

## LGBTQ from 1A

Some of it is due to organizational issues, she said, but some of it has to do with the national shift toward LGBTQ acceptance.

Ever since the 2015 Supreme Court ruling of Obergefell v. Hodges, which granted marriage rights to same-sex couples, along with an influx of positive LGBTQ role models in media and President Obama's acceptance of transgender soldiers in the military, the role of organizations like PFLAG have been put into question: Is the day of LGBTQ activism over?

Hudson doesn't believe that Florence is a hotbed of outward anti-LGBTQ attitudes, a feeling shared by all who were interviewed for this article.

"When I've marched with PFLAG in the Rhody Day parade, there have been a few people on the parade route that made disparaging remarks," she said. "Everyone else was either quiet or supportive. There were actually several groups that were yelling, 'Yay, PFLAG.'"

But with no visibly active community centers or major organizations in the community, aside from PFLAG, a high school gay/straight alliance, and small groups of meetups with friends, it seems that the old battle cry has come to fruition; LGBTQ is here, they're queer and people have pretty much gotten used to it.

Hudson said that although the days of rights marches that defined the movement in the 1990s and 2000s has come to an end, organizations like PFLAG are important because education surrounding issues needed to continue.

"We educate," she said. "We're still educating. We're out there letting people know that there were a lot of great laws passed and things got better, but as we can see things are going the other direction again."

Hudson pointed out to current reversals in transgender policies in the military and national anti-discrimination protections for LGBTQ.

"It's one of those things where people need to stay vigilant because there's always going to be some politician coming around trying to mess with people's rights, or their dignity or who knows. This isn't completely over. It looks good, but it's not finished, I'm sure," she said.

What the education consists of, and how it is done, has become a national discussion in the LGBTQ community.

The Siuslaw News interviewed multiple members of the community — from lesbians to bisexuals, gay men and Hudson to see where the Florence LGBTQ community is at when it comes to the state of their rights in the region, and found a diversity of opinions.

### "What's the big deal?"

"You know, there's at least 300 gays and lesbians in this town, at least," Jennifer French said. "It's a big community."

It's a community that French, along with her wife Sally Wantz, have been a part of since 2003.

The couple, who met in 2001, fell in love with the Florence area the moment they arrived.

"It just felt natural," Wantz said. "It felt like eating peanut butter off the spoon."

When asked if they had fears about moving to a small town as an open lesbian couple, French said, "It never entered my mind.

Some people might be afraid, because small towns are supposed to be conservative, but you'll find our town pretty progressive."

Wantz agreed, saying, "I think this is the best witness protection agency in the world."

It's that attitude that informed how they would approach revealing who they were to the community. It wasn't a slow, hushed process. They just "came out" right out of the gate.

When Wantz joined Rotary International when she first arrived, she was immediately open about her relationship with French.

"I see some of the divisions and I think to myself, 'Okay, I'm sitting next to someone at Rotary and I'm doing good for my community,'" she said. "Can I let go of the thoughts that this is a far right, Republican Evangelical? Yes. Can he or she let go of the fact that I might be sexually different than her? Yes. And that's how we win. That we show we're just as normal as everyone else."

Wantz stated that everyone in Rotary, including those she thought may have had objections, welcomed the couple with open arms.

"I think we've done a lot for the community because people see us as normal," French said. "They don't think of us as lesbians or gay or whatever, they just love us for who we are. So that kind of has pushed the walls a little bit."

LGBTQ is normalized in society, they believe, by just being normal.

But what about a greater LGBTQ community, one that is organized to give each other support, and help those who are still hesitant to come out? Wantz and French engaged in a lively back and forth about the topic.

"I came into this lifestyle late in life," Wantz said. "I lived as a heterosexual for 50 years. And then, I didn't. And I guess I just feel like, what's the big deal? Why do we need an LGBT community? If we're all just getting along and doing what we need to do, we shouldn't have to have our own little club."

"But what about the people who need our support?" French asked.

"It sounds harsh, and it feels harsh when I say it," Wantz replied.

"The labels and the divisions, we don't need any more of those, that's for sure," French said. "If we could all just get along. But I think some people do need support. I know women who are afraid to come out in this town."

Wantz agreed.

"A lot of them are still afraid," she said. "They haven't told their parents."

Wantz has unique views about the community and LGBTQ

groups.

"In Denver, you could only go so many places. You didn't feel comfortable going anywhere, except two gay and lesbian bars. I'm not of that. I don't want to go to a gay and lesbian bar, I'm sorry. I don't want that restrictive community. I didn't even want to be associated as a lesbian. I'm Sally. And I happen to be married to Jennifer. And it happens to be a good life. I don't think we need a separate gay and lesbian community in Florence. I think we all have our friends, we gravitate toward our particular faith, these people of a particular sexual persuasion and these people of different community mindedness. And we all cross pollinate. It just is."

