

The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same
By Bob Hammond

On April 17, RSWNY, in cooperation with the GAGV Youth Group and ARI, held our 2nd Annual Intergenerational Panel. The three organizations had a combined attendance of over 70 people. Some of those in attendance expressed entirely new thoughts and ideas that many had never considered previously. For almost all, new friends were made and knowledge exchanged.

Listening to the youth and the older panel members, a common thread was seen. It matters not when you decided to openly express your true self, it is always a difficult process. If you are 16 or 60, true friends remain and possible unknown foes appear. These foes can be as open as the people who want to beat up every GLBTI person they meet or the subtle type who want to deny you every right you so greatly deserve. I do not intend to mean 'special rights' but only equal rights. The basic human right all people and families deserve.

Twenty, thirty or forty years ago, most of our community had to remain somewhat in the closet. It is so sad to see that in some areas it is still the same today for the youth. Yes, the youth who will be our future. Rochester is very fortunate to have groups to support both the youth and the senior communities. Other areas sadly do not have much to offer any age groups. Most rural areas have little or nothing to assist anyone in our community regardless of age. What is available is ever so difficult to locate. Syracuse has a strong seniors organization in SAGE Upstate and little for youth. Buffalo has started Rainbow Elders of the Niagara Frontier for the seniors in their community.

One comment was made which shows well how our community, yes OUR community, yours and mine, need to come together and work toward common goals. A statement was made by a youth who said they had never met a gay person over the age of 30 until the panel is difficult to believe. I'm sure that this is most likely not the case. After all we are everywhere, but in rural areas the closet door may only be cracked open. Coming from a rural area myself, I know how difficult it may be to find the support of others like us without traveling long distances. Sadly, it seems most social activities in our community tend to keep the ages separated rather than trying to bring the community together.

We need to reach out and embrace each other be it mutual support, information exchange or just someone to listen when life gets too heavy to bear alone. Our goal, plans, ambitions, and desires are all the same regardless of age, race, or beliefs. We all wish to have happy, productive lives with our chosen families.

Our panel consisted of Black, White, Latino, male and female. The common thread was that we are all part of the GLBTI community. Does it matter if someone is gay, lesbian bisexual, transsexual, intersex, Black, white, Latino, Asian. or somewhere in between? No, it does not matter one tiny bit. We are all people. We are all members of OUR community. Let's make our community open and caring for everyone.

Come and join Rainbow Seniors of Western New York at our next meeting on June 19th at 4:00 PM for our potluck dinner. We meet at 1st Universalist Church located at 150 S. Clinton Ave. The location is handicap accessible. If you are a member of the deaf community as well, interpreters are available on request. Our doors are open to all of the community. For further information, check out our web site at www.rainbowseniorswny.org or call 585-442-6369.