



Select location

Search



Sign In | Register

EDGE
MEDIANETWORK

News A&E Biz Tech Money Cars Style Health Travel Nightlife Pride

News » Religion

Gay, Gray and on the Way - to SAGE!

by Winnie McCroy
EDGE Editor
Friday May 15, 2015

PRINT

EMAIL

COMMENTS (0)



About 15 years ago, I was a friendly visitor for SAGE. I had just moved back to New York and wanted to volunteer for my community. My wild, late-night lifestyle wasn't something I wanted LGBT youth to emulate, so I decided to help out older gays. I registered with SAGE, which back then stood for Seniors Active in a Gay Environment.

I asked to be paired with an active gay man who enjoyed going out to see classic films, figuring I'd finally have someone to watch *Mildred Pierce* with. Instead, they teamed me up with a homebound lesbian with a deep-seated love of rice pudding.

"You're too fat," was a standard greeting from Adele, a retired gym teacher. Her demeanor was initially off-putting, but I grew to love her curmudgeonly ways. As she told me tales about how life used to be, I realized that the new world of LGBT rights and visibility was not one in which Adele was especially comfortable. But one thing she did love was getting together with her old friends at monthly SAGE meetups. When we headed to the LGBT Community Center for Boston Market chicken dinners and conversations with other SAGE Members, she truly seemed happy.



SAGE on a field trip (Source:sageusa.org)

These days, SAGE offers a lot more to its members than just some grubby gay kid to stop by with their groceries and clean laundry. In 2014, they opened a SAGE Center in midtown Manhattan, at 305 Seventh Avenue and 27th Street, offering a comprehensive array of unique services and programs related to arts and culture, fitness, food and nutrition, health and wellness and lifelong education for LGBT elders. They provide camaraderie, life skills for a changing world and meals for a few bucks. They have a medical examination room with an on-duty nurse to address a litany of aging concerns, among them HIV. About a fifth of SAGE clients are HIV-positive.

In the main hall, where meals are served, an audio induction loop helps those with hearing aids. Older people can enjoy dance lessons, art instruction, games, film screenings, Zumba, tai chi, meditation, parties and other events. There are special women's groups and dances. They even go on field trips to museums and theaters, and summer treks to Fire Island.



(Source:sageusa.org)

A computer training room with 15 terminals gives elders access to the Internet and email, and the skills to navigate them. A collaboration with Beth Israel Medical Center provides for regular blood pressure screening, medication assessment, disease assistance (diabetes, hypertension, heart disease) and more. They offer an informative series of "Ask the Docs" sessions led by geriatric specialists focused on health issues facing LGBT elders.

"Many people are out to their friends, but not out in the neighborhood they live in, like the Bronx," said Bronx SAGE

member John Roane. "But if you go to the SAGE Center near where you live, you might run into some neighbors you didn't know were gay and strike up a friendship. And even if you are in the closet, when you're at SAGE, you are free to be as outrageous as you want."

Caseworkers help with benefits, Medicaid, Medicare and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. They even provide pro bono attorneys to answer questions about elder law, consumer debt, housing issues, guardianship, public benefits or immigration.

As Roane says, "If you need help with personal problems, they have counseling. If you need help filing for rent exemption for seniors, you can talk to a case manager rather than travel to the Department of Aging. It's one-stop shopping."



SAGE's Midtown Manhattan location (Source:sageusa.org)

The Manhattan SAGE Center was the first of its kind, serving 2,000 people a month. But it was hardly the last. SAGE currently welcomes LGBT older adults at five centers throughout New York City, with services available in all five boroughs. In November 2014 they opened up in Harlem, and in December 2014 SAGE and the Pride Center of Staten Island expanded their services to LGBT elders. On January 14, SAGE inaugurated its new center in the Bronx. And on March 16, SAGE and Griot Circle of Brooklyn launched a partnership funded by the New York City Council.