For French, those bars helped her become more comfortable in life.

"In Denver, I was interested in going to bars and meeting women. That's where I got comfortable. Here I'm comfortable with people. I have many, many lesbian friends. And gay guy friends. We did a talk this last Sunday on what the purpose of life is. And my whole purpose in life was an activist for the LGBT community for what seems like forever," she said.

But as far as French's involvement in the community now, she stated, "I go out with a lot of straight people, so I don't cling to that at all."

In fact, Wantz stated that the majority of their friends were straight.

"I do think some gays and lesbians do need that support, and they look for that in our community," French said.

The discussion Wantz and French had regarding the issue is somewhat indicative of what's going on in America right now. Wantz certainly doesn't bemoan the LGBTQ movement, and is supportive of programs like PFLAG, particularly if they help those in need.

"Go on, have fun, send us an invitation and we'll come if we can," she said.

And both have spoken out at community organizations about their sexuality. French was involved with a community forum held at the Siuslaw Public Library about the subject, and Wantz and French have both spoken about the issue at their church.

"I think one avenue for the LGBTQ in Florence is to seek out faith communities that are accepting," Wantz said "You'll meet people and get connected with a group of people who are like-minded and will accept you automatically. I talked to one person and asked, 'What do you do after work?' She said, 'Nothing.' I told her to get involved with the theater, follow her passion. That's where you build. Get involved in the place where you're most comfortable, be yourself without freaking everybody out, and just be accepted gradually."

French agreed.

"That is how you get out. You network, you find your passions," she said. "That gets us outside of ourselves. Get out there, be yourself, and good things will happen."

### "Erasure"

Jacqueline Guy doesn't want to be a representative for the

entire bisexual community in the Siuslaw region, though it can be difficult not to feel like a representative.

It's not that there aren't bisexuals in the area. In fact, statistically, people who identify as "bi" are the majority of LGBTQ people. A 2014 government national survey of family growth found that five percent of women and two percent of men identified as bisexual, compared to one percent of women identifying as lesbian and two percent of men identifying as gay.

But coming out as bisexual can be more of a challenge. In a 2013 Pew Research study, only 28 percent of bisexuals had come out to important people in their lives, compared to 77 percent of gay men and 71 percent of lesbians.

The reasons for these numbers are varied, but much of it has to do with the concept of "erasure." Because of that, being vocal about bisexuality is important for Guy.

She and her girlfriend have lived in Florence for the past year. Guy strongly identifies as bisexual and considers herself firmly within the LGBTQ community. She's also seen why it can be difficult for those who identify that way.

"I liked boys when I was young. And all the information I had from the media was that 'lesbians hate men.' And I didn't hate men, so I thought I couldn't be a lesbian. But I was attracted to girls too, so I couldn't be straight. I'd never seen that it was okay to like both," she said. "There are people who don't identify (as bi) because they don't know that they can, and they don't know they can feel comfortable, just like the rest of the LGBTQ community."

But even when Guy was able to come out as a vocal bisexual, she was still met with doubt.

"People think we're lying," she said. "Or that we're not totally out of the closet yet. 'Oh, don't worry, you'll be gay in a couple of years.' Well, I don't think I will be."

"I think that a lot of people see it a kind of being one foot in both camps. You get to be a part of the heterosexual community, as well as the gay community, but it can often be the opposite. I feel like some of the most disbelief I've gotten is from the homosexual community. There's a lot of misinformation about bisexuality in general and it leads to a lot of erasure."

In Guy's case, people see her with her girlfriend and just assume she's a lesbian, therefore erasing her bisexual identity.

Another issue she constantly faces is when people automatically assume she cheats on her partners.

"There are common misunderstandings that a bisexual person can't be faithful because they can't be satisfied by one partner, which is completely untrue," Guy said. "It doesn't matter how many genders you're attracted to. Your ability to be faithful is not about that. Your ability to be faithful is who you are."

Guy believed too much emphasis is put on the pure sexual aspects of LGBTQ. Attraction goes beyond just the physical, but that can often be

dismissed, particularly when women are involved. She mentioned the commoditization of women's bodies in the media, and that women's sexuality has been fetishized.

"It's what we use to sell everything," she said.

For many who identify as bisexual, one of the biggest hurdles they face is about sexuality in human nature as a whole.

"Sexuality is a spectrum and will change throughout your life. People will decide late in life to start identifying in a different way. It doesn't mean they weren't one way at a different time, it doesn't mean that they were. There's more fluidity in it," she said.

She said she currently identifies as bisexual, but that could change.

"Who I'm attracted to and my sexual identity is fluid. It's hard for people to understand that. America is just now accepting that people are born gay. But the idea that later on in life you might decide that you also like the same gender, it's like 'Wait a second, so you're gay now?' No, not necessarily."

