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# Raising The Bar

OGALLA: The LGBT Bar Association of Oregon strives for equality in the legal community

BY RYAN J. PRADO

As the decade inches further into the '10s, a who's who of equality organizations will celebrate milestone anniversaries. United in the fight against the discriminatory agenda of groups like the Oregon Citizens Alliance, and anti-gay ballot initiatives like Measures 8 and 9, activists in the early 1990s forged a legacy of Portland-based collectives. The class of 1991 includes OGALLA: The LGBT Bar Association of Oregon, founded 20 years ago to support the needs of LGBT people in the legal profession. Boasting a network of some 400 attorneys, judges, law students, educators, paralegals and more, OGALLA's work has played a critical role in the advancement of a more equitable judiciary system.

Sarah Adams, an attorney and teacher at Lewis and Clark Law School, has sat as OGALLA's chair for the past three years. After coming out as a lesbian, she was drawn to the organization as a source of support

"[Students] don't really care often about what lawyers are doing," says Adams. "But telling young people about how many openly gay or lesbian judges and Oregon Supreme Court justices there are can be really inspiring to them—sometimes also to the parents who are worried that their kids' lives are ruined because they come out."

—SARAH ADAMS, CHAIR, OGALLA

for those in the legal profession who were also part of the LGBT community.

"Twenty years ago, OGALLA came into being as an organization when Portland and Oregon were hostile places to be openly gay and lesbian and practice law," explains Adams, noting that at first, OGALLA had to have a secret membership list. "Five years ago, I found that I was in a very different place. I could be openly lesbian. I had no fear of being fired from my job. The same major law firms that 20 years ago were discriminating are now hosting OGALLA functions, and are now major sponsors."


Adams says that while OGALLA doesn't deserve all the credit, it is an integral part of the evolution of equality in Oregon's legal echelons. From the beginning, OGALLA assumed a proactive stance against statewide inequalities based on sexual orientation. In

1990, an early steering committee version of OGALLA lent its support to a University of Oregon professor who was forced by the school's dean to publicly apologize to his students for announcing he was gay in class. That same year, OGALLA helped convince the state bar association to revise its policy on hiring notices after an attorney wrote a homophobic letter to a newspaper, while also advertising a job vacancy in the same issue. As a result, the Oregon State Bar refused to publish hiring notices from legal firms that discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation, race, color, national origin, handicap or familial status.


Over the past two decades, OGALLA has diversified its impact, using partnerships with organizations such as Basic

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Virginia Linder (above left, with her partner Colleen Sealock) and Rives Kistler (below), openly gay Oregon Supreme Court justices

