



OUT IN THE MOTHER LODGE

A PROGRAM OF SIERRA HEALTH RESOURCES, INC.
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News and Views

Of the GLBIT Community

Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, Intersex and Transgender

AUGUST 2010

The Magic of the Mother Lode

by Brian Dean Gordon

I smile when I meet people new to our area who instantly recognize the magic of the Mother Lode. It took me a while to appreciate it's charms. I'd spent much of my youth as a local and moved away as soon as I could. Only years later did I begin to miss my foothill roots.

Doug Spruner and Joe Massoni found themselves in their forties, retired and no longer tied to the Bay Area. Having family here, Tuolumne County was a logical place to explore. What were their biggest adjustments? Doug offered prices and shopping first. "Things that are cheap in the Bay Area aren't that cheap up here and vice-versa. Just like anywhere, you have to learn the tricks from the locals."

"The climate was an adjustment too," said Joe. "It gets much colder here."

"I love watching the snowfall, and I love the silence here," said Doug. Then he laughed. "We also had to adjust to everything being closed by 8:00 pm."

Doug and Joe gave predictable reasons why the Gold Country appeals to them: less traffic lights, more courteous drivers, more neighborly people, slower pace, etc., but I wanted to know how the Mother Lode has appealed to them as OUT individuals *and* partners.

"We fly a gay flag on our deck, and we can honestly say that we haven't had a single bad experience." Doug said emphatically. "It took a while, but we've made some great friends, and all of our neighbors have been very accepting and welcoming. We love the wildlife, we love the sunsets, and we love that when we refer to *the big city*, we're now referring to Sonora."

Perhaps the most convincing evidence is their decision to become local homeowners. This was a step they had never taken in the Bay Area. They saw immediately what I had taken for granted for years.

Proposition 8 Overturned

On August 5, U.S. Federal Judge Vaughn Walker ruled that Proposition 8 violates the rights of gay and lesbian couples to due process and equal protection under the Constitution.

The news moved rapidly through the county in email messages, Facebook posts, and quick phone calls. There were huge smiles and long embraces when GLBT friends ran into each other on the streets that day. In evening, our TVs were tuned into Rachel Maddow not FOX News. We were grinning ear-to-ear, thrilled to hear the details of Judge Walker's ruling that preserved democracy by ruling that a majority cannot deny a minority group their fundamental freedoms. We know the battle is not over, but for one day we allowed ourselves to enjoy the warm satisfaction of Walker's decision.

Changes in Tax Law

The IRS recently moved to recognize California's community property tax law and treat income earned by registered domestic partners as community property income.

The change does not mean that the IRS or the federal government recognizes same-sexed marriages. It simply means they are recognizing state property laws. Nevertheless, advocates of same-sexed marriage welcome the change as a positive development.

Under the new ruling, California domestic partners each continue to file a single federal return, but they now must report one half of their community income. For example, if one partner earns \$100,000 and the

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Tax Law Changes cont'd

other earns \$60,000, they would each report half of their combined income, which in this case is \$80,000.

The new ruling could reduce federal taxes for some domestic partners, especially if one has a very large income and the other has little or none. But the ruling could hurt couples in which one partner qualifies for federal tax credits or benefits or college financial aid available only to low income people. The reporting of combined income may cause them to lose some benefits.

Itemized deductions must be handled carefully for only deductible expenses paid with community property can be split.

The IRS is also allowing California domestic partners to amend their returns for tax years beginning before June 2010, but they are not required to amend them.

Be sure to consult your tax adviser regarding these changes. Remember, you must make this change for 2010 returns and you need to determine *if* you want to amend previous returns.

New OML Writer

OML welcomes writer Brian Gordon, who has been "out" in the Mother Lode for many years. He lives in Twain Harte with his long-time partner Russ and their Border Collie, Mica

Brian wrote "The Magic of the Mother Lode," our 4th story about local GLBIT folks. He has signed on as a contributing writer for the newsletter, and we look forward to his future stories.



The 14th Sierra AIDS Walk will take place on Saturday September 18, 2010 at the Calaveras Big Trees State Park. Make a day of it! Bring your friends and enjoy one of three park trails, dominated by giant sequoias, each requiring different levels of skill and stamina. Walkers may start between 9 and 11:30am. Sack lunches are provided for participants.

Register for the walk online at www.sierrahope.org or call 209 736-6792.

An Upside to Google

While Google is being slammed for advancing its economic interests and possibly becoming a "corporate gatekeeper" to the Internet, the Non-profit Newswire recently reported an upside to Google business methods. Google will be the first to reimburse workers for the tax they pay on domestic partner benefits. Under Federal Law, gay and lesbian employees who cover their partners under their health plans are taxed, as the extra coverage counts toward their wages. With such visible action by Google, some predict that competitors, like Apple and perhaps non-profits as well, will make a similar move.

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Call 209-736-6792 for information

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