While the idea of being lesbian or gay has been more or less accepted in society, bisexuality, along with transgenderism, still needs to be fought for.

"It's important for me to be a member of the community because I feel safe with my sexuality. To me, it's very important that I'm a bisexual. When I'm mislabeled, I'll say 'Oh, actually, I'm bi.' I don't make a big production out of it. It's just about being in the community and sharing who I am and what I know and sharing that when I can. It's hugely important. It's important for me to share lots of myself."

Educating those within and outside her community goes beyond just being vocal herself, Guy said. She does believe there needs to be a vocal community in the region.

"We need those things," she said. "I don't know why it's not happening."

One reason it isn't happening, Guy believes, is because we've become an age of internet activism.

"I'll share an article on Facebook, but what is that doing beyond my bubble of friends?" she asked. She said she's stopped sharing online articles and started calling congressmen about issues she passionate about, but even then she could not be sure of what ultimate change it provided.

"To have this social change and be a social warrior, it means putting something above so many other things in your life. Of course it's worth it, but it's hard to find those people who are able to have the natural ability and the means to focus 100 percent on it. And I think, 'What am I doing? I'm a part of this community and I'm not doing anything.' Just 'being' is enough sometimes. The more visible you can be, the better, and the more comfortable you can be, the better, but I think everybody could do a little bit more," Guy said.

In Saturday's edition, learn about other LGBTQ perspectives on the idea of community and living in the Siuslaw region.

## Cindy Wobbe Estate Sales

### ESTATE SALE

October 13 & 14, 9am to 3pm

#### FLORENTINE ESTATES

(Use 35th Street entrance ONLY)

Prime estate of beautiful examples of Mid-Century and early Danish modern furniture/decor and artwork, art and artifacts collected from a lifetime of international travel, office supplies, housewares, clothing, outdoor/garden, and a nice collection of art and travel related books. Use entrance at 35th Street (off Hwy. 101) ONLY - gate attendant will provide address and directions upon entrance.

Everything must go!  
All Sales Final / Credit Cards Accepted  
View online photos at

[www.CindyWobbeEstates.com](http://www.CindyWobbeEstates.com)

Ring 541.999.0126



### FRAA ART CENTER

120 Maple Street  
Phone: 541-997-4435  
Hours Open: Wed-Fri noon-5pm,  
Sat 10am-5pm, Sun. noon-5pm

## Classes, Workshops & Events

#### Annual Members' Meeting

Monday, October 16, 3:30 pm. Come learn about what we have been doing and upcoming events, hear the results of our annual survey, vote for new board members.

#### Next Art Swap Day

Monday, November 13th, 9-11 am  
Please pick up your artwork and bring something new to keep the art at FRAA fresh to our visitors.

#### Open Studio @ FRAA, Thursdays

No registration required. Drop-in, bring your materials, and create. All artistic mediums welcome.  
Every Thursday, 1-4 pm

#### Whimsical Hand Building

**Ceramics w/ Alissa Clark**  
Wednesdays, 3-5 pm & Thursdays, 6-8 pm  
**Open Lab Ceramics on Saturdays**  
Drop in, work at own pace. Sat 12-5 pm  
All ceramics classes held at Alissa's Studio, 180 Laurel Street. Call Alissa with questions: 503-857-5222

#### NEW! Florence Big Wave

**Spooky Word Contest**  
Friday, October 27, 7 pm at FRAA  
\$10 minimum donation at the door to benefit Malakia's bone marrow transplant. Poets, songwriters, storytellers all welcome. Must be your original work. Limited to 4 minutes.  
Registration at 6:30 pm. \$100 First Prize, gift certificates for 2nd and 3rd prize as well as best costume!

#### Catherine Rourke will be back in 2018 for new Creative Writing Workshops!

**Painting with John Leasure**  
Saturdays 9 am - 12 pm  
Oct 14, 21 and 28, Nov 4, 11, 18 and 25  
Contact: [jleasure@hotmail.com](mailto:jleasure@hotmail.com) or 541-991-2754 for details and fees.

**Oil Painting with Michael Wood**  
Wednesdays 1:30 pm - 4:30 pm  
Contact: [mwood@msn.com](mailto:mwood@msn.com) for fees and more information.

## DENTURE SERVICES INC.

LOCALLY OWNED AND OPERATED

Open 4 days a week!



William Foster LD  
Sherry, Office Manager

"As a denture wearer myself, I can answer your questions and address your denture concerns."  
~ William Foster, LD

Here to serve your denture needs:

Dentures  
Partial Dentures  
Immediate Dentures  
Implant Dentures  
Relines & Repairs Same Day

Monday-Thursday  
10am - 2 pm

524 Laurel St.  
541-997-6054



For more information about classes, visit [fraaoregon.org](http://fraaoregon.org). To register for these classes, please call or visit FRAA at our art center on Maple Street.

Financing: Citi Health Card  
12 Month no Interest