

Rainbow Seniors  
Marilyn Mitchell, Secretary

It is a pleasure to write the Rainbow Seniors of Western NY (RSWNY) article for the Empty Closet this month. There have been several exciting occurrences in the lives of GLBTI seniors in Western NY and across the state. I want to share a few of those with you.

As you may already know, RSWNY has received two legislative grants through Empire State Pride Agenda's LGBT Health & Human Services Network (The Network). This funding is assisting us in purchasing technical equipment to build our infrastructure and in offering the membership opportunities that would otherwise not be possible. In other words, we are able to fill more of the gaps senior GLBTI individuals have. We are fairly confident that there will be more funding like this in the future because there are many more gaps to fill. By no stretch of the imagination are we reaching all who would benefit from RSWNY activities, opportunities, companionship, and fellowship. RSWNY will pursue applications for more grants in order to hire staff and locate a permanent "home."

If you are over 50, please consider joining us for any of a number of events that you will find on our Web site, [www.rainbowseniorswny.org](http://www.rainbowseniorswny.org). If you prefer contacting an individual, our president, Bob Hammond, can be reached at [bob\\_hammond@rainbowseniorswny.org](mailto:bob_hammond@rainbowseniorswny.org) or by phone at 585.442.6369. Try the monthly potlucks (3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of each month) at the 1<sup>st</sup> Universalist Church, 150 S. Clinton, downtown Rochester. We have a great time playing, chatting, and dining on delicious homemade goodies. Our potluck in April will be on Sunday, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 4:00 P.M.

For my article I wish to focus on The Network, who generously awarded RSWNY the two grants mentioned above. The Network has been in existence for 11 years. The mission statement of The Network states, "The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex Health and Human Services network (The Network) is an association of LGBT-specific and LBGT-supportive non-profit groups and organizations that serve the non-HIV/AIDS-related health and human services needs of the LGBT New Yorkers. The Network's purpose is to ensure and enhance our ability to provide needed services to LGBT communities." There are 6 subgroups in The Network, including the Seniors Issues Work Group, the Youth Issues Work Group, and a Funding Taskforce.

The Network convened a retreat on February 13, 2006, in Albany. Two other RSWNY Board members and I had the privilege of attending the meeting. I learned a great deal about the Network through members of organizations and agencies across the state. Serving the needs of the aging GLBTI community is only one of the goals of The Network. That goal is why RSWNY was so enthusiastic to be an active participant on the 13th. During the general meeting, The Network shared its many successes during 2005, some of which included receiving a technical assistance grant from the NY State Health Department, reallocating that funding, working with youth, adding new member

organizations, strengthening the infrastructure, and creating a buddy system to assist new organizations.

The Network had numerous and challenging goals for 2006. One RSWNY Board member, Sherlea Dony, is a member the Senior Issues Work Group that focuses on the needs of aging LGBTI individuals. We know with confidence that the GLBTI aging community in Western NY is well represented by Sherlea as The Network moves tenaciously forward to accomplish its goals. Some of the many goals for the overall Network in 2006 are focused on the implications of “No Dignity for All Students Act” (DASA); educating the powers that be on the importance and need for additional funding; strengthening the “buddy” system, maximizing resources; bringing small member organizations to The Network table; engaging more volunteer organizations; increasing non-Caucasian and non-hearing group membership; and many more. Please go to the Web site for The Empire State Pride Agenda (ESPA) to learn more about The Network, [www.prideagenda.org](http://www.prideagenda.org). It’s the only program of its kind in the country, as is ESPA.

The following day, February 14<sup>th</sup>, we had the privilege of participating in the 2006 Network Advocacy Day. Most participants from The Network retreat traveled to the Empire State Plaza in downtown Albany to organize and meet with Assembly people and Senators. We were there to advocate for the needs of the NYS LGBTI community. What an exciting day this was! Some of the legislators’ offices met small groups of us, through their aides, for only a few minutes. Others opened their offices to us for a lengthy period of time. We left feeling tremendous respect for those legislators and the offices that sincerely and honestly wanted to know about the LGBTI constituency and support our identified needs.

Allow me to share one successful, and extremely important, piece of legislation that was passed this year. On February 6, 2006, Governor Pataki signed a bill that gives same-sex (and opposite-sex) partners the ability to make decisions about their partner’s remains. “The new law creates a simple proxy form for use by New Yorkers, recognizing that a written document expressing the wishes of the deceased always takes highest precedence in determining disposition of bodily remains. When no proxy exists, a priority list is followed to determine authority. The list in the law gives equal standing to spouses and domestic partners above blood relationships like adult children, parents and adult siblings.” This is extremely important for couples. There are many more important pieces of legislation that must be pursued tenaciously, not the least of which is civil unions for same-sex partners so that couples have the same rights and privileges as opposite-sex marriages.

I must say that, although it was an honor and generally exciting to meet our legislators, the most valuable experiences for the Advocacy Day, as well as the retreat the day before, was meeting other members of our community—experienced members who professionally, knowledgeably, positively, and successfully reached out to each other and to legislators. Within minutes, I felt as if I had been a part of The Network for a very long time and hope to be able to represent RSWNY again in future activities.

Again, please consider supporting RSWNY directly or indirectly. If you have any questions, please contact us at your convenience. Have a terrific month!