

Health Inside and Out

Manifest Men's Wellness Community talks man to man

When Q Land was formed seven years ago, it was out of a need to provide HIV and STD testing in Portland metro's gay bars. But it wasn't long before that focus grew into Manifest Men's Wellness Community—a Portland-based nonprofit dedicated to improving the physical, spiritual and emotional health of men of all ages.

About 80 percent of gay and bisexual men will die from heart disease, not HIV/AIDS, says Manifest executive director Bart Church. Diabetes is positioned as the second deadliest chronic illness facing men in Portland. With treatment for cancer, HIV and suicides and accidents related to depression and anxiety basically the same for gay, bi and straight men, Manifest's wellness practices target all men, regardless of orientation or age. Serving a core group of about 50 members, Manifest draws men who've realized that their normal support systems have actually created negative effects on their health and well-being.

"Something's happened where they've had some physical or emotional challenge to their health that makes them want to do things differently," Church explains.

Manifest offers weekly and monthly programs—ranging from yoga classes and summer hiking expeditions to herbalism and nutrition classes—designed to both provide a healthy male support system, as well as to subconsciously break down societal barriers related to sexism and homophobia.

"Sexism teaches men to ignore their bodies, ignore their feelings, ignore their symptoms, and basically focus on work and sex," Church says. "There is no cultural support for men to take care of their emotional health, or their physical health. Everything [Manifest does] confronts the core stereotypes of masculinity, and also the core ideas about homophobia, because you're getting



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-BART CHURCH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MANIFEST MEN'S WELLNESS COMMUNITY

together and you're doing healthy activities with other men, and you're developing friendships with men around wellness activities."

On average, men in the Portland area die from preventable illnesses five years before women. Church stresses that a simple diet change, exercise and social connections can combat these illnesses.

"By having a group of friends to talk to about stress, loneliness and emotional well-being, men don't act out in ways that are dangerous to themselves," he says. "We try to get men together to learn and do things that are healthy."

For more information, visit manifestpdx.org.

—RYAN J. PRADO

Never Give Up

Portland Two Spirit Society marches into community

When Amanda Wright first attempted to form a Two Spirit Society in Portland six years ago, she was met with unfriendliness from her Native American community. Sadly, that first roadblock mirrored the struggles that Two Spirit people have encountered since the colonization of the Americas in the 15th century.

Two Spirit is an umbrella term that was coined in 1990, chosen to represent the equal balance of what is male and female. The term encompasses sexuality, gender identity and the traditional cultural role within native and indigenous communities. Customarily, Two Spirits were recognized as an honored people within tribes, acting as negotiators, name givers, healers, historians, warriors and council people, among other things. Colonizing Europeans saw Two Spirits as godless heathens, and as such they were brutally murdered. Afterward, their traditional roles in Native American cultures were forgotten. Wright's dreams of founding a Portland Two Spirit Society were realized last year, and she aims to add to the list of similar organizations nationwide seeking to reclaim their identity.

"It is my hope that PTSS can get a nonprofit status and work on building a social, cultural community for Two Spirits and their families as well as the native community and the queer community," explains Wright, who spoke at the Queer Students of Color Conference in late April. "There are more native people living within the Portland metro area than in any of the tribal communities in [Oregon], and I am hopeful we can be a resource for all urban and tribal communities within the state."

Wright has been spreading the word about PTSS and building a supportive Two Spirit community through various speaking engagements, along with potluck meetings and gatherings. Wright admits that most people haven't heard of Two Spirits—something she hopes to change by the time Portland Pride 2011 rolls around. The organization—currently numbering around 25 members—plans on having a walking group or small float in this year's parade, and is putting together a Portland Two Spirit Conference in the fall.



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-AMANDA WRIGHT, TWO SPIRIT SOCIETY

"We are very excited about [the conference] and look forward to the networking and community building this will bring," Wright says. "I am grateful to be part of PTSS and hope that we continue to grow and do good things in our community for generations to come, and for those who have already passed."

For more information, visit portlandtwospiritsociety.org, or email portlandtwospiritsociety@gmail.com.

—RYAN J. PRADO

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