

Housing for the elderly of any community is always an important need. The sexual minorities community is no exception, and with the "out generation" rapidly joining the senior population, where and how they will live has become a serious issue.

Older citizens today have many residential options, but how many of them have realistic potential for sexual minorities wanting to retain their open lifestyle in a supportive environment? What do they want? What do they need? What are they willing to accept?

These questions are being asked by a group of sexual minorities in the Portland area who have begun meeting monthly to brainstorm on what they hope will translate into access to good housing where the only closets are for clothes.

Mary Beth Brindley started researching this need a year ago. Faced with her own aging process, she began looking into existing options for sexual minorities in the area.

At Brindley's urging, the Lesbian Community Project sponsored a forum on the issue. It was, she says, "poorly attended," but a few participants did commit to addressing the matter.

A total of 15 people met Oct. 30 to discuss needs and options and to address what can be done in the short and long term to make life livable for elderly sexual minorities. Some of the participants already are involved in retirement programs, both private and state- or county-sponsored. For others, it is an area of concern they want to address.

Two real estate professionals and one insurance broker shared their input on how retirement communities might be developed. Two Portland State University students would like to gear a project to the needs surrounding this issue.

All are concerned, and with good reason. We

THE OLD SCHOOL

Meetings discuss housing options for gay and lesbian seniors

by Patricia L. MacAodha

have heard and sometimes observed horror stories: the frightened old people who are miserably closeted, whether living with family members, in nursing or foster care facilities, or in their own homes with 24-hour attendants who might not be supportive.

We have been told about neglect and abuse, about rejection by homophobic residents and caregivers, and extremes of battering and rape perpetrated against our frail elderly. Frightened and isolated, their final years are not restful and happy but terrifying and lonely.

Sexual minority communities in a number of urban and rural areas already have begun developing retirement centers and homes to confront this special need. The matter is being addressed in California, Florida, North Carolina, New York and Maine, among other states.

In Washington, sexual minority housing already exists in Seattle, Bremerton, Port Townsend and the Olympic Peninsula. Some of these models are being discussed by the Portland group.

They came to a mild consensus that privately owned retirement homes would be preferable to agency-controlled facilities. "Financial backing is the key element in any planning for this type of facility," meeting chairwoman Betty Nelson said.



Vi Leagield supports the concept of a gay retirement community

The meeting participants favored mixed-gender communities rather than all-male or all-female settings. *Just Out* talked to a few people outside the group about these issues, and they seemed to have support.

Vi Leagield, who has been out for 30 years, was delighted with the idea of a gay retirement community. She shares an apartment with her canine friend, Angel.

"If I ever got to the point where I wasn't able to take care of myself," she said, "I would definitely want to be with my own people."

Frank Myers, an accountant, has discussed the matter with a circle of friends. They agreed they want to live their older years together but haven't decided where—a house, a retirement home? They don't know.

A six-member committee is drafting a mission statement in time for the next meeting Dec. 4, when discussions and strategizing on this issue will continue. Anyone interested in joining the process is invited.

For Brindley, it's not just a dream; it's a must. "I want to live the rest of my life in God's country," she says. **JM**

A second brainstorming session will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. Dec. 4 in the first floor Collins Lounge at the YWCA, 1111 S.W. 10th Ave. For more information call 503-286-3575.

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