

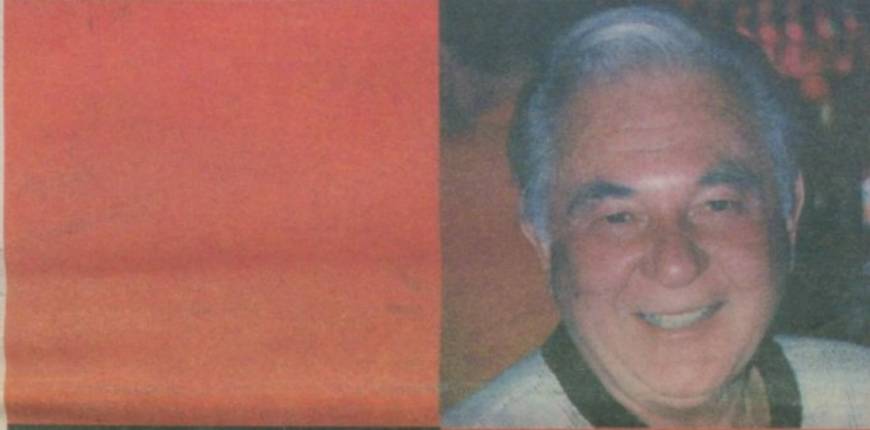
WI ~~Light~~

May 5-11, 1999

Our Village Elders

Looking Ahead Through The Past

They have lived through and helped foster one of the most remarkable social revolutions in America's history. The age of Gay liberation is largely a product of their efforts.



Having laid the foundation of our current Gay culture, older Gays and Lesbians often find themselves ignored by it. Nevertheless, for the most part, Gay seniors lead happy, fulfilling lives.

Many societies treat their older members with reverence. In those cultures the word "elder" is a mark of respect. An elder is someone you consult and learn from. An elder is someone who is recognized for their past contributions. Our throw away, "I want it now," society races past those who have preceded us.

The result is that many Americans, especially those who are Gay or Lesbian, fear growing older. Studies on AIDS/HIV prevention have even shown that some young people don't practice safe sex because they don't want to grow old. In an Internet post, a young Gay man wrote that if he lived to be 35, he would kill himself because life as a Gay man would no longer be worth living.

How wrong that is. The vast majority of LGBT seniors continue to contribute, be productive and enjoy life. Like all seniors they face the problems associated with aging, some of which are worsened by the stigma of being Gay or Lesbian.

Yet, our elders are used to dealing with that stigma. Within them there is a pride at having

survived in a society that was far more homophobic than present day America is. In countless

ways they have passed that pride onto younger generations.

During May, Older American Month, *Wisconsin Light* salutes our LGBT Wisconsin seniors with a series of profiles telling their life stories. These profiles begin on page 6 in this issue.

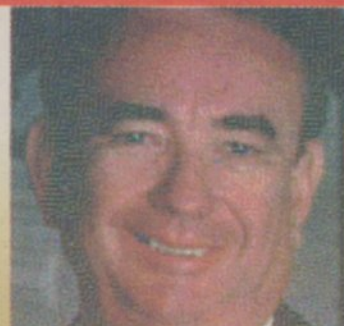
We believe that younger Gays and Lesbians have much to learn from those who have blazed a trail for them. Our LGBT seniors are a part of our family and we are a part of theirs. They are our history, they are role models. They are our Village Elders.

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AROUND THE STATE

Large Crowd at Town Hall Meeting

Milwaukee – Over 100 people turned out for a Town Hall Meeting to discuss a proposed Milwaukee Domestic Partners registry. The meeting, held at the LGBT Community Center, included discussions on the proposal, strategy on getting it passed and breakout sessions where specific ideas on building support were discussed.

Alderman Mike D'Amato, the principal sponsor of the proposal, told the group that everyone must work hard to convince the Common Council to approve the registry. Aldermen Paul Henningsen and George Butler, co-sponsors of the Partnership proposal agreed with D'Amato.

During the breakout sessions, volunteers discussed mobilizing the community, dealing with the mainstream media and general strategy. Organizers said they were encouraged by the turnout and by the number of people who volunteered to help with the effort.

