

## You're never too old to love

by Shoshana Keller

Growing old and dying is a thought that terrifies most people. The mass media generally ignore old people, and as individuals we tend to push away as much as possible the thought of our own aging and death. For lesbians and gay men, the thought of living and dying in a heterosexual retirement center or nursing home can be especially troubling.

The Lesbian Aging Project (LAP) is a small group of Portland women who have been working for a year and a half to develop solutions for the problems that old lesbians face. They propose an ambitious program geared to meet the needs of old dykes with many interests and in many states of health.

The Lesbian Aging Project originally called itself the Old Dyke's Home (the name was changed for public relations purposes) and a home, center, or cluster of buildings is at the project's core.

"We had a group visualization of what we wanted, right down to the colors," said LAP Executive Board member Jesse Jordan. "We want a space for animals, a softball diamond, a meditation room and a recreation center," as well as health-care facilities, she said. Other ideas for the project are a lesbian visiting association for the homebound women, a hospice, a meals-on-wheels program, and a day-care center where residents can care for working lesbians' children.

A short-range goal for the LAP is the purchase of one house where several older lesbians can live together on a fairly autonomous basis. It is hoped that this house will eventually constitute the beginning of a cluster of houses or a center where actual health-care facilities and other services can be set up.

These visions are far from being concrete realizations, however. One major problem is money. The LAP has made some profit from the sale of T-shirts saying "You're Never Too Old To Love," but does not have much income beyond that. The Ms. magazine foundation turned down a grant application. The group is in the process of finishing its bylaws to file for non-profit incorporation. This has been a long and difficult process for members of the project, because no one involved has any previous experience in writing bylaws.

People, or rather a lack thereof, have been the other major problem for the LAP. The Executive Board consists of six white women and one Native American woman, who make up almost all of the LAP membership. "People have been positive, but no one wants to commit time," Jordan explained.

"Last January we had a community meeting and invited 500 people," said Renee Augrain, another Board member. "Fifteen showed up. And the excuse I heard a lot was that it was Superbowl Sunday. But the fifteen who did come were really committed."

Jordan and Augrain have several thoughts on why people are reluctant to commit time to the LAP. "The older you get, the more the reality of what you might need really sets in," said Jordan. "People don't want to think about aging. But I want to see lesbians take care of each other if what we don't want to happen happens."

"People have a hard time believing that they'll need this," said Augrain. "We need to figure out a way to make women know they need this. Three lesbians I knew in one month died of cancer... we need people."

The Lesbian Aging Project has four basic committees that need women to fill them. They are: fund-raising, financial resources, bylaws, and program development. "On one committee we have two committee heads and one member," explained Augrain.

One thing the LAP is doing to attract women is having a picnic on Saturday,



September 7th at 1:00 p.m. in Mt. Tabor Park. The picnic will be potluck, featuring games, prizes, and music with an eye to having fun and drawing older lesbians out of their closets and into the project. Donation requested is one dollar.

Finding older lesbians has been a challenge for LAP Members. "Very few old lesbians are not closeted. We may not be able to reach them," said Jordan. "Old-style dykes are hiding out. We know of them by word-of-mouth. There are also women in 'clubs'... tiny, incestuous private groups. These women would benefit from a larger crowd," Augrain pointed out.

Portland's LAP is not unique in the United States. There are many groups working on the needs of aging lesbians and gay men springing up around the country, such as the Old Crone's Nest in Florida and Senior Action Gay Environment (SAGE) in New York. Jordan expects that the first nursing

home for gays and lesbians will be founded soon in San Francisco, where the Unitarian Universalist Church is putting up the funds.

A researcher at Johns Hopkins University, Dr. A.J. Lucco, is conducting a survey of gay and lesbian people age 55 and older to find out what they want in facilities for the aged. People interested in participating in the survey should write to: A.J. Lucco, M.D., The Beacham Center, 5200 Easter Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland 21224.

In spite of obstacles and burn-out, Augrain and Jordan are optimistic about the LAP's future. "I think the time has come when it's going to start happening. We need people, but I think that within six months to a year we ought to be well into starting a real home or a cluster of homes," said Augrain. Jordan waxed enthusiastic: "It will happen. I know it will. We're not going to give up. It will go."

OREGON  
SCHOOL  
OF ARTS  
AND CRAFTS  
OUR BOTH YEAR!

FALL  
OPEN HOUSE

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 1985, 11 AM - 5 PM

Oregon School of Arts and Crafts. ■ You have to see it to believe it. ■ That's why we have an Open House, coming Saturday, Sept. 14. At the Fall Open House, you can view ongoing demonstrations by our faculty artists and their students. Or explore our campus facilities equipped for over nine disciplines including **Book Arts, Ceramics, Crafts History, Drawing & Design, Fibers & Textiles, Metal, Photography, Printmaking and Woodworking.** Browse in our Hoffman Sales Gallery and visit the current show in the adjacent exhibition gallery, **Double Vision**, artwork by artist couples. After all that, you might want refreshments from the school cafe. ■ OSAC is many things to many people. ■ But you have to see it to believe it. Come to our Fall Open House. Seeing is believing. ■ **Fall Term Classes Begin Sept. 30, 1985.** Registration begins Sept. 10. Call today for our new catalog and Fall Schedule. Hurry! Class sizes are limited. Beginners welcome. ■

OREGON SCHOOL OF ARTS AND CRAFTS

8245 S.W. Barnes Rd., Portland, Oregon 97225 • (503) 297-5544



Open to All—



Food  
Front

COOPERATIVE  
GROCERY

Whole Foods, Real Groceries,  
Natural Treats, Fresh Produce

Open 7 days, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

2675 NW Thurman 222-5658  
TRI-MET BUS 53