



LAVENDER NOTES

Newsletter of Lavender Seniors of the East Bay

Volume VIII, No.4 – April 2003

A Volunteer Services Program — project of The Tides Center

• 1395 Bancroft Ave. • San Leandro, CA 94577 • (510) 667-9655 •

As Hard to Grow Old as It Was to Be Young

by *Dudley Clendinen*

When Ruth Ellis died in Michigan not long ago at the age of 101, a beloved character among the elderly and the gay community in Detroit, she should have been more famous. She was the oldest known lesbian in America. But it was not the fact that she was homosexual that made her special. It was the fact that she let it be known.

Of the estimated 70,000 centenarians now living in the United States, only one, Ms. Ellis, was so public about being gay. Of the million and a half nonagenarians, just a handful are widely known to be gay. There is a reason for that, and it isn't because so few old people are homosexual. It's because they grew up before the American gay rights movement began to free homosexuals to be honest about themselves.

That movement began just 52 years ago, and its founders are still alive. But they are aging, and mostly poor. Harry Hay [recently deceased], who got the idea that homosexuals should organize for civil rights at an election-year party of gay men in Los Angeles in 1948, is now 88. Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, who organized the first enduring organization for lesbians, are nearing 80, still in the little house in San Francisco where they held meetings 45 years ago. Dr. Franklin Kameny, the intellectual lion of the movement, the first to insist that homosexuals were not abnormal or mentally ill, the first to petition for employment rights in federal court and the first to make the legal claim that homo-

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New Interim Project Director



Jeffrey Vessels

This month I am pleased to introduce to you Jeffrey Vessels, Lavender Seniors' new Interim Project director who will start working with the organization on April 1, 2003. Jeff comes to Lavender Seniors from Louisville, Kentucky, a city of 700,000, where he has been the Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union in that city for several years.

He was born and lived all of his early life in Owensboro, KY, two hours west of Louisville where his parents and most of his family of an older brother and two younger sisters still live. Having attended a Catholic high school there, he went on to graduate with a BA in English from Brescia College — it is a college of 1200 students named for an order of nuns and a town in Italy. From

there he moved to Louisville and the university there and finished a graduate degree, Masters of Social Work.

Following that he worked at several different jobs for agencies serving seniors in Long Term Care in the Louisville area including an internship with a government agency that ran a skilled nursing facility and two personal care homes, helping the resident councils and advocating for them. It became obvious to him that care is delivered differently depending on the economic status of the people involved. This work also became a motivating influence which combined his interests in writing and social justice issues.

Jeff told me that he came out as a gay man to his family and at college at 20 — he's now twice that age — and became activist soon after. At first it was difficult for his family to accept his gayness but now they feel quite comfortable with it.

He is one of the founders of the Owensboro Gay Alliance which filled a powerful need at a time when there was no place for gays to meet. During the 80's he also worked in HIV education and with GRID (Gay Related Immune Deficiency) to help develop outlets for social interaction.

When Jeff read the job announcement for Lavender Seniors he says, "I knew it pulled together lots of my interests." He was able to come to the Bay Area to be interviewed and once our or-

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Lavender Seniors provides a Volunteer Services Program to isolated gay and lesbian seniors. It also presents LGBT educational panels to care providers who offer services to all seniors. Lavender Seniors is a member of the Lesbian and Gay Senior Services Collaborative along with New Leaf Outreach to Elders in San Francisco, Senior Spectrum in Marin. Lavender Seniors is funded in part by Alameda County Area Agency on Aging, Alameda County Leather Corps, The California Endowment, Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund, Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, Horizons Foundation, The True North Foundation, Royal Grand Ducal Council of Alameda County and San Francisco Foundation. We gratefully acknowledge this support and that from all other donors.

LAVENDER NOTES

is the newsletter of
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Mission Statement

The mission of Lavender Seniors of the East Bay is to improve the quality of life of older gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered residents of Alameda and Contra Costa Counties through community outreach, advocacy and education.