Religious Right Attacks Governor Thompson Over Gay Conference Letter

Madison – Ralph Ovadahl, head of Wisconsin Christians United is making an issue over a letter Governor Tommy Thompson signed to welcome LGBT students to a Madison conference. The letter was included in a packet given to attendees at the Midwest Lesbian Bisexual, Gay, Transgendered College Conference. The conference was held February 19-21 at Madison's Convention and Civic Center. It attracted a record 1,200 students from 20 states.

According to Ovadahl, the Governor's office received numerous telephone calls protesting the letter. He also claimed the Governor's office told him the letter was a forgery.

Not so said Jason Rasmussen, who chaired the conference. Rasmussen told *Wisconsin Light* that Madison's Convention and Visitor's Bureau had arranged for the letter. "It was a form letter," said Rasmussen, who added that the letter encouraged conferees to visit other attractions, such as the Madison zoo, while they were in Madison.

Rasmussen said there was nothing "pro-Gay" in the letter. He added, "The Governor has issued letters like this for other conferences. They are used to generate more tourist dollars. I don't understand why anyone would have a problem with this. It was a totally appropriate thing for the Governor to do."

Governor Thompson's press office was not able to provide a comment on the matter before the *Light* went to press.

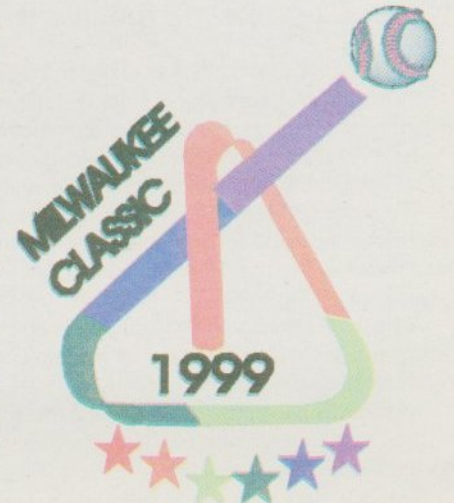
Classic Logo Wins Contest


Milwaukee – The Milwaukee Classic may be a few weeks away but the 19th annual softball tournament is already a winner. This year's logo won second place in a national Office Max competition for best use of a paper clip.

The promotional contest attracted entries at each of the hundreds of Office Max stores. Rodney Stockel designed the logo. Dan Beebe used his computer to produce the finished product. An enthusiastic supporter of the League entered it in the Contest.

Stockel said he came up with the design while playing with a paper clip. I was trying to save embroidery costs so I decided to keep it simple and clean", said Stockel. "I knew I had a winner when our shirts began selling so well this year". The League has already ordered additional T-shirts, although the event is still three weeks away.

T-shirts, sweats and other items bearing the prizewinner in various colors are available for purchase in Milwaukee at The Ball Game and Designing Men.





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SAGE Hosts Annual Meeting

Milwaukee — Senior Action in a Gay Environment (SAGE-Milwaukee) held its annual meeting and luncheon at the Astor Street Restaurant on Sunday, April 25. Over 50 individuals attended the event that featured the release of the 1998 Annual Report.

The annual report covered SAGE-Milwaukee's 5th year, which was another year of solid progress for the group. During 1998, SAGE held most of its events at rented space at Lake Park Lutheran Church but in January of this year moved to Milwaukee's LGBT Community Center. The move appears to be a good one. "Attendance at events is already beginning to pick up and we expect to continue to grow using the facilities of a center devoted exclusively to our community," said SAGE — Milwaukee Founder and Chair Eldon E. Murray.

During 1998, SAGE sponsored 59 events, which the report calls, "the longest and most impressive yearly list of accomplishments since our beginning."

In '98 \$5,845 came into the organization from various sources, and a total of \$6,051 was spent (nearly 39% for rent alone), leaving a deficit of just \$207. Total assets as of the end of '98 were a healthy \$7,695.

