RAINBOW ROUNDTABLE
PRESS RELEASE

Thursday, November 3, 2005

For Immediate Release

STATE COLLEGE, Penna. — Members and allies of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community will gather at the Penn Stater Conference Center Hotel this evening in a quiet demonstration aimed at educating attendees of the Renaissance Fund dinner and reception where a known homophobic woman will be named the Fund's "Person of the Year."

Penn State Lady Lions women's basketball coach Rene Portland has been named 2005's "Person of the Year," despite a two decade-old reputation for discrimination against lesbians.

The Renaissance Fund, which provides scholarships to disenfranchised students, has existed since 1969. While the Rainbow Roundtable fully supports the Fund's scholarships and the recipients of these scholarships, demonstrators tonight aim to educate attendees of this evening's ceremony of Coach Portland's history of discrimination.

In 1986, Coach Portland told the *Chicago Sun-Times* that she did not allow lesbians to play on her team. "I will not have it in my program," she is quoted as saying. "I bring it up and the kids are so relieved and the parents are so relieved."

At the time of these public comments, Penn State had no university-wide policy prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Still, the Rainbow Roundtable believes that her policy was unethical, unfair, and unjust. The group believes donors to the Renaissance Fund should know of Coach Portland's history of discrimination. In fact, many donors have already contacted members of the LGBTQ community and asked for ways to donate to the Fund without doing so in Coach Portland's name.

Although Coach Portland never publicly admitted to anti-gay practices after the university added "sexual orientation" as a protected category in its non-discrimination policy in 1991, rumors have abounded that Coach Portland continued to discriminate against anyone she perceived to be a lesbian.

Last month, former basketball player Jen Harris took the brave step to come forward and allege that Coach Portland removed her from the team because she believed Ms. Harris to be a lesbian. The demonstrators gathering this evening recognize that many athletes are silenced by fear of retribution; they stand united this evening for those who do not have the privilege of taking a public stance.

The Rainbow Roundtable is a coalition of Allies, the Coalition of LGBTA Graduate Students, Undertones, and the LGBTA Student Resource Center. Members of the Penn State Pride Alliance, as well as other friends of the community, will join the Roundtable in this evening's demonstration. They can be contacted at Rainbow.Roundtable@psu.edu. The press contact for this evening's demonstration is Christy Merchant (570-493-2971). More information about Coach Portland's history can be found at www.clubs.psu.edu/psupride/news.html