

A Centering of Gay Energies

Lesbian and gay center draws near to reality

LESBIANS and gay men who call Santa Cruz home will soon have one more reason to do so: the Lesbian and Gay Community Center, which is having its grand opening on June 14 at 7:30 p.m. at the Loudon Nelson Center.

While the center is far from having a permanent presence or a fixed home — it will be at the Loudon Nelson Center one or two days a month for a while — organizers are encouraged that things have come this far.

"There's been talk about such a center for years, but it's never been like this," said organizer William Russell. "It was always, 'We don't have enough people, there isn't enough money, this community is too small to support such a thing. It's just a pipe dream.' And now we're saying 'Well, maybe it can happen.'"

This time, for reasons no one can really name, things just came together.

Center organizer Mindy Storch gave the credit to the Lesbian and Gay Action Alliance, which she said made a community center one of its goals this year and called the first organizational meeting.

But alliance spokesperson Allison Claire said that a center had always been a goal, and credits member John LaRiviere with taking the initiative to organize the first two meetings.

And Russell adds that two men who recently moved to Santa Cruz from Los Angeles have been the "real movers and shakers about rattling all of the right doors and saying, 'Here you have this big community and you talk about being so lefty and active, but you don't have a center.'"

Whoever is responsible for the



All for a center: Proponents include, from left, Will Russell, Allison Claire, John LaRiviere, Christopher Spillers, Jo Corone and Lee Roden.

initial work, whether the center moves from its present a one- or two-day-a-month set up to a 24-hour office in a permanent location depends on community interest and input.

To gauge that interest, organizers have been circulating hundreds of questionnaires at gay events. The responses will be part of the discussion at the next organizational meeting Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. at Loudon Nelson.

Speakers from the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center in Los Angeles and the Billie Defrank Center in San Jose have been invited to the meeting to talk about how their community centers are run and how they got started, Russell said.

So far, according to organizers, the center has been met with enthusiasm, with 30 people representing some 20 local gay organizations attending the second organizational meeting last month.

"We had a brainstorming session — someone took notes — we just listed all the things we could possibly think of that someone might want," said Russell. "Some of them were

really sort of far out, dreamy sorts of things, others were more realistic. Some wanted it to be a center for politics, others leaned more toward recreation.

"But we really want to avoid any possibility of division in the community about this, so that's why we made up the questionnaires."

Among the suggestions for the center are aerobics classes, a business directory, housing help and outreach and support to gay seniors and youth.

But one of the main interests, at least for Russell and Storch, is the opportunity to pool community resources and cut down on the expense of maintaining separate facilities.

"One of the benefits would be to minimize the duplication of information and resources that are currently not centralized," said Storch. "Things like typewriters, file cabinets, telephones. It'll also provide a tangible sense of community and allow us to see whether there are any holes in the services provided. I think there are many things that are absent that

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would be beneficial to provide."

The center's organizers acknowledge the community is financially drained from funding services for people with AIDS and fighting repressive AIDS-related legislation and that organizing such a diverse community isn't going to be easy.

"My feeling is that we won't have a physical space until or unless a single large contributor makes their home available or something like that," said Russell. "I'm pretty sure that's how

the centers in San Jose and L.A. got their offices. But I do think that once this gets started there will be enough support financially and otherwise to keep it going once we have that space, and there will be enough support to rent a small space."

Both Russell and Storch say that they want more involvement from minority group members in the planning and running of the center, but don't know how to encourage that involvement. Storch said she is concerned that only two women showed up at the last organizational meeting. And one of the suggestions for the center is that it provide "separatist

space" for women-only events and organizations.

But, said Russell, the community's divisions are "one of the reasons people want to have a community center, because there are separate groups and the membership overlaps maybe only slightly. We thought maybe we can build a coalition of the groups."

"I think there are a lot of factions among the gays and lesbians of Santa Cruz," said Storch. "And that there may be the opportunity for more of a community sense with a community center and the chance to reach the unaffiliated people, too."

—Chela Zabin