

## Fly Like An EAGLE

### Lesbian and gay elders take flight

By KarenMarie Kauderer

EAGLES (Elder Action in the Gay and Lesbian Environments) is a support organization which benefits lesbian and gay elders, 50 and older, in the Buffalo and Western New York state area. It creates a supportive community environment by counteracting the social isolation such people often experience.

This enhanced environment is being created through the Elder Support Program, support groups and social events. EAGLES also provides service providers with training and consultation to assist them in being part of a supportive community for lesbian and gay elders.

EAGLES strives to decrease the isolation felt by many lesbian and gay elders through provision of concrete services, social support and intergenerational programming with existing lesbian and gay organizations. In addition, EAGLES provides training and consultation to area social service and health care providers to enable them to more effectively meet the needs of lesbian and gay elders.

EAGLES is committed to addressing the needs of all lesbian and gay elders, especially working-class and differently abled members of our community, and lesbians and gays of color, all of whom often face financial and social obstacles in obtaining needed services.

Such service programs currently exist in New York City and San Francisco, but EAGLES is the first such organization in a mid-sized industrial city such as Buffalo.

#### EAGLES Rising

EAGLES began in January 1994 as a single program initiated by Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis, authors of *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community*. The authors' work with the elder, working-class lesbian narrators of this oral history heightened their awareness of the needs of lesbian and gay elders. Kennedy and Davis donated 70% of the proceeds from the book to create EAGLES. Julia Reinstein, an elder community member, donated the additional monies necessary to fund the organization for its first year.

EAGLES is conducting an ongoing assessment of the needs of lesbian and gay elders on which to base its programming. This has involved meeting with lesbian and gay elders and learning about their strengths and the areas in which EAGLES can help improve the quality of their lives. To date, the needs assessment has highlighted the lack of social support, the difficulty caused by transportation problems, the need for

advocacy with health care and social service providers, and assistance with planning for the future.

The program's success in reaching lesbian and gay elders in need can be attributed to the participation of a core consultant group of lesbian elder community members who also participated as oral history narrators for *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*. This group — which includes working-class lesbian elders, lesbian elders of color and differently abled lesbian elders — is helping EAGLES make contact with lesbian and gay elders in the community who would otherwise be difficult to reach. One member travels in from a remote, rural area to participate in this group. This year's goal is to expand EAGLES' social groups into the suburban and rural areas to reach elders further isolated by distance and transportation difficulties.

The need for this kind of organization in Western New York has also been illustrated by the enthusiasm with which it has been supported. Besides the program consultants, there has been a strong response from people interested in supporting and volunteering for EAGLES.

#### How Far We've Flown

EAGLES has already accomplished the following:

- The Elder Support Program (ESP) is matching volunteers — many of whom are young people in the lesbian and gay community — with lesbian and gay elders. ESP provides a vital social link, as well as assistance with transportation, shopping, etc. The quality of life for several lesbian and gay elders has already improved significantly because of this program. With the help of their volunteers, several elders have started attending community events for the first time in many years.

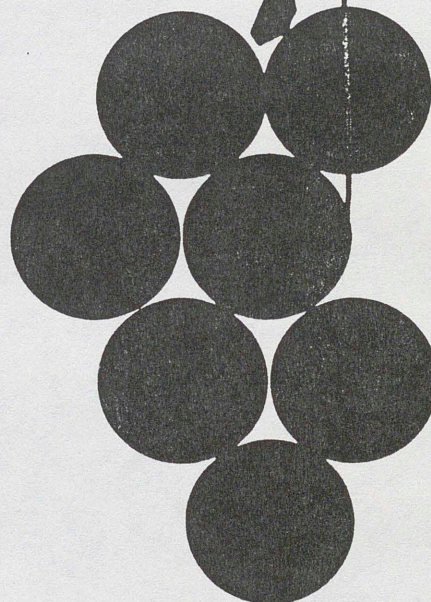
- A bereavement support group is provided for lesbian and gay elders who have lost a significant other, offering an important service for those who have not been able to receive help with their grief from traditional service providers. For instance, one group member is grieving the loss of her partner of 25 years. Prior to her encounter with EAGLES, she was unable to find support for the impact this loss was having on her life. Within the group, however, she is receiving the validation and support she needs to come to terms with her loss.

