

Communities of color, LGBTQ communities share values

BY AMY LAM
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

Almost a decade ago, Christian Baeff arrived in Oregon unable to speak the most basic English. He was 21 years old, struggling to stay in college and to find work in his native Buenos Aires, Argentina. His mother had an even tougher time finding a job. Together, they decided to

search for new opportunities in the U.S. They borrowed money from a family friend for plane tickets and ended up in Salem, Oregon.

It wasn't easy settling into a new home in a new country. And for Christian, he struggled with his sexual identity on top of all the stresses that comes with building a new life in a foreign place. He came out as gay four years later and was lucky to have support from his family and friends in Oregon and Argentina.

Christian was fortunate that he could be his whole self in the communities he belonged to and he felt a desire to give back when the opportunity arose with CAUSA. CAUSA is Oregon's statewide Latino immigrant rights coalition that works towards progressive policy changes by rallying their members all the way to the legislature.

CAUSA has a history of standing in solidarity with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) community as an ally to organizations fighting anti-gay ballot measures. But CAUSA felt like they could do more.

"While that was really powerful work to do," said CAUSA organizer Aeryca Steinbauer, "it created a sense of 'we're the straight Latino organization supporting white gay folks' which wasn't how it was."

In 2010, CAUSA joined the groundbreaking Uniting Communities, a project that supported organizations of color to have meaningful conversations about LGBTQ issues and to begin taking a stand on LGBTQ equality.

"When I was asked to volunteer for CAUSA to make the inclusion of the LGBTQ community a reality, I said yes right away," said Christian. "I cared about the Uniting Communities project because it recognizes my multiple identities and the daily problems that I face." Christian became the core volunteer for CAUSA and helped CAUSA to identify and address the connections between Latino and LGBTQ issues.

Uniting Communities, a project of Western States Center, provided the space and support for CAUSA to examine how they could fully integrate and engage LGBTQ issues into every aspect of their work and community. The Center provided training to help CAUSA become more inclusive and to connect immigration rights work to struggles faced by LGBTQ people in their community.

"Participating in the Uniting Communities project has really been about owning this work as part of who we are as an organization and community. It is our organizational values and who our leadership is," said Aeryca. "This has been a really transformative process."

In 2010, Uniting Communities supported six organizations based in communities of color to advance LGBTQ equality. These organizations had the opportunity to learn about and encourage each others' work. "We were able to connect with other groups to exchange ideas," said Christian. "We all have the same passion and having a main organization like the Center to go to for support is crucial."

The impact of Uniting Communities found its way through all of the work that

CAUSA does, including the Leadership Development Program that trains Latinos to become leaders. Because of Uniting Communities CAUSA created an environment where their members felt safe to come out as LGBTQ and be their whole selves.

An informal group of Latino LGBTQ folks have started to come together. Christian attends the LGBTQ Latinos and Friends group and said, "I have LGBTQ friends who are in need of support and that's why we need a space to open ourselves and address our issues."

Organizations like CAUSA offer the Latino, immigrant and LGBTQ communities hope that the multiple identities of their members will always be recognized – and that they are all in the struggle and fight for justice and equality.

In the next few months, stories about Uniting Communities groups such as Portland's Black PFLAG and Indigenous Ways of Knowing will feature their journey in incorporating LGBTQ work in their communities of color. Stay tuned to learn about how your community groups are working to create social justice for all.

To find out more about Uniting Communities and Western States Center go to: www.WesternStatesCenter.org

The May Day March and Rally will celebrate International Worker's day. CAUSA's members, partners and allies will get together to rally for driver's license access, tuition equity and quality education, safer communities, healthcare equity, affordable housing, family unity, jobs and economic recovery. There will be opportunities for LGBTQ community members to express themselves through testimonials to share their experiences.

CAUSA May Day March and Rally
When: May 01, 2011
Time: 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Where: Oregon State Capitol Front Steps, Salem, 900 Court Street NE.

For more information:
English: 503.488.0263
Spanish: 503.984.4823



Amy Lam is the Development & Communications Associate at the Western States Center, which aims to build a progressive movement by supporting grassroots organizations. The Center's Uniting Communities project works with organizations based in communities of color to advance LGBTQ equality.

Sidewalk use and musicians part of the larger code of courtesy

BY AMANDA FRITZ



Commissioner Amanda Fritz is a member of the Portland City Council.

Bucket drums, violins, trumpets, and keyboards: the sounds of a typical, vibrant day on the streets of Downtown Portland. Beautiful. Yet imagine you are a worker in a nearby store or office, or a retired resident on the lower floors of an apartment building, listening to the same performer playing the same sets over and over, all day every day. Not so much fun, perhaps. Back in 1994, musicians, community members, business leaders and government agencies sat down together and created the Street Musician Agreement, seeking to maintain Downtown's unique musical culture while respecting that Downtown is home to residents, businesses and office jobs. It achieved a workable understanding between street musicians and other Downtown interests, so each would have their needs met.

The Street Musician Agreement recognizes the needs of musicians and importance of music to Portland. To give access to each performer, the agreement asks musicians to: space themselves one block apart; rotate their location every 60 minutes to allow for everyone to enjoy prime locations; and to return to a location only twice in one day after a 60 minute break. Musicians should comply with Portland's Noise Control ordinance, which

states that noise should not be audible more than 100 feet away in any direction (including vertical). Community members are asked to treat musicians with respect and not interrupt a musician in the middle of a number.

Downtown sidewalk use was a highly contentious issue when I took office. In 2009, my first year, I led the dialogue and hosted public meetings to discuss the former "Sit-Lie" ordinance, seeking common ground on how everyone can share Portland's sidewalks. While finding consensus is still difficult, the animosity in the debate significantly diminished after Portlanders had the opportunity to share ideas and life experiences with one another. Through the course of public involvement and information exchange, my city colleagues and I formulated a Sidewalk Management Plan addressing multiple uses of Downtown's sidewalks. The ordinance includes an exclusion allowing street musicians to play on any part of any sidewalk, when they comply with the Street Musician Agreement. The Sidewalk Use process paved the way for other successful public policy and strategy discussions, including the Street Musician Agreement forum.

I hosted the forum on February in response to concerns I heard from

community members and street musicians that the Agreement is no longer working as intended. Some residents and workers experience musicians playing in the same location for hours. Bucket drummers often exceed the Noise Ordinance limits. Musicians report being harassed. As a result, musicians, business owners, residents and government employees attended the forum to discuss how to improve the Street Musician Agreement. Most participants concluded the Agreement was written in good spirit, and improvement efforts should be focused on educating everyone about its provisions. This column is part of that effort.

The Street Musician Agreement is not law. It is an agreement reached by members of the community working together: musicians, businesses, residents, law enforcement, and public servants. It trusts people to use good judgment, kindness and courtesy towards one another. The more we as Portlanders treat one another with respect and compassion, the better our City works.

This column was co-authored by Sara Hussein, who staffs the Sharing Public Sidewalks Advisory Group and the Street Musician Agreement review process. For more information, contact Sara at 503-823-3994 or sara.hussein@portlandoregon.gov

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