Advisory Board

Frank Howell & Ina Mae Murri,
 Co-Chairs
Jeanine DeBacker, Secretary
Bobbie Jarvis, Treasurer
Meg Bruynell, John Ellefsen,
Eugene Marangoni, Norma Ramos
& Natalie Zarchin

Next Advisory Board Meeting:

April 8, 7 P.M.

Interested persons are welcome to attend this meeting; public comments will take place at 7 P.M.

Interim Project Director,

Jeffrey Vessels

Senior Services Coordinator,

Susan Kalmus

Administrator, *Nancy Fugett*

Editor, *Bert Hendriksen*

There are no membership dues. All persons over 55, their partners, and guests are welcome. The cost of mail makes it necessary to request a donation of \$15 dollars per year to receive the newsletter. Visitors or persons interested in learning more about Lavender Seniors may receive the newsletter for three months without charge. None will be turned away for lack of funds.

Signed articles represent the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of Lavender Seniors of the East Bay.

Inclusion of a name in this newsletter does not necessarily indicate a person's sexual orientation.

www.lavenderseniors.org

Subscription Renewals

When renewing your subscription, please make the check payable to **The Tides Center/Lavender Seniors**

SHORT NOTES

by Sidney Poufte

Meg Bruynell and Bobbie Jarvis were in their most intense work of the year (for tax time) when Meg's purse was stolen from the car and their computer system was down, **down, down!** Not the best Ides of March for them (it was actually March 17 . . . but not to give St. Pat credit for such misdeeds).

Peggy Alices is back in the hospital again after having been sprung for a short time. Pneumonia and heart problems are tough to send packing. Words of encouragement for **Bert Hutchinson**, her partner, are in order.

Stella Lopez-Armijo had a birthday in March and she got just the butch gift she'd been looking for – a *pickup truck*! Do they really need another vehicle at their house?

South County Film Festival

A contingent of Lavender Seniors, **GLOBE** and Lighthouse Community Center attended the festival in March. **Stella** did some fundraising to help defray the costs of the fesitval by selling raffle tickets. **Ina Mae Murri, Stella, John Ellefsen, Frank Howell** and **Marvin Burrows** all reported that the films were a great success.

This newsletter is available in **Adobe Acrobat Reader** via E-mail; request: hendriksen@aol.com
 510-652-6906

Housing Rights, Inc.

800-264-2298

Are you and your partner having a hard time finding a place to live?

Are you afraid to put your lover on the lease?

Does your landlord treat you differently now that he/she knows you're gay?

It's possible you may be facing illegal housing discrimination.

In the state of California it is illegal for landlords to discriminate based on sexual orientation.

Do Something about it today!

(Free, confidential service.)

Housing Rights, Inc. is a non-profit agency serving Northern Alameda County and Contra Costa County

Help Prevent Burglary

According to the FBI, a burglary occurs every 15 seconds in the United States. A few simple steps can make your home a less attractive target for burglars.

- ✓ Lock all outside doors and windows before you leave or go to bed.
- ✓ Keep all garage doors closed and locked
- ✓ Don't allow daily newspapers and mail to pile up. Ask a friend or neighbor to pick them up when you are gone.
- ✓ Arrange to have someone take care of your yard work while you are gone.
- ✓ Don't leave keys in secret hiding places as burglars know them all.
- ✓ Be a good neighbor and if you notice suspicious activity in your neighborhood, contact the police immediately.

(Suggestions from Alameda County Area Agency on Aging & Advisory Commission on Aging)

As Hard to Grow Old as . . . (from page 1)

sexuals were a minority like African-Americans, equally deserving of civil rights, is 75.

A Harvard-trained astronomer, Dr. Kameny was blackballed as homosexual in the 1950's in Washington, D.C., where he still lives and works at the cause, alone and without a pension. Harry Hay, who has been ill, and his partner, John Burnside, are housed and supported with the help of a network of friends. They have a place in history, but no security. The leaders of the modern movement, which has given millions of dollars to favored politicians, should give some thought to their needs.

It is no small issue. For homosexuals, the twilight years can be especially daunting.

