

# Filling A Void

SOMOS connects a previously ignored population

In 2009, a small group decided that something needed to be done about the stigma of being gay in the Portland Latino community.

That group became SOMOS, whose goal was to be the first social and educational organization for Latinos. The word "somos" roughly translates to "we are all"—as in "we are all Latino, we are all gay, we are all lesbian," says Cesar Pecori, one of SOMOS' founding members.

The group is relatively new, but it's trying to get its name—and purpose—to the masses. SOMOS has had a vibrant presence in the Pride parade with a Carnival-inspired float, flamboyant headdresses, balloons, feathers and dancers.

SOMOS seeks to be a household name in the Latino population because its very mission is to connect the community. When it was established two years ago, there was no specific group that targeted LGBTQ Latinos, Pecori explains.

In his community particularly, Pecori says he noticed many people were becoming increasingly isolated.



"Young Latino men were coming out and didn't know where to go," he shares. "People wanted to know any other gay men or lesbians whom they could talk to." So SOMOS was created to provide support to others who weren't connected or involved with the community.

The founding members also thought it was important that the organization be one by and for Latinos. They envisioned a place where folks could feel comfortable and have no fear of discrimination.

"We wanted others in the community to see that the group was led by Latinos," Pecori says.

SOMOS holds meetings in the offices of Educate Ya, a nonprofit for the well-being of the Latino community. SOMOS organizes events, parties and support groups, and it also serves as a bridge to other resources. For example, sometimes Latinos need help finding medical or legal services geared toward them. The group offers bilingual assistance to help



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point individuals in the right direction.

SOMOS has several events planned for this summer, including a sex education and STD prevention workshop July 15, a potluck July 30 and a hike at Multnomah Falls August 13.

Visit [groups.google.com/group/somos-lgbtq-latinos](http://groups.google.com/group/somos-lgbtq-latinos).

—AARON SPENCER

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