SAGE's expansion has particularly benefited members like Roane, a 67-year-old gay man of color who lives just a few

blocks from the new SAGE Bronx center. Three years ago, he used to trek an hour and a half each way on the train to take advantage of programs at the Queens Center for Gay Seniors, formerly known as SAGE Queens. When his partner of 35 years passed away in 2011, he felt like a fish out of water.

"It's hard enough to meet people when you're young and out and about," said Roane. "But you can meet people at SAGE by watching movies, going to the theater or concerts. They would ordinarily be too expensive, but SAGE gives us free tickets to shows." Working with Access-A-Ride programs, SAGE even provides transportation for people to attend these events, like a recent trek to the New York Botanical Gardens for the Orchid Show.



Get your meals at SAGE (Source:sageusa.org)

SAGE keeps members healthy by providing daily meals. They are available for a \$2 donation on a first-come, first-served basis to adults ages 60 and older, with a menu posted on the website and vegetarian options available. The NYC Department for the Aging and the MAC AIDS Fund helps pay for the meals.

"Now I know that each day I have a balanced meal," said Roane. "Not everybody can say that, especially when they get older and don't feel like cooking, or don't like eating alone. SAGE provides wonderful meals and camaraderie."

Roane said that SAGE also looked after members' physical and emotional well-being. He spoke highly of the personal trainer he was working with, saying that SAGE provided transportation to and from the gym. He praised an art program that brought in an educator from the Museum of Modern Art to present a slideshow presentation, then provided supplies for members to create their own art. At the end of the eight-week class, one artwork will be selected to hang in the museum.



(Source:sageusa.org)

SAGE is working to reshape the gay experience for those who may have had to live in the closet. Roane spoke about life as a young gay man, prowling decaying piers and dark streets in seedy parts of the city to meet up with other gays. Living your life in the shadows affects you psychologically. But today, he said, being gay is OK, and older people can see what it's like to live out in the open, in the relatively safe space provided by SAGE.

"I go to a Latin dance class, and it's nice to do that within a queer environment, because if I want to dance with a guy, people don't balk like they would at a mainstream place," said

Roane. "I also wanted to learn to speak Spanish, and they'll teach it for a nominal fee, if anything."

SAGE members with physical or cognitive limitations aren't left out in the cold either. A partnership with the Hebrew Home at Riverdale has resulted in SAGEDay, New York City's first comprehensive LGBT-inclusive

social adult day program. It offers socialization, wellness programs, movement classes, memory support, live entertainment, art, history, meals, special trips and outings, and round-trip, door-to-door transportation. This supervised program is a lifeline to members who need a little help to get around.

And SAGE doesn't just offer help in these centers. Their advocacy work in the National LGBT Elder Housing Initiative helps keep members in their homes, or find them a safe place to live. One in eight LGBT older people reports housing discrimination because of their sexual orientation, and one in four transgender older people report discrimination based on gender identity. This discrimination is nationwide, and even occurs in states with legislative protections in place.



Have fun with SAGE! (Source:sageusa.org)

Economic insecurity, housing discrimination and a lack of legal protections can make life precarious for LGBT elders. But SAGE's national, multiyear housing initiative fights back by building housing, training providers, changing policy, educating consumer and expanding services.

The work that SAGE does isn't just for New Yorkers. SAGeNet offers programs across the United States, from Philadelphia to Rhode Island, Maine to Milwaukee, St. Louis to Cleveland, California to Portland, Florida to Atlanta to Washington, DC. Wherever you are, it's likely that SAGE is there too, helping you have a higher quality of life.

SAGE is sharing the stories of the LGBT individuals who helped spawn a civil rights movement that now affords gays and lesbians the right to marry in many states. With the support of the AARP Foundation and the Ford Foundation, they have founded SAGE Story, a digital storytelling program to keep these stories alive and open the conversation on aging, long-term care and LGBT rights.

"We're not like our grandparents were, sitting around in our housecoat," said Roane. "We're out and about, we have friendships and things to do. SAGE provides almost all of the things you could possibly need for free or a minimal cost. Some people don't want to think about getting older, but it's not a bad thing, considering the alternative. And you have the possibility of a much richer older experience with SAGE."

