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Age Ain't Nothin' But a Number

Old Lesbians Organizing for Change gather for first Pacific Northwest Regional conference

BY RYAN J. PRADO

Whether you've noticed it or not, ageism is everywhere. Chances are if you're unaware, you might be a part of the problem. Here's a quick test: Did you chuckle when Betty White and Abe Vigoda were famously tackled during a pickup football game in the Super Bowl XLV Snickers commercial? Mary Beth Brindley didn't, and odds are the entirety of the national organization Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC) felt the same way. On their watch, ageism has nowhere to hide.

"That was so belittling to knock those two marvelous and, yes, famous, people to the ground in the mud in order to advertise a candy bar," says Brindley, the chair of Portland's chapter of OLOC. "I got on the Internet and told them what I thought about that. Our nation must really enjoy seeing seniors pushed in the mud."

For the past 20 years, that sense of protecting and encouraging senior citizens to stand up against discrimination has fueled OLOC, and provided the benchmark for combating ageism not just in the LGBT community, but with seniors across the board. In 1990, a group of old lesbians in Santa Barbara, Calif. became fed up with the stigma, and sparked the first inklings of what became OLOC. In 1999, six Portland lesbians said the same thing and established

the Portland chapter. Now, for the first time in OLOC's history, the Pacific Northwest—specifically, Tacoma, Wash.—plays host to the organization's regional conference, which as co-founder Brindley sees it should help boost the group's visibility, and rally support for their important mission.

"An awful lot of old people, period—not just old lesbians—do not stick up for themselves," says Brindley, 71. "We absolutely must do that, be it on the bus, at the doctor's office, anywhere. Any instance where people

are belittling, downplaying old people, ignoring us, we have got to stand up for ourselves."

Portland's OLOC chapter has about 20 members total, with about 11 who actively support the group's efforts. The 2011 Regional Gathering—held July 28-31—is a partnership

"I would have never considered myself an activist until I came to Portland. I was too busy hiding in the closet to try to protect my sanity and my existence. It brought out the best in me."

-MARY BETH BRINDLEY

venture between Portland's chapter and the Puget Sound chapter. During the three-day conference, various panels and workshops tackle the themes of community, visibility and action, with a keynote address by award-winning author and historian Lillian Faderman. Keeping the community abreast of discriminatory issues facing old people has been at the center of Brindley's focus since she moved to Portland from Fort Worth, Texas 15 years ago.

"I was closeted for almost 40 years, so I

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