Something like two-thirds of people over 65 in the United States live with a spouse or relative, and the vast majority of those who need daily help are cared for by family. But studies in New York and Los Angeles have found that 65 to 75 percent of elderly gay people live alone. Because homosexuals don't get survivors' benefits from Social Security or most

The aging of a needy but mostly invisible gay population.

pension plans when their partners die, they may be poorer than their widowed heterosexual peers. Housing for the elderly is not an easy place to seem different – not if you want company and support. Attitudes are conservative, and for those in the geriatric towers and clusters where millions of old people now live – especially those dependent on subsidized low-income housing – the pressures to hide their identity can be strong.

In Atlanta late last year, at its Creating Change conference, the largest annual gathering on gay issues in the nation, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force held seminars on the needs of aging homosexuals. The development of gay retirement colonies is also under way. A score or more, in places like Florida, New Mexico and California, are in search of financing. But only one is up and growing, and open to both men and women. Called Palms of Mannasota, it is on 35 acres of farmland above Bradenton, Fla., on the south side of Tampa Bay. There, among the grapefruit, orange and banana trees, between two country Baptist churches, are 21 villas filled with people who have come from New York, Ohio, Oregon and elsewhere to live in retirement with others like themselves.

The people who live there seem to love the place, but strikingly, few are 65 or older. Most residents are couples in their 50's, a gay reflection of the national surge of affluent boomers into resort or retirement housing. Places like Palms of Mannasota will be for those who can afford them, and who are comfortable in all-gay housing. For those who are old, alone and poor, the likelier end is elderly housing, and, later on, a nursing home.

Book Review

Creating Change:

Sexuality, Public Policy, And Civil Rights

Edited By John D'Emilio, William B. Turner, and Urvashi Vaid

St. Martins Press

Paperback – \$19.95

These days your typical gay and lesbian observer is overwhelmed by the sheer mass of material relating to our community. That's why I welcome the appearance of anthology collections that cull the best articles about the latest trends in human liberation.

John D'Emilio, who teaches gay and lesbian studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago, William Turner, a history instructor at St. Cloud State University, in Minnesota, and Urvashi Viad, former head of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, have surveyed the field.

The variety is dazzling. Supreme Court decisions affecting gays, gay civil rights legislation (ENDA), gays in the military, the right to marry, the dog fight over family values, and lesbian health issues are analyzed. The connection between AIDS and the black community has long been a subject of controversy. For several disappointing years the black churches failed to address this deadly disease because the official attitude was that AIDS was strictly a white person's disease. Millions died while the game of denial was played out. The politics of this pathetic situation is explored by Cathy Cohen.

Nadine Smith provides a thought-provoking chronicle of the gay marches on Washington (1979, 1987, and 1993). But we need to ask ourselves if the marches have outlived their usefulness. Now is the time for professional lobbying and less yelling in the street with crude-looking signs.

The collection concludes with a look at the transgender community and a searching essay by John D'Emilio on the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and how it has evolved.

We owe it to ourselves to stay abreast of these exciting developments by reading books like **Creating Change**.

—Frank Howell

The challenge in such environments is to keep an independent spirit, and that is why Ruth Ellis, who lived in a retirement center, earned such affection, and respect. She was old and black and poor and gay, and happily herself. By the time she died, last October, she had become the subject of a documentary, an example of both the difficulty and effectiveness of honesty at her age.

No one knows how large a market there is for gay retirement colonies, but this much is certain. Centenarians are the fastest-growing age group in America. At some point, there are going to be a lot of people over 100 who are gay.

New York Times, January 2003,
Editorial Observer/Dudley Clendinen

Many Thanks to Our Donors

Home Instead Senior Care

Bea Howard

James Joslin

Rita Kresha and
Susan Vanderburgh

Mayor's Community Fund of
San Leandro (Sheila Young)

Ruth Michaels

Verne E. Nelson

Rolland Sherman

James Silva

and

Alameda County Leather Corps

John Ellefsen and Dotty Fowler were invited to a meeting of the Alameda County Leather Corps on March 13, to receive a check for money the Corps had raised at a recent event which was a benefit for the Lavender Seniors. What an exciting moment it was when John and Dotty were given the distribution for the Lavenders and saw that the check was for the amount of \$1,755!

