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Bonnie Berman



tion made life as a lesbian feel like part of the norm.

But six women who were interviewed for this story were apprehensive about giving out their last names. Three were even wary of giving out their true first names. A woman who owns a well-established business outside of Eugene says, "I say I'm lesbian if asked. But being in a newspaper article might not sit well in my conservative community. As a business owner, I have to take that into account." She says when she retires in a few years, she'll be out and proud as she wants to be.

Requests for photographs were turned down by more than half a dozen women. A Springfield couple, Dee and Lynn, have been politically active and are completely out with family, friends, coworkers, everyone. But the

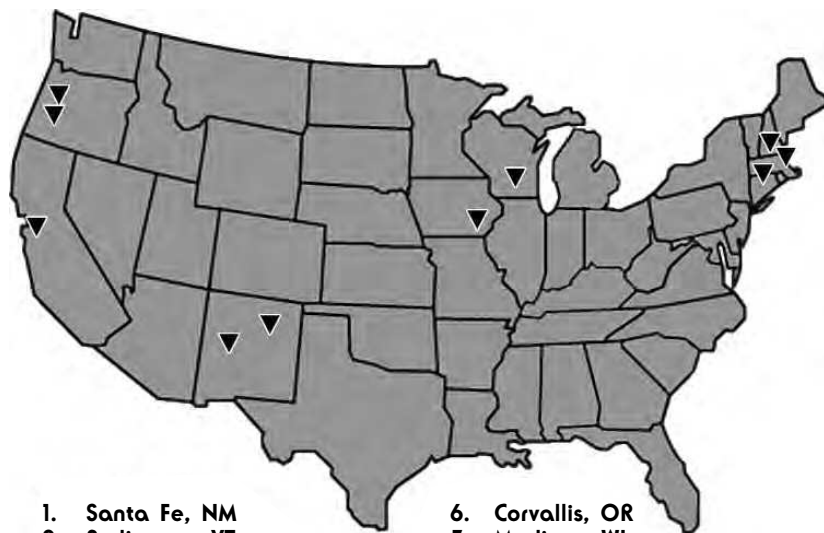
idea of being in the media made Dee say matter-of-factly, "There's nut jobs everywhere." They've known enough harassment that it seems better to lay just a little low. There's still caution, even a little fear, in this community.

Good news is, the talk about gay and lesbian rights is going on loud and clear at the national level. And, according to the City Recorder's Office, in about 25 weeks since the Domestic Partnership Registry in Eugene has been open for registrants, 45 couples, nearly all of the same-sex, have signed up in official partnership.

And, as Kim (who didn't give her last name) says, "More lesbians here means more lesbians will come here. And that is a good thing." Maybe Eugene is on its way to living up to its reputation. ▼

Top 10 Metro Areas for Lesbians

(from Population Today)



- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Santa Fe, NM | 6. Corvallis, OR |
| 2. Burlington, VT | 7. Madison, WI |
| 3. Portland, ME | 8. Albuquerque, NM |
| 4. Springfield, MA | 9. Eugene, OR |
| 5. San Francisco/Oakland, CA | 10. Iowa City, IA |

What is the appeal of these cities for lesbians? "Part of the draw," says Lynn Stephen, "is that women generally have lower salaries than men. A household of two women is more likely to settle in a place where you can get more for your money."

Economics are important for a female couple to consider — the "glass ceiling" effect doubles for them. Just to get an idea: In 1990, (according to the General Social Survey and the National Health and Social Life survey), lesbians earned an average of \$23,000; gay men earned an average of \$28,000 (men in general earned an average \$32,000). Additionally, lesbian couples (23 percent in 1990) were also more likely to be parents, so earning potential and affordability were critical draws for women looking to settle down.

University towns (which defines most of the cities on the list) tend to have institutions — bookstores, cafes, publications — that support tolerance and diversity, and they also tend to be safe, stable places to raise children. — *Bobbie Willis*

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