SAGE hosts events at Milwaukee's LGBT Community Center every Friday evening. The Center is located at 170 S. Second Street. SAGE events are open to the public.

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Village Elders continued from cover

Chris and Mavis

Mavis and Chris remind you of your favorite aunt, the one that never married. They're quick with a joke, but full of good advice, too.

There weren't any "Lipstick Lesbians" when they met. Lesbians classified themselves as "fems" and "bitches." Chris, 52, is the fem. Mavis, 62, is the butch. She is also a bit of a rouge. If not for Chris, Mavis, who says, "I feel like I'm 20," would probably still be on the prowl at the bars.



It was November 23, 1968. "I was looking for love," says Chris. "I was looking for fun," chuckles Mavis. "She said she was innocent, but those stories I heard from her friends. No, I don't believe that," laughs Chris.

Two weeks and a Thanksgiving weekend trip to meet Mavis' approving parents in Green Bay later, Chris moved in with Mavis. "I couldn't get rid of her," wisecracks Mavis. Not, of course, that she wanted to. The romance that blossomed continues more than 30 years later.

What's their secret? "Friendship first" says Chris. "Then romance, trust and respect." Mavis agrees adding that monogamy is very important to them as well.

Mavis is a cancer survivor. She underwent a mastectomy and lost a kidney 12 years ago. She is currently in a two-year remission from bone cancer. Her health problems have left her body weakened, but her spirit is undaunted.

"I don't know what I would have done without Chris," she said. "Chris, the Lord and our dog got me through." Mavis would come home from work and lay down on the bed. Meanwhile Chris would fix dinner.

She still does all of the cooking at their near South Side home. Well, maybe not all of the cooking. "Once a month or so, I can get her to make grilled cheese sandwiches and tomato soup," laughs Chris. "She was supposed to do that tonight, which is probably why she suggested we do this interview."

Chris also cooks over an open fire at their trailer in Campbellsport. "Chris is a great cook,"

says Mavis. In addition to camping, and romantic evenings at home, Chris and Mavis enjoy nights out at Kathy's Nut Hut.

Chris hails from Ontonagon, Michigan. The region's economy forced her to move from the Upper Peninsula. "Back in those days there wasn't a lot of industry up there. We had copper mining, but women weren't allowed to work there," said Chris. "Women had a choice of being a waitress or getting married — to a man."

She made her way to Milwaukee. Since coming here, Chris has held a variety of factory jobs. For a time, she was a big rig truck driver for Schneider Transportation. "I was one of their top producers," said Chris with pride. "The money was good, but they wanted me to work three week shifts. I didn't want to be away from home that long."

Chris wants to retire early. She started a web page design and advertising business, CM Marketing, in order to supplement her income. Mavis beams saying, "Chris can do anything she wants to do. She's very talented."

Mavis retired from the Postal Service two years ago. During her last 12 years on the job, Mavis gave out zip codes over the phone.

Like

Our Village Elders

many Gays and Lesbians their age, Chris and Mavis were not overtly involved in the politics of Gay liberation. That does not mean that they didn't contribute to that cause. Both came out to their families. At work, they didn't make an issue of being Lesbian, but they didn't hide it either.

Chris took Mavis to a company Christmas party last year. "The party is supposed to be just for the workers and their husbands or wives," she said. "I took Mavis. They know."

Both ladies are deeply spiritual, but for years, they shunned organized religion. They resent the anti-Gay attitudes of most churches. "They just want to control us," says Chris. "God didn't make us to be controlled." Mavis agrees adding, "We have a right to love God, too."

Drawn by its weekly local cable TV show, Mavis and Chris joined Milwaukee's Metropolitan Community Church last October. Mavis calls its pastor Reverend Lew Broyles "a gift from God."

Mavis and Chris want to be legally married. About 20 years ago, they looked for a church where they could have a commitment ceremony, but were unable to find one. Last summer, they participated in the mass wedding at PrideFest.

Whether the state recognizes it or not, they consider themselves to be married. Looking forward to 30 more years of life together, Mavis says, the butch and fem thing doesn't matter anymore. "Now we are just one."

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– Curt, Doug & Staff