Having this kind of effort put into raising money – and as they said “having good times” – coming from our LGBT community of support is what makes our programs possible. Many thanks to the Leather Corps!

Paid Research Subjects Needed

The School of Social Welfare at UC Berkeley is conducting research on caregivers to the aged.

Qualified subjects will be paid \$50 for attending one “focus group” (approximately 2½ hours long) at the San Leandro Community Church.

Information gathered will remain completely confidential and the participants will not be identified.

To qualify, the researchers say they are looking for persons where the following apply:

YOU help out or take care of someone 18 – 49 years old

You help with their care at least two hours a week – physical care, finances, housework, etcetera

The person is ill or disabled

The person cared for is your mom, dad, sibling or other relative

Or the person cared for is your partner, friend or neighbor

Further qualifiers: Lesbians, gay men, Filipinos, Cantonese- or Mandarin-speaking Chinese, African Americans or Russian-speaking Central Europeans

You may call our office to determine the April or May date: 510-667-9655.

The focus groups are part of a statewide effort to improve services for family caregivers. The Center for the Advanced Study of Aging Services, School of Social Welfare, UC Berkeley, is conducting the research for the California Department of Aging, as part of the National Family Caregiver Support Project.

¡Happy Birthday!

Glenn Cummins

April 2

Earle Brown

April 5

Dorothea Carter

Don Green

Gordon Osser

April 7

Ray Robb

April 12

Tracy O'Kates

April 13

Julia Craig

April 14

Dorothy Chevalier

Iris Crider

April 15

John Ellefsen

April 24

Kate Rosenblatt

April 26

Amoi Leung

April 29

Ron Ermini

April 30

¡Feliz Cumpleaños!

Saturday • 12 Noon • Potluck Meeting
• Program at 1:15 P.M. • April 12 •

Your name begins with the letters

A through I — Bring a Main Dish

J through R — Bring a Salad

S through Z — Bring a Dessert/Fruit

San Leandro BART station shuttle is available. Call voice mail day before: 667-9655 to arrange pickup.

Presentation of the Month: Susan Brady

Legal Assistance For Seniors to be Explored

Older citizens are often baffled by the bewildering maze of rules and regulations produced by social agencies. How does medicare work? How do I cope with an HMO? Is long term health insurance right for me? How do I protect myself from fraud and abuse? These and other concerns will be explained by Susan Brady. Susan represents Legal Assistance for Seniors, an organization located in Oakland. Many valuable tips will be given at this vital presentation.

New Interim Director

(concluded from page 1)

gанизation notified him we would be interested in his joining us he began preparing to leave his home in Kentucky. He gave notice to his employer and sold his house in Louisville – it took just three days – and will be driving to California any day now.

He told us his family and friends gave him a wonderful farewell party. “It’s been difficult to leave so many friends and colleagues and at the same time I know that the most important relationships will not end.” Also he said that moving here is an important growth opportunity and that he’s looking forward to starting a new life in the Bay area with his partner of one-and-a-half years, Gilberto Gerald.

Finally he said, “I like the people I have talked to at Lavender Seniors, they are down-to-earth folks. Its an honor to be serving LGBT seniors. They have paved the way for the younger generation to enjoy the feelings they have.” Please join us in welcoming Jeff Vessels to the Lavender Seniors.
 —Dotty Fowler

Sun Sense

“Spring has sprung” and with it comes the sun and more time spent outdoors. Prolonged sun exposure or infrequent sun burns can have effects from aging of the skin to skin cancer (basal cell, squamous cell or melanoma).

Here are some simple rules to help protect your skin:

1. Limit sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.
2. Apply a generous amount of UVA/UVB Broad Spectrum sunscreenn with a SPF of 15 or higher. Apply to any sun exposed area – face, neck, ears and hands. If bald, don’t forget your scalp! If you swim or perspire heavily, apply a water-resistant sunscreen. Sunscreen should be applied to dry skin 15 minutes before sun exposure and re-applied every two hours.
3. Some medications make you more susceptible to the sun’s rays. Check with your physician or pharmacist. Protect yourself.
4. Wear protective tight woven clothing and wide brimmed hats before sun exposure. Visors are not adequate protection for your scalp . . . with or without hair!
5. Self tanning products do not protect you from the sun.

