

GLBT Alliance

Responses of Leonie Sherman City Council 2014

1- Please tell us why you are interested in reaching out to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender community.

ANSWER: As a new candidate, I see my job as listening and learning as much as I can. I want to reach out to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community for the same reason I want to (and do!) reach out to any community in Santa Cruz - I hope to make sure the full diversity of our community is represented and has their needs and issues heard by our governing bodies.

2- Why do you want the endorsement of The GLBT Alliance, Santa Cruz County's grassroots progressive gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender political organization?

ANSWER: I am proud to have such a vibrant progressive grassroots organization in town, and since I am such a vibrant progressive grassroots candidate, this endorsement seems like a natural fit. I hope that with an endorsement also comes the ability to dialogue with your organization, to reach out and ask questions as they arise and know that I have allies in the LGBT community who can help me understand complicated issues.

3 - Please tell us about your history with the LGBT community, and your awareness of issues specific to our community.

a - Have you had any opportunities to address LGBT issues in the course of your community service or professional life to date (i.e., have you helped formulate corporate non-discrimination standards, worked on the board of a non-profit that developed a LGBT outreach program, etc.)? If so, please tell us about this work.

ANSWER: I've worked and lived and studied with the LGBT community since my college involvement with Queer Nation and a brief stint on a lesbian separatist commune in the early 90s. For the past twenty years, many of my friends, neighbors and co-workers have been deeply involved in the LGBT community and issues pertaining to their lives and the community come up in every day conversation, so I'd say I am moderately familiar with issues specific to the LGBT community. I look forward to the opportunity to work with the GLBT Alliance to learn more.

For over a decade I have taught self-defense classes for women. Many of my students are lesbians and share their personal experiences and stories through our class; I work carefully to help them feel safe and deal with the specific issues they raise.

b - The queer community is diverse, and we work to represent all elements of it. In support of that objective, we'd like to ask, specifically, whether you are familiar, at any level, with the issues faced, specifically, by the bisexual and transgender communities. If so, what influence would this have on your decisions as an elected official? If not, what steps will you take to become familiar with the issues, needs and concerns of these communities?

ANSWER: Most recently I worked with the Cantu Center at UCSC teaching self-defense and safety skills classes specifically designed for the transgender community. Working with this group directly and hearing stories from their lives of discrimination and challenges they face was deeply moving and a profound privilege. Hearing their struggles and triumphs inspires me to make sure that folks from the transgender community feel safe in Santa Cruz and have direct access to elected officials.

c - As documented in the The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute publication, "Bisexual health: An introduction and model practices for HIV/STI prevention programming" (2007), which is available for download at the URL below, in many cases bisexual people face even greater health risks and obstacles to accessing effective health care and health information than their peers in the queer community, including higher levels of self-harm, suicide attempts and thoughts of suicide. What specific steps would you take to address the issues raised in this report, and elsewhere, that are specific to bisexuals, including "biphobia" and lack of service provider awareness of bisexuality?
http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/reports/bi_health_5_07_b.pdf

ANSWER: Reading the reports about Bisexual Health and risks faced by bisexual youth in particular made me quite sad. I have been thinking and hearing and talking about bisexuality and challenges faced by bisexual people since I was 20; I am disheartened to learn that there is still so much work to be done. I hope to work closely with the LGBT Alliance to come up with strategies that improve the health and safety of this vulnerable element of the community. A specific step I can imagine taking focuses on education and outreach, so service providers are more aware of and sensitive to the diverse needs and perspectives of their clients.

A summary of the top ten health issues for the bisexual community, sourced from the above report, can be found here:
http://brown.edu/Student_Services/Health_Services/Health_Education/lgbtq_health/bisexual_health/health_concerns_for_bisexuals.php

4 - Many adults, in and outside of the queer community, express their sexuality in a variety of ways, many of which are not well understood by the general public or the service provider community, and often subject to severe social stigma; this frequently leads to poor health outcomes for the individuals in question and / or complications when interacting with the legal system and social services providers. What do you know about "alternative" sexualities aka Leather/BSDM/Fetish (often collectively referred to as "kink") and their associated communities? Are you willing to learn more about them and engage in dialogue with people from your community who express their sexuality in this manner, in order to ensure that these constituents are better served by the agencies and institutions that you will be overseeing?