- A plan has been implemented for interested lesbian and gay elders to be

placed through Foster Grandparents at Gay and Lesbian Youth Services of Western New York. This provides an opportunity for them to be more connected with, and make contributions to, the larger lesbian and gay

Rising  
Above  
the  
Rest  
of  
the  
Bunch

the  
Grapevine  
cafe



73 E. Gay St.  
Columbus, Ohio 43215  
614/221/Vine

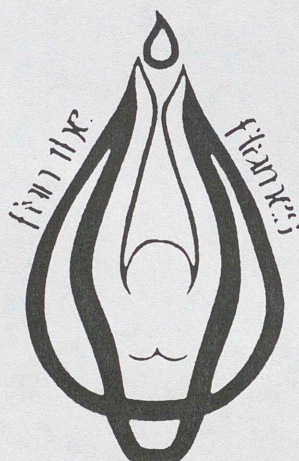


community. This also provides lesbian and gay youth with positive, supportive adult role models. EAGLES currently has one Foster Grandparent, a volunteer who is making a change in a young woman's life while having her own life expanded.

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- A meeting was held with the Erie County Department of Senior Services to discuss the ways in which EAGLES and the department can work together to better serve elders in the Buffalo and Western New York area. A professional, in-service training was provided to department staff on how to more effectively provide services to lesbian and gay elders. Department staff reported that the training increased their comfort with addressing sexual orientation issues with their clients, and gave them helpful, concrete information and referral sources.

EAGLES had a similar training session with the Niagara County Coalition of Aging Services, as well as ongoing trainings scheduled with individual agencies that provide services to elders.

- EAGLES provides a telephone information and referral service for individual community members and service providers. The phone is staffed by the program director. An answering machine takes calls in the evening and on weekends. This service provides a crucial first link for many lesbian and gay elders, before they are ready to actually attend an EAGLES program. Service providers are also utilizing this service to obtain referral information for their lesbian and gay clients.

- EAGLES has provided publicity and outreach to lesbian and gay elders, potential volunteers and potential community funders. Feature articles have appeared in the two large area newspapers and in the gay press. A well-attended party was held to introduce the program to the community. In addition, an informational brochure has been mailed to area service providers and potential recipients of services. This outreach produced an immediate response from volunteers and recipients of services.

Through outreach, support and regular evaluation of our effectiveness, EAGLES is committed to improving the quality of life for lesbian and gay elders.

*Karen Marie Kauderer, B.S.W., is a geriatric mental health worker and lives in Buffalo with two cats.*

*A local organization, 50 Plus, serves 50-and-over lesbians and gays in Central Ohio. 50 Plus meetings are scheduled through next May as follows: October 7, November 2, December 1, January 4, February 2, March 7, April 6 and May 2. The meetings take place from 7-9 p.m. at a location to be announced. Call Mindy Meacham at 614.852.3566 for confirmation and more information.*

## News & Views

### Two Women Hope to Enter The Citadel

Two women could take up Shannon Faulkner's legal fight to end the all-male policy at The Citadel military college. Faulkner's lawyers say two women they would not identify [were] ready as early as August 23 to join the suit started by Faulkner two-and-a-half years ago. Both women want to join the school in August 1996, the attorneys say. One of the lawyers stated there might be more women joining the suit, but at this time don't know how serious their commitment is.

Faulkner, 20, in August became the first woman admitted to the Charleston, SC college. But she quit after less than a week, a step some male cadets cheered. The Citadel is setting up a court-ordered alternative: a \$10 million women's leadership program at the all-female Converse College. Also, the Virginia Military Institute's alternative women's program at Mary Baldwin College, designed to block female cadets from the all-male VMI, welcomed its first class of 42 women. [Editor's note: "Salute!"]

— "USA Today"

### Esther Rome Dies of Breast Cancer

The co-author (with the Boston Women's Health Collective) of the ground-breaking *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, died of breast cancer on June 26. Rome, who was 49 at the time of her death, was a pre-eminent advocate of women's health and health-education. When *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (now revised and titled *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves*) was published 25 years ago, it sparked revolution within the women's community. For the first time in patriarchal medical history, it provided us with accurate, comprehensible information about our bodies, how they worked and how to care for them. Not incidentally, it dealt matter-of-factly with the health issues of lesbians and bisexual women. Less tangibly than these accomplishments, but perhaps more importantly, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* offered all of us a view of our bodies that was woman-centered, woman-defined and, therefore, affirmative. No longer were our bodies or their functions seen as inherently dirty, gross or less vital than men's.

The cause of Rome's death is ironic in the face of her life's work, but that work literally helped set in motion change no less profound than the re-evaluation and redesign of how women's health is perceived and ministered to, both within the women's community and the mainstream medical community.

At the time of her death, Rome was collaborating with another woman on a book called *Risking Health for Love*.