You may not be a gay older person. You may not even know any LGBT elders. But those of us who play our cards right will eventually live long enough to be old. And when we do, it's nice to know that SAGE will be there with us.

For more information, visit sageusa.org.



Winnie McCroy is the Women on the EDGE Editor, HIV/Health Editor, and Assistant Entertainment Editor for EDGE Media Network, handling all women's news, HIV health stories and theater reviews throughout the U.S. She has contributed to other publications, including The Village Voice, Gay City News, Chelsea Now and The Advocate, and lives in Brooklyn, New York, where she writes about local restaurants in her food blog, <http://brooklyniscookin.blogspot.com/>

Comments


Add New Comment

Comments on Facebook


0 Comments

Sort by

Top



Add a comment...

 Facebook Comments Plugin



Related Stories

SAGE Launches National Housing Initiative for LGBT Elders
NATIONAL | By EDGE | Feb 5
SAGE has launched a comprehensive national initiative to address the LGBT older adult housing crisis, hosting a panel discussion at its national headquarters on February 3 with marriage equality pioneer Edie Windsor.

SAGEWorks Brings Employment Boot Camp to LGBT Elders
NATIONAL | By Winnie McCroy | Jan 7
Are you an older LGBT, struggling with lack of up-to-date computer skills, an absence from the job market, or a rusty resume? If you need the skills to make it in a job market that can be stacked against older workers, SAGEWorks is just what you need!

Sage Release Research on Aging Among LGBTs
NATIONAL | By Winnie McCroy | Nov 10
LGBT seniors report high concerns about aging and retirement, a lack of disclosure to their healthcare providers and smaller support networks, but are also more likely to see themselves as mentors, reads a new report by SAGE.



Arkansas AG: Unclear Whether JPs Must Officiate Gay Weddings

It's unclear whether courts would require a justice of the peace to officiate over a same-sex wedding, even though clerks are required to issue licenses to gay couples, Arkansas Attorney General Leslie Rutledge said Wednesday.

More»



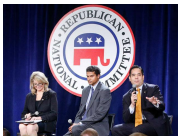
INSIDE EDGE



Outside Lands Announces the GastroMagic Lineup



US Consumer Spending Edges Up in June



Report: Republican National Committee Nixes 2 Anti-Gay Resolutions



Future Unsure for Troubled New Mexico Green Chile Production



US Agency Denies Request for Fiat Chrysler Investigation



Texas Gov. Accosted by Traveler Angered Over Gay Marriage Stance



Network Partners

Things to do

- Atlanta, GA
- Atlantic City, NJ
- Austin, TX
- Baltimore, MD
- Boston, MA
- Buffalo, NY
- Charlotte, NC
- Chicago, IL
- Cleveland, OH
- Columbus, OH
- Dallas, TX
- Denver, CO
- Detroit, MI
- Ft. Lauderdale, FL
- Fire Island, NY
- Indianapolis, IN
- Key West, FL
- Las Vegas, NV
- Los Angeles, CA
- Miami, FL
- Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN
- Nashville, TN
- New Orleans, LA
- New York, NY
- Orlando, FL
- Palm Springs, CA
- Philadelphia, PA
- Phoenix, AZ
- Pittsburgh, PA
- Portland, OR
- Providence, RI
- Provincetown, MA
- San Diego, CA
- San Francisco, CA
- Seattle, WA
- Washington, DC
- BARTab
- Bay Area Reporter
- Bay Windows
- Damron LGBT Travel
- HotSpots! Magazine
- Metro Weekly
- QNotes
- Rage Monthly
- South Florida Gay News
- Uomo Moderno
- Get Newsletters
- Learn about EDGE
- Work here
- Visit our Press Room
- Advertise
- Write Feedback
- Read Privacy Statement
- Read Terms of Use
- Contact Us

Copyright © 2003-2015

EDGE Publications, Inc. / All Rights Reserved

Homotech, YouShoot, EDGE Media Network, Pride Labs and QueeryMe are registered trademarks of EDGE Publications Inc.

98.14.250.18