



Success on Wheels

'Gorgeous' Oregon Bus Project celebrates victories.

They might have knocked on your door on Halloween, daring you to "trick or vote." Maybe you were one of the 6,000 Oregonians who registered at their hip-hop voter drive in Portland. Or you might have noticed a bizarre series of "I Saw You" ads in *EW*'s classifieds seeking gorgeous men in Elect Prozanski T-shirts.

However quirky their methods, volunteers for the Oregon Bus Project — an organization working to engage and educate voters to elect progressive candidates in the state — have been grabbing a lot of attention. And for the most part, it's worked. All five of the Project-endorsed Oregon Senate candidates won, resulting in the first progressive-controlled state Senate in 12 years. The Project also endorsed seven triumphant state representative candidates as well as winning Lane County candidates Bonny Bettman, Andrea Ortiz, Betty Taylor and Kitty Piercy.

The secret to their success, according to Oregon Bus Project-Lane Chair James Mattiace, is planning. "The idea for changing the Senate was a plan that started three years ago," he says. "Everything was geared toward the end goal of achieving that. We never lost sight of the big picture, and we had fun while doing it."

Most of the Project's 6,000 volunteers — 450 in Lane County alone — are younger than 30 years old. Mattiace, a high school teacher who dedicated 20-30 unpaid hours per week to the project, is 29. And one of the Project's two local paid staff members, Ron Batdorf, is a UO freshman.

Sen. Floyd Prozanski credits the Bus Project for engaging youth in the campaigns. "It's crucial that young people understand the political and civic processes, and they [the Bus Project] help foster long-term involvement among youth," he says.

Perhaps one of the Bus Project's greatest appeals is that it cleaves to the weird and creative. When activist-writer Arianna Huffington visited Eugene last May, four local Bus Project volunteers — Jonathon Manton, Gary Gillespie, Clark Morberg and Mattiace — were her escorts for the evening. At one point her cell phone rang; it was Dennis Kucinich. "Oh hello, Dennis," Huffington said. "I just got picked up by four gorgeous men." She then posted the phrase on her web blog: "I just arrived in Eugene, Ore. It's absolutely beautiful. I was picked up by four gorgeous men of the Lane County Bus Project."

The guys rolled with it. "None of us are

gorgeous," says Mattiace, "but we're milking that as far as we can get." So they made up T-shirts that read, "Just one gorgeous man making a difference for the Oregon Bus Project" and placed "I Saw You" ads in the *EW* classifieds seeking a "tall, gorgeous blond guy with an Elect Prozanski shirt." Mattiace says it's just another way to draw people in. "It's funny, so we'll use it," he says. "We'll use any schtick that gets more attention for the Bus Project."

In addition, the local Project hosts community-building events such as the Stuff-the-Bus drive for FOOD for Lane County and a donations drive for Centro Latino. "There are a lot of folks who need more than politics as usual," Mattiace says. "If we make it more about community, people will volunteer."

While it's not technically partisan, the Project tends to endorse mostly liberal-leaning, progressive candidates who support what Mattiace calls the "six e's: environment, equal rights, economic fairness, education, election reform, and 'ealth care.'" Mattiace pauses to let the last one sink in. "We couldn't call it five e's and an h," he says.

To decide where to dedicate their efforts, the Project looks to groups like the Oregon League of Conservation Voters, the Senate Democratic Caucus, and local progressive coalitions. "We listen to folks that are really aware of what's going on statewide and have their ears to the ground," says Mattiace. "It's a calculation, and a lot of it's based on rumor. We don't get involved in issues that split progressives."

Despite all their efforts, not all of the Project's endorsements won. Measure 37, which the Project opposed on environmental and economic grounds, passed soundly even in Lane County. State Rep. candidate Bev Fick, outspent 2-1 by her opponent Debi Farr, narrowly lost. And East Lane Commission candidate Don Hampton was defeated by Faye Stewart.

But the bus isn't parking now that the campaigns are over. Local Project volunteers are planning to hold a fundraising drive in December, drive people to Salem for organized Lobby Days, and keep close tabs on the Eugene City Council and the Lane County Board of Commissioners.

That's good news for local progressives. "The Bus Project is the best thing that ever happened to politics in Eugene," says activist Ruth Duemler. "It really gets your imagination going."

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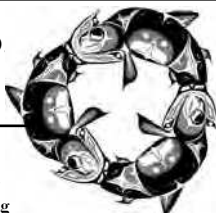
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