The Woodhull Sexual Freedom Alliance, which "works to advance the recognition of sexual, gender, and family diversity" and "to affirm sexual freedom as a fundamental human right" addresses these issues as part of their larger agenda of supporting "sexual freedom." Their web site is at <http://www.woodhullalliance.org/> <<http://www.woodhullalliance.org/%E2%80%8E>>
The National Coalition for Sexual Freedom (NCSF) has an introduction to SM that outlines the governing

principles followed by responsible individuals and organizations within these communities:
<https://ncsfreedom.org/key-programs/education-outreach/education-outreach-program-page.html>

ANSWER: Running for City Council is extremely stressful. I've started running as a way to cope with that stress. I listen to Dan Savage as I run - he's been one of my favorite columnists for many years, but now he's a daily fixture in my life. I love my mornings with Dan!

Listening to his Lovecasts, and having several close friends who have been involved with the Leather/ BDSM/ Fetish communities for decades has brought me some moderate awareness of issues relating to "kink". Of course I am willing to learn more and engage in dialogue with people who express their sexuality in this way in order to ensure they they are better served by agencies and institutions that I will be overseeing if elected to City Council. I hope to turn to the LGBT Alliance as I strive to learn more.

5 - Many adults, in and outside of the queer community, participate in relationships that do not fit the traditional two-partner model, and in doing so, are subject to discrimination in housing, insurance coverage and access to health care, immigration, custody and parental rights.

What do you know about these "alternative" relationship structures, often referred to by those participating in them as the practice of "polyamory" (defined as "the practice, desire, or acceptance of having more than one intimate relationship at a time with the knowledge and consent of everyone involved"), the people who participate in them, and the communities that have formed around them? Are you willing to learn more about how these types of relationship structures work, and engage in dialogue with people who participate in them, in order to ensure that these constituents are better served by the agencies and institutions you will be overseeing?

ANSWER: Several of my dearest friends live polyamorous lives and some of them participate in or lead workshops on how to have successful multiple relationships. I was involved in non-mongamous relationships for several years and have read several books about the topic (*The Ethical Slut, Redefining our Relationships*). I am willing to learn more about how these types of relationships work, excited to engage in dialogue with people who participate in them and determined to make sure that this group is well served and their concerns are addressed by agencies I will oversee if I am elected to City Council.

You can find out more about these types of families, and the issues they face, on the Family Matters Project website (sponsored by the Woodhull Sexual Freedom Alliance) at <http://www.familymattersproject.org>, which is "dedicated to advancing, respecting and protecting the fundamental human right to family by eliminating discrimination based on family structure and relationship choices."

6 - Have there been any LGBT people who've had a significant impact on your life as role models, inspirations, mentors, friends, etc.? If so, please tell us a little bit about how they've influenced you.

ANSWER: When I was 15 years old, one of my closest friends was a feisty outspoken genderqueer person before any of us knew that word existed. She introduced me to hard-core straight edge music and punk DIY fashion, but more importantly she inspired me by her example. When others turned and ran from their fears, she did an about face, running *at* them and tackling what scared her with the tenacity of that linebacker in *The Blind Side*. Though we

live on opposite sides of the country we still share a deep connection.

Throughout my life I have always had friends, neighbors and co-workers who identify in various ways along a gender and sexuality spectrum. A gay friend in college had a particularly profound impact on my scholarship, a lesbian carpenter I apprenticed to for several months taught me how to use power tools and gave me the confidence to install drywall and plumbing fixtures, a lesbian real estate agent helped me navigate the complexities of buying my first home. My current neighbor is an urban homesteader and happens to be a lesbian. She has inspired me to garden more carefully, harvest rain water and conserve more water.

There have been many LGBT people who have had a significant impact on my life and those are only a few of the most prominent examples that come to mind.

7- Please describe your philosophy for working with under-represented communities of which you are not a member and, specifically, how this will manifest itself in your tenure in office.

ANSWER: My philosophy for working with underrepresented communities of which I am not a member is to listen carefully with humility. A focus on listening, understanding and gathering information will be part of my governing philosophy.

8 - Please tell us what you know about current City-operated or funded programs which impact the LGBT community, and what suggestions, if any, you have for improvements.

ANSWER: The City currently funds the Diversity Center's youth programs, and Encompass Community Service's STRANGE and Santa Cruz AIDS Project programs. There is probably other funding from the City for programs which impact the LGBT community that I am not aware of yet. Programming for LGBT youth under 18 is quite strong, but I have heard from members of the community that there are unmet needs for LGBT youth 18-29. I also believe support for HIV evidence-based prevention education could be stronger.

9 - Local non-profits that serve the LGBT community, along with other non-profits, have experienced considerable cuts in funding from all sources over the past couple of years. As a member of the City Council, where would you place funding for health and human services on your priority list?

ANSWER: Funding for health and human services that reach and engage all members of our community will be high on my priority list if I am elected to City Council. I realize there is a limited budget and we need to be careful with how we spend it; but investing in health and human services benefits all of us who reap the benefits of living in a healthier more respectful society.

