

'MO BIZ

Anne Levinson and the Force Behind the Seattle Storm

By Lisa Walls

In the spring of 2007, news leaked that two members of an Oklahoma City-based conglomerate that had recently purchased the Seattle SuperSonics and Storm basketball team franchise had bankrolled an anti-gay organization 'Americans United to Preserve Marriage.' To the Storm's strong lesbian fan base, the headlines came as a surprise. Twelve months later, talk is focused on a quartet of women, Force 10 Hoops, who bought and rescued the Storm. And, oh yeah, three of the four who supplied the money to keep the team in our fair city are openly gay.

On the basketball court, I believe the ref would call this a "turnover." Fans are gleeful.

Anne Levinson, chair of Force 10 Hoops, came out publicly more than 20 years ago. As deputy mayor under Norm Rice, she was instrumental in gaining domestic partnership benefits for Seattle city employees. "We



Force 10 Hoops is (from left to right): Dawn Trudeau, Lisa Brummel, Ginny Gilder and Anne Levinson.

were the second city in the country to win benefits," she said.

The American Basketball League approached Levinson when she was deputy mayor to see if she'd help bring women's basketball to Seattle. "I had the opportunity to help negotiate to have the Reign play at the Seattle Center." She also organized a group of women to buy the first block of tickets and hire a coaching staff.

During her undergraduate days Levinson suited up in a kilt to play field hockey for the University of Kansas. Her team was competitive, winning regional tournaments, yet had no access to facilities or trainers. The men's teams, winning or not, enjoyed such advantages. Witnessing this gender-based inequity, Levinson filed a complaint under Title IX—a law enacted in '72 and mainly used to ensure women and girls have equal access to athletic programs within public schools and universities. She won her complaint after she graduated, and went on to pursue a law degree. Years after earning her J.D. she would become one of Washington state's only 'out' lesbian judges.

Watching the Sonics debacle from afar, and knowing the Storm would be lost to Seattle if the Sonics left, Levinson gathered three wealthy friends to save the team. Together, they created an attractive package for the WNBA and the Oklahoma City owners. With approval from the league for the purchase, they announced their option to buy last January. The Storm is now an independently owned team (meaning it's not connected with the NBA); it joins six other independents in the WNBA league.

All four partners in Force 10 Hoops grew up during the years surrounding Title IX's passage. Gym class for Dawn Trudeau meant donning her gym uniform to sit in the bleachers

and watch the boys play. Ginny Gilder didn't become an athlete until college, when she started rowing. A natural and hard-working athlete, she kept at the sport until she won a silver medal in the '84 Olympics. Lisa Brummel played university-level softball and basketball, and was drafted by the Dallas Diamonds in the '81 Women's Basketball League draft before she pursued a career in business.

This foursome's ability to work effectively is already established. Said Levinson, "We've been involved in community and nonprofit work together. We have similar values. We knew it was important to have a group that could make what might be difficult decisions in a collaborative way and model what we like to see in an organization."

What does this new ownership mean for lesbian Storm fans? It means partnering with Olivia for give-aways and concerts. It means becoming a silver sponsor of the GSBA. It means collaborating with the National Center for Lesbian Rights. It means Sheryl Swoopes, the only out lesbian in the WNBA and a recent transplant from Houston, handing out GSBA's scholarship award at their annual scholarship dinner.

Levinson is most excited "about the opportunity for the Northwest to have a women's professional sports team for many years to come, so that boys and girls can see what terrific role models these women are."

"We view our ownership of the Storm as us being stewards of a community asset," said Levinson. "I had no idea of the breadth of community support," she continued. "It's been really incredible. All four of us have felt that since we announced the sale. Fathers with daughters come up and thank us, and women who came of age before Title IX. We've sold more season tickets than ever before."



Washington State

The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network

The Washington State chapter of GLSEN, located on Capitol Hill in Seattle, is a non-profit organization committed to putting an end to the bullying and harassment of youth in K-12 schools throughout the state, regardless of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.



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