

Worth The Wait

PCC Rock Creek opens Queer Resource Center

BY AARON SPENCER

The Rock Creek campus of Portland Community College is about 12 miles west of downtown Portland, abutting the predominantly rural areas of North Bethany and Helvetia.

There, the students and staff have been working since last year to create an LGBTQ community center that would serve not only the students at the college, but the community at large.

The new Queer Resource Center, or QRC, had its grand opening on October 11, National Coming Out Day. The QRC's mission is much like that of the Q Center, the nonprofit LGBTQ hub in Portland. It's a designated space where people can come and connect with others in the LGBTQ population, participate in activities, get help if they need it and learn about the community's issues and history.

These resources are available at the Q Center in North Portland—near PCC's Cascade campus, in fact—but they are sparse in the suburbs.

"At a campus like Rock Creek, it makes sense that you would create these types of services and programs because these sorts of outlying areas don't have as much available," says David Martinez, the outreach and orientation coordinator with the Rock Creek campus and a member of the task force that started the QRC.

Students and staff invited the community to attend the grand opening, which was celebrated with a ribbon cutting, music and food. Tables were set up to educate people about the new QRC, and representatives from Cascade AIDS Project and the Portland Area Business Associ-

ation (PABA), as well as Q Center executive director Barbara McCullough-Jones, came to show support.

But the QRC didn't happen overnight. In fact, the very idea of a school-based QRC is something of a novelty, especially on a community college campus. Larger universities like Oregon State University and Portland State University have QRCs, though they go by various other names. But as far as staff at PCC Rock Creek can tell, their QRC is the first at any community college in Oregon.

"We're really at the forefront of a new and innovative program," says Joshua Peters-McBride, who as the clubs and programs specialist with PCC Rock Creek, helped drive the QRC forward. "Even though the concept of a QRC isn't new and innovative, at an academic level, it really is."

PCC Rock Creek's QRC sprang from the school's Gay-Straight Alliance, a club found at many schools and universities that's meant to provide support for LGBTQ youth (though the PCC club is in talks to rename itself the Queer-Straight Alliance, or QSA).

GSAs are not uncommon. Students often

at her high school in Scappoose, but parents eventually forced the club to shut down, she says. When she went to PCC Rock Creek, she got involved with its GSA.

"I joined the GSA, but it took me a while to get the courage to go to a meeting," she says, "and then when I went there I was like, 'This is where I belong.'"

The QRC idea came from students in the GSA and was brought before the school's student government. Around that time, in January, the school hired Peters-McBride, who had experience organizing queer groups at the University of Montana. He "really ran with the idea," Martinez says.

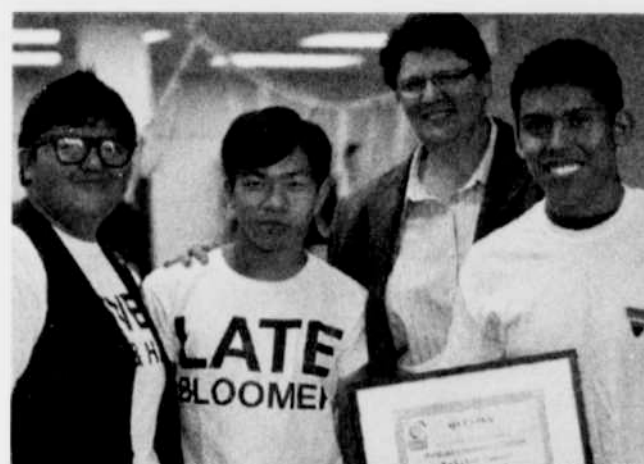
Student government worked with the dean of students to create a task force, which drafted a proposal for the QRC. That proposal was eventually okayed by the president of the campus with an annual budget of \$16,500 a year.

The QRC is operational now and sees about 30 to 50 people walk through its doors each day, says Peters-McBride, who has an office near the space.

Plans for future programming aren't concrete, but students envision events that can help the entire community.

"It's been a long time coming, but it's definitely been worth the wait," Peters-McBride says. ☐

For more information on the PCC Rock Creek QRC, visit pcc.edu/resources/aspc/rock-creek/qcenter.



Carlos Sanchez, Jazmin Sandoval, and Patrick Guillen were recognized for their efforts by Q Center executive director Barbara McCullough-Jones.

come to college from high schools that have GSAs, so they're looking for something similar in college, Martinez says. But the QRC is different from the GSA in that it provides a designated space for LGBTQ resources. It has a front lobby, or lounge, a collection of books, computers and a part-time staff.

One of those staff members is Jazmin Sandoval, a sophomore and student advocate for the QRC. She had been a member of her GSA



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