

STU RASMUSSEN

b. September 9, 1948

d. November 17, 2021

FIRST OUT TRANSGENDER MAYOR

“I transitioned in place. And the community came along with me.”

**Rasmussen was
the first openly
transgender mayor
in America.**

Stewart “Stu” Rasmussen became the first openly transgender mayor in America when he was elected in Silverton, Oregon, for a third time in 2008. It was his first term as Silverton’s mayor after coming out as transgender.

Assigned male at birth, Rasmussen, who identified as female but used predominantly male pronouns, was a lifelong resident of Silverton, a farming community of roughly 9,200 people. His father was a mail carrier and managed the Palace Theatre, a local cinema. A self-described nerd, Rasmussen studied electrical engineering at what is now Chemeketa Community College. He worked for a tech company and as an entrepreneur

before entering politics, where he served for most of three decades.

Rasmussen brought cable TV to Silverton in the 1970s. In 1974 he became the co-owner of the Palace Theatre. He ran the projector, worked the concessions, and frequently stood out front, costumed like a character from the currently running film. The year he took over the theater, he began dating Victoria Sage, the woman he would eventually marry.

A socially liberal, fiscally conservative Democrat, Rasmussen entered politics in the 1980s, first as a City Council member. He was elected mayor in 1988, while still publicly identifying as male, and served two terms. In the mid 1990s, he ran unsuccessfully for a seat in the Oregon House of Representatives and then the Oregon State Senate. By the time he ran for mayor again in 2008, he had transitioned to female. Despite backlash and his own doubts, Rasmussen won Silverton’s support. He told the Salem Statesman Journal: “A lot of people who are transgender think, I can’t be myself here, I have to go somewhere else ... I transitioned in place. And the community came along with me.”

After the election, members of the Kansas-based, notoriously anti-LGBTQ Westboro Baptist Church descended on the town in protest. The Silverton community countered, rallying around Rasmussen, with several male supporters donning dresses and holding signs declaring “Jesus Loves Stu.” In 2013 a musical about him, “Stu for Silverton,” opened at the Intiman Theatre in Seattle. It played in other cities, including New York.

Rasmussen remained in office until he was unseated in 2014. He married his longtime partner, Victoria, the same year. In 2018, he ran again, but was defeated.

Rasmussen died of prostate cancer at age 73. The New York Times published his obituary.



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