

Portland activist F. Gene Ediger dies at 41

■ The social worker is credited with bringing the city recognition in the 1970s and '80s with programs to help the homeless

F. Gene Ediger, a Portland social worker and advocate for the homeless whose community service was recognized with the 1995 Mayor's Spirit of Portland Award, died Sunday, Aug. 17, 1997, of AIDS. He was 41.

Chuck Currie, co-chairman of Oregon Housing Now Coalition, called Mr. Ediger a behind-the-scenes force driving many of the programs in the 1970s and 1980s that helped Portland gain national prominence as a city trying to solve the problem of homelessness.

"He always saw homelessness and

poverty as a grave injustice and worked all his life to correct that," Currie said.

Mr. Ediger was born in McPherson, Kan., on June 7, 1956. He moved to Portland in 1976. He graduated from the University of Oregon in 1979 with bachelor's degrees in psychology and community service in public affairs.

Mr. Ediger first became involved in Portland's homeless scene when he was an intern with the Mennonite Church at the Koinonia House at Portland State University. During that time, he became friends with Michael Stoops, who also had a passion for helping the homeless.

From 1979 until 1989, Mr. Ediger worked for the Burnside Community Council, which operated the now-closed Baloney Joe's and the West Women's and Children's Shelter. He

served on the board of Burnside Community Council from 1989 until 1990.

In 1990, he co-founded Burnside Advocates Group, now called the Oregon Housing Now Coalition. In 1993, he was elected chairman of the board of directors of Outside In.

He retired from full-time work in 1993 after he developed AIDS but continued to do volunteer work and served on the boards of Outside In and the Oregon Housing Now Coalition until his death.

Kathy Oliver, executive director of Outside In, said Mr. Ediger was a guiding force for Outside In who never shied away from controversy, be it needle exchange programs or issues of gay and lesbian homeless youths.

"It was truly remarkable what he gave to Outside In and homeless

youth," she said. "He truly cared."

Mr. Ediger also worked for four years with developmentally disabled people at the Association for Retarded Citizens.

He is survived by his partner, Paul Nickell; mother, Helen of Inman, Kan.; brothers, Ralph of Oklahoma City, and Ray of Newton, Kan.; and sisters, Ilene Banman of Denver and Rhonda Sandstrom of Portland.

A memorial service will be at 4 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 28, in First United Methodist Church, where he was a member.

Disposition was by cremation. His ashes will be cast on the Pacific Ocean.

The family suggests remembrances to Outside In or the Goose Hollow Family Shelter at First United Methodist Church.