

northwest

Our House Redux

Renovations and expansion give cause for celebration

by Malka Geffen

Our House of Portland has provided integrated health and housing services to people with HIV/AIDS since 1988. As the epidemic changed, Our House modified its services to best benefit its clients. Now, as the organization opens the doors to its new facility, Portland will see how Our House has modified its structure to do the same.

Executive director Wayne Miya says that in its early days, people who came to Our House did not leave. According to volunteer director Kathryn Siebert, Our House saw an average of 50 to 60 deaths a year.

"A major service we provided was spiritual care with an emphasis on end-of-life needs," says Siebert. "Following the effect of new medications, there was a need for occupational therapy as people began looking at building up their strength and independence."

The new state-of-the-art facility will not only house 24-hour skilled nursing for 14 residents, it will also serve as headquarters for the Our House Continuum of Care. This three-step approach to health care and residential services faces the challenges of the changing nature of HIV/AIDS and the needs of people with the disease. People who cannot live independently but do not require intensive medical support can reside in Swan House, which provides adult foster care in a group

home for five people. Clients who can live in their own homes with the assistance of Our House clinical staff benefit from the Neighborhood Housing and Care Program.

"People have gone in every possible direction between Our House, Swan House and NHCP," says Miya. "It is a continuous care cycle where clients know the people who will care for them."

Prior to the expansion and renovations, Our House was a single-story mid-century structure that cared for 10 residents with shared bathrooms. Miya notes, "People with HIV/AIDS who often have problems with their [gastrointestinal] systems don't want to share a bathroom with anybody." There was no air conditioning, and the heat was variable. The only large space available for a general gathering was the residents' living room. According to Siebert, staff sometimes had to kick people out of the dining room to have space for a meeting. "The kitchen was not nice," says Miya. "It had a lot of handed-down and donated equipment that we barely kept running."

Jump ahead to July 18, when Our House residents will move back to their new digs. They will walk into sunny rooms as, according to Miya, every room has some source of natural light. They will stay cool in the air conditioning and have privacy in their living room. The kitchen is designed to be efficient and a joy for volunteers and staff to work in. There are a



Construction workers labor to complete the new Our House facility in time for the grand opening July 16.

MARTY DAVIS

the advanced stages of AIDS. He says he was bankrupt and in the hospital with nowhere to go before he moved in.

"It's very fortunate for the people who are here," says Ranallo. "If you can't do anything for yourself, they'll do everything. They'll help with your medications, schedule your appointments, call for transportation. Everything."

Ranallo, whose health has stabilized, says he had lost 50 pounds and looked like Calista Flockhart before coming to Our House. "I've got a good sense of humor, and I want to survive as long as I can."

When asked about the new facility, Ranallo says he's looking forward to seeing live growing things instead of the asphalt and concrete he sees from Our House's temporary location. He says he looks forward to an increased separation in living spaces as well as the air conditioning, "especially when it reaches 100 degrees!"

OUR HOUSE OF PORTLAND will hold a grand opening celebration featuring food and guided tours from 3 to 6 p.m. July 16 at 2727 S.E. Alder St. Wayne Miya, Our House executive director, and Gary Maffei, Circle of Life campaign chairman, will speak briefly at 4.



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