10 - Will you insist that the City not associate with organizations - such as the Boy Scouts and The Salvation Army - that have clearly stated their intent to discriminate against LGBT people, supporting, instead, such inclusive organizations as Girl Scouts or Big Brothers/Big Sisters or Goodwill?

ANSWER: I will associate with and support organizations that follow strict non-discrimination

guidelines and operate on a policy of inclusiveness. I will not support or associate with organizations that have clearly stated their intent to discriminate against LGBT people and will do everything in my power to convince other City Council members to adhere to strict non-discrimination policies.

11 - Will you ensure that medical insurance for City employees covers complete health care for gender reassignment surgery and medical care for transgender employees and family?

ANSWER: I believe that medical insurance for City employees should cover complete health care for gender reassignment surgery and medical care for transgender employees and family. As a City Council member I will work hard to ensure adequate coverage for all City employees.

12 – If elected, do you intend to take a leadership role with respect to LGBT youth in your city, working to ensure that all schools are safe for all students? If yes, please cite a concrete example of how you would do so. In particular, did you support AB 1266 (text here: <http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billStatusClient.xhtml>), which guarantees equal access to all school programs and facilities for students in accordance with their expressed gender identity?

ANSWER: I am excited to take a leadership role with LGBT youth in Santa Cruz and ensure that schools are safe for all students. In my work teaching Safety Skills in our local middle and high schools I include a short discussion about issues pertaining to LGBT youth. If elected I hope to host forums at local high schools which give students a voice and help ensure safety for all. I hope the GLBT Alliance and other organizations that serve the LGBT community can help me come up with other ways that I can ensure safety and respect for all students in schools in the city.

13 – If elected, do you intend to take a leadership role with respect to rights and services for LGBT elders in your city? If yes, please cite a concrete example of how you would do so.

ANSWER: LGBT elders often face discrimination and lack of sensitivity from health care providers, which has even caused the “re-closeting” of some individuals. All of the most vulnerable people in our community deserve special treatment and care. Support groups for the affected individuals and education seminars for service providers are one starting place.

I hope to turn to Sharon Papo, Executive Director of the Diversity Center, as well as the GLBT Alliance for more ways I can be a leader for LGBT elders in our city.

14 - What would you do to support HIV education and services for at-risk communities in your city? Specifically, do you support syringe exchange in an effort to stop the spread of HIV and other blood-borne diseases and will you work to keep the program based on best practices and evidence-based research? Do you support safe needle drop-boxes in public areas, such as parks or bus depots? Will you support the syringe exchange program if it encounters interference? Do you support training for your police department around needle exchange?

ANSWER: HIV education and services for at-risk communities in Santa Cruz are critical in Santa Cruz. I look forward to turning to the GLBT Alliance as a resource for learning more

ways I can support HIV education and make sure at-risk communities receive adequate care and services.

I fully support the County's Needle Exchange program which saves lives and reduces the improper disposal of syringes. I will work hard to keep the program and expand it so more people can benefit from its services. I support safe needle drop boxes in public areas. I will support the syringe exchange program if (and when!) it encounters resistance and opposition from others. Of course, I support training for the police department - and many other in our community- around needle exchange.

15 - Do you support marriage equality, and did you do so publicly? Are you aware of a nation-wide movement to create "religious exemptions" to marriage equality and other nondiscrimination laws (e.g.: AB 2237 – text here: http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/13-14/bill/asm/ab_2201-2250/ab_2237_bill_20140221_introduced.html)? Do you have a position on such exemptions?

ANSWER: I support marriage equality and I have spoken publicly about my support. We can measure the progress of our civilization by the number of people included under the umbrella of civil rights. I think the “religious exemptions” are backwards, regressive and dangerous.

16 - Have you in the past, and will you in the future, attend LGBT events, such as LGBT Pride, Queer Youth Leadership Awards, or the BAYMEC dinner? If you have not attended, why not?

ANSWER: I have attended LGBT events for the past twenty years and fully intend to keep doing so if I am elected - only more so, since I will probably get more invitations!

17 - If you receive The GLBT Alliance’s endorsement, will you display it in your campaign literature?

ANSWER: If the GLBT Alliance endorses me I will display it in my campaign literature ... with pride.

18 - Have you received endorsements which you think might be of interest to the LGBT community?

ANSWER: I am not sure which of my endorsements might be of interest to the LGBT community, but Adam Spickler and Glen Schaller have both endorsed me.

19- Is there anything else you’d like to tell us?

ANSWER: Gosh you made it all the way to the end? Thanks for reading my responses. I look forward to working with you.