

New Beginnings

By Seth Kilbourn, Executive Director



I knew from the moment I walked in as the new Executive Director of **openhouse** that I had landed in the right place at the right time to lead this vibrant, cutting-edge and critically needed organization. **openhouse** has the greatest opportunity in its ten years of service to San Francisco's lesbian,

gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community to expand its reach and take its truly entrepreneurial vision of building housing, services and community for LGBT seniors to the state and national level.

What struck me first as I took the helm in August was the incredible talents and dedication of the staff and board. Day in and day out, our Education and Outreach Coordinators are talking to seniors, visiting senior centers across the city and working with a wide range of agencies to improve the health and well-being of LGBT seniors. They inspire me every day.

openhouse Board members through their bold tenacity have become key participants in critical policy and planning discussions in every corner of the city and at the highest levels of government. **openhouse** has brought the LGBT community to the table where private developers, city agencies and public officials make important decisions that impact the lives of San Francisco's large and growing senior population.

HOUSING

One of the most memorable moments for me in the last two months was my tour of the site at 55 Laguna Street where **openhouse** will construct its new building with 88 units of affordable housing, an on-site senior center and a state of the art comprehensive care facility welcoming to LGBT seniors, their friends and family.

55 Laguna will not only transform the lives of the LGBT people who live there, it will be a critical resource for

all seniors who live in the neighborhood and across the city. Creating those kinds of transformations and community partnerships is what **openhouse** is all about.

SERVICES

I have seen first hand that our LGBT seniors are resilient and tenacious. But they also grew up in a time when they could be fired, institutionalized or incarcerated for being open. As a result, LGBT seniors do not access the care they need because they fear judgment, rejection or compromised care if they come out. **openhouse** is changing that reality through our Cultural Competency Trainings for staff in senior service agencies on how to better understand and serve LGBT seniors. Since 2004, **openhouse** has worked with and trained more than 1,000 service providers from over 150 agencies and is now a recognized leader throughout California providing this kind of training and support.

COMMUNITY

openhouse doesn't stop at trainings. Our experience shows that senior centers and other facilities need additional help in implementing programs by and for LGBT seniors. Take a moment to read Ken and Steve's story, just one example of how **openhouse** is impacting the daily lives of LGBT seniors by building visibility and community. I want to see stories like theirs replicated all over San Francisco and across the state.

An estimated 1.7 to 3 million Americans over the age of 60 are LGBT. The demand is endless for the expertise that **openhouse** has to offer. How much and how far we are able to bring that experience to bear is entirely dependent on the resources we, as a community, are willing to invest.

I couldn't be more proud to lead this incredible organization at such a critical time. I greatly look forward to working with all of you in the months and years ahead to ensure that LGBT seniors—no matter where they live—are able to age with dignity and grace in the place they call home.



housing, services, and community for LGBT seniors

openhouse

Support our entrepreneurial vision
Make a generous tax-deductible gift today at
www.openhouse-sf.org

We'd love your comments
Please send your feedback, thoughts and
ideas to info@openhouse-sf.org

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SPOTLIGHT

Ken Prag and Steve Collins, regulars at the Castro Street Senior Center LGBT Discussion Group, read an ad in the *Bay Times* welcoming LGBT seniors to the Castro Senior Center lunch program. Before they saw the ad, they thought the Senior Center served only non-LGBT people—yes, even in the Castro! But **openhouse** had been working with the Center to establish a program specifically for LGBT seniors in the neighborhood. Ken and Steve were delighted to find such a fun and friendly gay group. When **openhouse** began the LGBT Senior Discussion Group at the Castro Senior Center, Ken and Steve knew it was for them. They keep coming because they find the group exciting and exhilarating, and for the opportunity to get to know other LGBT seniors, and for the interesting discussions.

They love the lunches—“a mini-party during the day”—and the film series on Mondays and Fridays. They now have a whole new set of friends to go out with to share movies, plays and LGBT events.



Ken Prag and Steve Collins, San Francisco residents since 1969

With the help of **openhouse**, Ken and Steve’s new goal is to compile a list of area LGBT seniors who want to be connected and support each other. And they are our newest volunteer panelists for our Cultural Competency Training program for senior service agencies.

housing, services, and community for LGBT seniors

openhouse

Founded in 1998, **openhouse** is a nonprofit organization working to ensure that all seniors—regardless of income level, sexual orientation or gender identity—are able to age with dignity and grace in the place they call home.

openhouse is working to:

- build affordable and mixed income housing that is welcoming and inclusive of LGBT seniors and their friends.
- create and increase the accessibility of health and social services welcoming to LGBT seniors.
- develop community programs targeting LGBT seniors within the larger network of services available to all seniors.

Felicia Elizondo, volunteer speaker for openhouse training programs



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