

Idaho Human Rights Education Center to be renamed after Wassmuth

BOISE – Honoring one of Idaho’s earliest and best known human rights advocates, the board of the Idaho Human Rights Education Center has approved changing its name to the Wassmuth Center for Human Rights.

Bill Wassmuth, a one-time Catholic priest who died in 2002, became one of the northwest’s most visible leaders against hate when he confronted the Aryan Nations in Idaho. Among other things, he founded the Northwest Coalition against Malicious Harassment, later called the Northwest Coalition for Human Dignity.

Marilyn Shuler of Boise, who served on the original Northwest Coalition board, said the name change was a fitting memorial to Wassmuth.

“Bill was a charismatic leader and a passionate man whose strong sense of justice permeated his work in Idaho and elsewhere,” Shuler said. “He was totally committed to spreading the message of equality throughout the northwest, and he simply refused to let any obstacle stand in his way.”

Among those obstacles was the 1986 bombing of his home in Coeur d’Alene. Although Wassmuth was in the house at the time, he escaped injury. Eventually three Aryan Nations members were convicted of the crime.

Wassmuth was also a prime mover in the 2000 legal action that led to a \$6.2 million judgment against the Aryan Nations, bankrupting the group and forcing it to abandon its compound near Hayden Lake.

Dr. Dan Prinzing, IHREC Executive Director, said the name change will be formalized once all required documentation is completed. He noted that the 2013-14 edition of the “Idaho Blue Book,” published by the Office of the Secretary of State, was dedicated to Wassmuth and two other human rights activists, Tony Stewart and Norman Gissel of Coeur d’Alene.

“People sometimes forget that throughout Idaho’s history, we’ve had human rights activists who were willing to step up and lead – people like the Bill Wassmuths, the Phil Batts, and the Marilyn Shulers. They built a strong legacy for the rest of us, and the IHREC is proud to have this chance to honor someone whose life’s work made a real difference to the state,” Prinzing said.

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About the Idaho Human Rights Education Center

The mission of the Center is to promote respect for human dignity and diversity through education and to foster individual responsibility to work for justice and peace. The Center achieves this mission through educational programs with teachers and students, community leadership and advocacy in human rights.