

Take Me to Your Leader

New exec director Barbara McCullough-Jones arrives at Q Center BY RYAN J. PRADO

During the first couple of weeks following Q Center's announcement that, after a months-long search, the board had found their next executive director in Barbara McCullough-Jones, details on who she was were relatively scarce. A press release detailing an impressive resume of two decades of advocacy and outreach in LGBT community centers notwithstanding, McCullough-Jones, 53, and her spouse Sandra were on the road to Portland, likely taking the scenic route, and were summarily "offline," as Q's operations coordinator Paul Fukui put it. Fast forward to McCullough-Jones' arrival—in town, and at her desk at the helm of one of the most important organizations in the local LGBT community.

We're here to tell you it was worth the wait.

For one thing, McCullough-Jones' arrival in Portland isn't so much an arrival as a coming home. She and Sandra live in Keizer, where Sandra is from originally. The couple, who most recently resided in Arizona, have been together for 16 years. McCullough-Jones was born and raised in Seattle, where she attended Eastern Washington University, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in physical education and health sociology, and later a master's in education administration. It's worth noting that those fields of study don't necessarily scream "activism" or nonprofit work. It took McCullough-Jones some time to understand that her career path would carve a politically progressive niche.

"I ask myself that every day, 'How did I end up here?'" McCullough-Jones jokes from her new office at Q Center. Dozens of framed certifications, awards and other accolades sit stacked underneath the window awaiting their place on the wall. Her first position following the completion of her master's degree was at a work-training program for inner city youth for the City of Seattle. McCullough-Jones says

the program operated like a nonprofit, something to which she was immediately drawn.

"I loved the structure of that program and the way it was put together," McCullough-Jones says. "So I kept finding other opportunities like that, other nonprofit organizations that were unique in how they were put together or the community they served. That's really how I spent the last 20 years in the LGBT movement—looking for those unique elements of the movement. Fortunately, I've gotten to experience just about all of it."

That's no exaggeration. Be it through politics, the arts, social, community and health services and everything in between, McCullough-Jones has been on the cusp of the LGBT equality movement in a staggeringly diverse cross section of positions. During her time living in Phoenix, Ariz., she served as the director and founder of the Lesbian Resource Project, and was a founding member of the Valley of the Sun Lesbian and Gay Community Center. That center ran for about 10 years and was still in operation when McCullough-Jones moved to San Jose to serve as the executive director of the Billy DeFrank Lesbian and Gay Community Center.

She's also served on the Board of Directors for CenterLink, formerly the National Association of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Centers; was executive director at GALA Choruses, the international choral arts organization in Washington, D.C.; and most recently was executive director of Equality Arizona—the state's political advocacy organization for equal rights. Long story short, McCullough-Jones has the know-how and the desire to make great things happen for the LGBT community through her position at the Q—and not just Portland's sexual and gender minorities, but for the state at large.

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-BARBARA MCCULLOUGH-JONES

munity in such a strong, powerful way," McCullough-Jones explains. "I knew it was just waiting to take off and provide really good leadership on LGBT issues in the Portland metro area. There are other metro centers like Eugene or Corvallis that may look at a smaller version of [what Q does] but pick up that model. I think that's a great service we can provide here in Portland—to help the rest of the community statewide feel connected to a larger purpose."

In the limited time spent outside of helping front the national movement for LGBT rights, McCullough-Jones enjoys studying her family's genealogy—yet another time-consuming endeavor she's worked on for the past 35 years. She and Sandra are also avid campers—in true Northwest fashion—and look forward to revisiting spots they haven't seen in years.

But for the foreseeable future, McCullough-Jones' arrival as the successor to Kendall Clawson comes at a busy time for the Portland community. Pride is here. A new trans-inclusive health care bill has been approved unanimously by the City Council (see story, p. 12). Her first two weeks have been a whirl of briefings, quick meet-and-greets and cursory assessments of the programs and services of-



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fered by the community hub. Despite her experience in LGBT advocacy and outreach, it's an important period of adjustment. And for that, she needs the community's help.

"I think, in general, being an executive director can be kind of a fishbowl situation," McCullough-Jones says. "But I also think the expectations of leadership can be really high. You can't be a good leader unless other people step forward to help with the process, or to participate. The one thing I would invite the community to do is to come and join in. Join a group, start a group, develop a program, whatever works. Help get those stories of our lives out into the mainstream so it doesn't become such an anomaly, and we only get air-time in June Pride month. We want to see our stories on a regular basis."

"We hope to continue building the Q Center as a great place to support, and to call home." ■

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