As the two made their way down the off-ramp hand in hand they were attacked from behind by three white men in their twenties, about 5-foot-11 or 6-foot and medium-to-large build, wearing hooded sweatshirts—blue, white/cream and possibly brown.

"I was shoved—I think into the railing, as my side hurts—and punched in the face and head several times," Forkner said. "My first instinct was to run and I managed to get my



KELLY REIGWIN

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—BRAD FORKNER

phone out to call 911. They surrounded Christopher and hit him several times before noticing I was calling the police and ran off, south."

Neither man was seriously injured, but Rosevear required stitches on his lip and had a CT scan to rule out head trauma. Both were bruised and sore. Police have not yet identified the alleged suspects, but Detective Kevin Warren said the Portland Police Bureau is investigating the incident as a bias crime.

"This is not the first time I have feared for my safety or my life and, sadly, I don't expect it to be the last," Forkner said before the demonstration began. "What I want to talk about is a much larger cultural issue we have with making different people feel like they're worth less than normal people, as if there is such a thing as 'normal.' In this instance, it was because we are gay."

The day after the most recent attack, he