

The Rainbow Seniors Logo



***Promoting and addressing life issues affecting the
general welfare of older gay, lesbian, bisexual,
transgender, and intersex (GLBTI) individuals***

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The Empty Closet

February 2004

Who is a Rainbow Senior of Western New York?

By Bob Hammond, President

This can be an interesting question with many answers. Last month we learned there is no set rule for how to classify a person as being a "senior". For ease of definition, we have decided anyone over the age of 21 qualifies. If you are not an "older" GLBT now, someday you will be.

As an organization, we are a diverse group. We are your friends, your neighbors, or perhaps a co-worker. To others, we may be a member of your family, your brother, sister, aunt, uncle, or in some cases your parent or grandparent.

Yes, many of us tried to do what society expected when we were younger. We married, had families, and went on with our lives. We tried to live the life "society" expected of us. At some point, it differs for each one of us; we could not go on hiding who we really were. Today it is not unusual for one to come out as a teen, younger people today have it so much easier coming out than someone older. I recently met a wonderful person who is afraid to come out too quickly for fear of what his children and grand children might think. For many coming out is a life long process, in this case, the person is over 75. Many "seniors" have been in the closet for so long they do not know any other life.

I wonder the reaction of someone who is 20-25 and asked to return to the "closet" for a time. The answer would most likely be a NO WAY! We have members that are open and some who have been in that closet for 10, 20, 30 or more years. We understand their position and accept them, embrace them. It is our differences and experiences that have the greatest value. It is always a good day when we can learn something new or make a new friend. Our membership, geographically, is from Buffalo, Syracuse and close to the NY/PA state line. Our age ranges currently are from later 30's to???

I can almost imagine what some of you may be thinking. Who needs "old folks"? Well, today "seniors" live longer than at any time in the human past. Seniors today THINK younger, DRESS younger, ACT and FEEL younger. Who has the time to get "old"? We surely don't have the time. We are too busy with enjoying our lives, families and friends. Those of us who may be retired are so busy they wonder how there was ever time to work. Others of us work, and sometimes just like younger people 2 or 3 jobs.

Many have worked hard, whether out in front or behind the scenes for the advances we have seen thus far. Still there is much more to be done. We have seen the bill in Albany passed to stop discrimination. We have seen the marriage decision in Ontario and Mass. We are fortunate to live in Rochester where we have open and out members of our community on the city council. There is much more that needs to be done. We, as a community, need to inform the hetero world that we are here; we have our lives and our "chosen families". We do not seek special rights nor privileges only equal rights and

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privileges. What happens today if you have a partner? Do you have the same rights at a hospital or nursing home? Do you or your partner have rights to the property you own together if something happens to one of you? Perhaps you do, then perhaps not. Some families would circle like vultures to take everything if the opportunity arose. I do not think any of us want to see that happen to anyone. RSWNY is not now nor ever will be a political organization. We only wish to help our members and if to do so we need to help others learn and understand our needs, wants and desires then we shall do it.

Rainbow Seniors of Western New York is happy to be working with the Gay Alliance of the Genesee Valley on a joint survey to determine the needs and desires of our community, YOUR community. Many have concerns about housing, access to their partner during medical crisis, transportation limitations, in some cases doing yard work or snow shoveling. We as a community can not work to help with concerns if we do not know which items should be on the "top of the list". Let us know your thought and where you would like to see the focus concentrated.

Currently we meet monthly for a potluck dinner on the 3rd Sunday of the month 4:00 PM at AIDS Rochester, 1350 University Ave. We have other activities along the way and still more in the planning stages. These include social as well as informational activities. December had a meeting on advance care directives, a lunch and movie group. Etc. We hope to get other group activities onto the calendar as well. Plans are in the works for a reading group and a euchre club.

Join us for a fun time and friendship. Meet new friends or connect with an old friend.

If you wish more information about Rainbow Seniors of Western New York we may be contacted at the following address:

RSWNY 305 Pearl St, Rochester, NY 14607

Rainbowseniorswny@yahoo.com

Or leave a message at 585-442-6369 and someone will return your call.

Remember, we do not stop playing because we get old. We get old because we stop playing.



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