So enjoy the sun – just use “sun sense”!!

—Kathy McCarter, R.N.

Our Mailing List Lavender Seniors does not lend, sell or give away its mailing list to any outside organization.

Your support is crucial to enable the *Lavender Seniors* to continue its role as a vital resource to our community. Please take a moment and send your donation today.

Here’s my gift of: \$10 ____ \$25 ____ \$50 ____ \$75 ____ \$100 ____ other ____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip Code _____

Home Telephone _____

E-mail address _____

Please make checks payable to
The Tides Center/Lavender Seniors
 and mail to:
 Lavender Seniors
 1395Bancroft Avenue
 San Leandro, CA 94577

Thank you for your generosity!

☐ Please contact me about including Lavender Seniors in my will. ☐ Please contact me to volunteer.

Community Listings

East Bay Women's Support Group

Meets 2nd and 4th Fridays each month

April 11 and 25: 1:15 – 3 P.M.

Meets at *Pacific Center*,
2712 Telegraph Avenue, Berkeley

Fellows of East Bay

Second Sunday, 5:30 – 8:30 P.M.

Social Club for mature men and their admirers. Monthly Potluck dinner and social held the second Sunday of every month at Oak Center Towers, 1515 Market Street, Oakland.

Bring food and drink to share and a \$4 donation.

April 13

Senior Men's Afternoon

1:30 – 3:30 P.M.

2nd and 4th Thursdays

April 10 and 24

**2712 Telegraph Avenue,
Berkeley**

Co-sponsored by *Pacific Center*
and *Lavender Seniors*

Special Kudos

From the potluck coordinators:

Many, many thanks to those who help to set up the room and take it down at the end. *We appreciate all the help and hope that others will join in the ongoing effort.*

Free Income Tax Help

If you would like help with your taxes, call your local senior center and schedule an appointment with an expert trained to help reduce your tax preparation stress. The free, one-on-one confidential income tax counseling service is usually in high demand, so it is recommended you call early for an appointment.

(Recommendation from Alameda County Area Agency on Aging & Advisory Commission on Aging)

Lighthouse Programs Committee Needs You Now!

The Lighthouse **Programs Committee** is looking for people who are willing to volunteer some time and who are available during the weekdays. We need your participation in planning our wonderful events! Without the Programs Committee, the Lighthouse would just be a space that few would benefit from. Volunteering for Programs is also the perfect activity for retired Seniors. The Programs Committee meets every first Monday from 1pm to 3pm. Please join us on March 3rd or April 7th. You won't be sorry.

510-881-8167

Credit Protection

Effective January 1, 2003, people have the right to "freeze" access to their credit reports maintained by the three major credit bureaus and then "thaw" them with a special PIN when they apply for a credit card or a loan.

According to Senator Debra Bowen (D-Redondo Beach), author of SB 168, even if a thief has your Social Security number and a fake driver's license he/she would not be able to buy anything based on your good credit rating since he/she would not be able to get access to your credit report without your PIN.

Basically the process is that you must send the credit bureaus a request in writing, giving your name, address, date of birth, and Social Security number, as well as a check, money order or a credit card number to cover the fee. Within 5 days you will receive a confirmation number, complete details on how to release the freeze, and a PIN number.

Equifax (800-685-1111) indicated a \$12 payment was required. TransUnion (888-909-8872) has a \$29.95 fee and a charge of \$14.95 each time you ask for a release. I was unable to get through the phone tree to get information from Experian (888-397-3742). Experian did warn that putting a freeze on your account could delay or prohibit access, so it may take them some time to get the "bugs" worked out.

Nationwide, about 1 in 5 families have been victims. Identity theft can occur in a variety of ways, such as stealing your Social Security number or credit card number and then changing the address on your bills, using your information to impersonate you and then rent or buy products, using your information in criminal acts. When you consider that last year California reported 30,738 identity theft cases – the most of any state – it is something to consider.

(Information from Alameda County Area Agency on Aging & Advisory Commission on Aging)