

Loud and Proud

PFLAG chapter strengthens Black Pride with family ties

BY ERIN ROOK

When Khalil Edwards came out as gay to his family in 1998 it was a "nonissue"—his parents had been doing LGBTQ activism for years and his brother was prepared to defend him. But the outside world was not as ready to stand by his side.

"Outside influences were telling me I needed to be the baddest, have the most women, have the most money, and let the world know," Edwards says. "There is homophobia in every community, but being black and gay not only forces you to deal with double discrimination, there is a cultural element to homophobia in the black community that I believe is rooted in racism."

Edwards' parents, Keith and Antoinette, have been working to change the cultural elements at the root of homophobia in the African-American community, and society at large, since at least 1992, when the couple worked with African-Americans Against Measure 9 to defeat the anti-gay ballot measure.

In the years before her son came out, Antoinette had already helped start the Gay-Straight Alliance at Jefferson High School, where she

worked as a family resource center coordinator. So when Edwards left the closet, he stepped out into a family already passionately engaged in the struggle for LGBTQ equality.

His parents also knocked on doors in an effort to defeat Measure 36 in 2004 and, most recently, in 2009 the couple helped start the first black chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) in the country.

Their son now serves as the coordinator for the PFLAG Portland Black Chapter, keeping the spirit of family activism alive and working to share the Edwards tradition of love and acceptance with the broader community.

"My personal goal and my goal for Black PFLAG is to erase the horror stories of coming out that, thankfully, I never

had to experience, but that too many others have, and do, and will," Edwards says. "My goal is to remind everyone that we all want the same things and should all be given the same things. We all want to be loved, accepted and respected for who we are."



"This year's Portland Black Pride really came about in a collaborative effort. People in the community wanted to make sure that this tradition continued."

-KHALIL EDWARDS

of LGBTQ black people. PFLAG PBC does not just offer support for family and friends,

but for LGBTQ black people as well, providing a place where they can bring all their identities and have them honored."

The PBC also offers a weekly support group where LGBTQ people of color can gather to share stories, organize and advocate and is in the process of developing services for youth.

"It is incredibly important to provide culturally specific support for LGBTQ youth of color who do not see themselves reflected in mainstream discussions," Edwards says. "Much of the recent coverage of the teenage suicides focused on youth who were white and male. We did not have national conversations about youth of color, gender nonconforming or female youth, working class youth."

PFLAG PBC hopes to address that lack of visibility by supporting Gay-Straight Alliances in a way that empowers rather than patronizes. The group is in the process of creating a GSA/Youth Grant Fund as well as a GSA Day Out to provide opportunities for relationship and skills building.

"We are excited about the community visibility we are experiencing for both PFLAG

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