

# Sources Of Pride

Community members give back, one person at a time

BY AARON SPENCER

## Help for the Long Term

Shortly after Bill Bard, 65, moved to Oregon in 2002, he began taking full-time care of his aging mother. She was 87, and after four years under his care, she died.

Then Bard's own health started to buckle. Two months before his mother died, he noticed his shoes were too tight. He had a condition called idiopathic polyneuropathy, which caused him to lose feeling in his feet. Now he can't walk safely without assistance, and he uses a rolling walker to get around.

But Bard's disability didn't stop him from winning an Oregon Governor's Volunteer Award this year. He won in the Outstanding Senior Volunteer category for his work with the Oregon Long-Term Care Ombudsman, a federally mandated state agency that checks on the care of seniors in assisted-living facilities. It was work he started after his experience caring for his mother.

"I never had to place her in long-term care," Bard says, "but it was considered, and I learned a lot about the pros and cons."

Bard has been volunteering with the agency for four years. He is assigned to several facilities, where he goes to investigate care and check up on complaints. The work requires some training, people skills and a fair amount of record-keeping.

The record-keeping is where Bard shone. All of the activities done by the volunteers must be recorded and turned in to the state, which then submits the information to the federal office. When Bard began working with the ombudsman program, all of the forms were on paper. He had career experience doing information processing with airlines, and made the whole process an online, electronic one—an innovation that helped secure the governor's award nomination.

Bard also turned his interest toward a group



**Above:** (l to r) Deputy State Ombudsman Ana Potter, Bill Bard and Bard's partner, James Donder, at the Governor's Volunteer Awards Nov. 4

**Right:** Teri Bunker

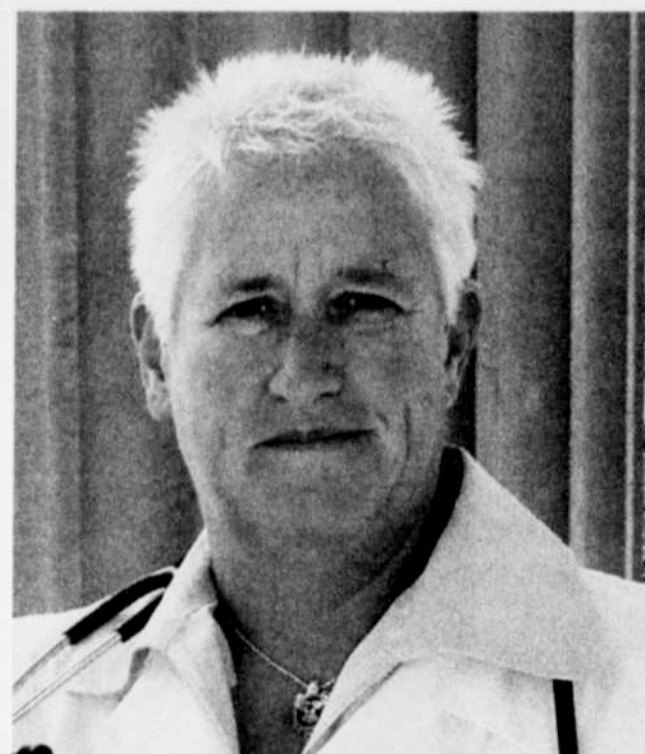
that was close to him: the state's aging LGBTQ population, seniors who often aren't prepared for the world they face when entering long-term care. Many haven't done the legal legwork required to avoid fights when they want to see their partners—to whom they are not legally wed. Some end up going back in the closet.

"Some of our gay and lesbian senior elders are ending up in long-term care, and I'm making it a mission of mine to make sure that there is no discrimination and to get the word out that there is help for you if you're gay," he says.

## Of Primary Concern

Teri Bunker, 47, has always taken care of underserved populations.

From Reno, Nev., she moved to Portland in 1986, got her nurse practitioner degree and went to work for the Multnomah County Sexually Transmitted Disease Clinic—"I've



seen it all, working there," she says.

She went next to the Clackamas County Health Department, where she took care of people who didn't have insurance.

Then in 2003, she decided to open her own clinic, Bridge City Family Medical Clinic, now located in Gateway. At the time, the Oregon Health Plan, the state's Medicaid program, had just suffered a budget cut. Bunker saw a lot of people without a primary care

provider and was well versed in taking care of individuals without insurance.

"I'm an entrepreneur at heart," she says. "I wanted to be the boss, and I did the math, and I just knew that I could do it."

Bunker is a big believer in primary care, and she wants it to be accessible to everyone, especially the LGBTQ population.

"They've had a lack of success with health care because there's a lack of acknowledgement with them—even on intake forms," she says.

Bunker tries to combat this problem from the first step a patient takes in her office. She doesn't make assumptions and gives people room to disclose their gender identity and sexual orientation.

"I've wanted my office to be a place that you would want to go whether your straight, gay, lesbian, bi, trans—whether you have Oregon Health Plan or regular insurance," she says.

She's notably seen several transgender patients, for whom all-inclusive health care coverage is more difficult to find. Bunker offers trans health care and spoke about the subject this year at the Nurse Practitioners of Oregon Education Conference.

In fact, about 20 percent of Oregonians do not have health insurance. But because Bunker is a strong proponent of primary care, she's trying to get over this hurdle by starting a plan of her own.

The plan offers coverage in return for a \$54 to \$89 fee per month, plus annual enrollment, and was helped made possible by Senate Bill 86, which passed this year and labels the service as health care, not insurance.

"I'm very passionate in primary care and finding ways to deliver primary care in a simple, affordable fashion that services the patients and the providers and not the insurance company," she says. "We need to take the insurance companies out of primary care." ☐



**Hala J. Gores, Attorney**

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