Constancy amid change: the life of Senior Pride

By Keith Ashley, Interim Executive Director

Constancy amid change is not a contradiction. It is the balancing nature of life.

For two and a half years I’ve watched Senior Pride evolve rapidly, but for many years now our organization has consistently provided services and innovative programming to our community, while keeping the needs and interests of older LGBTQI+ adults visible. We’ve weathered the sudden storm of COVID. We’ve become our own independent 501(c)3 nonprofit. This Senior Forum newsletter is now in its 18th year of production. Constancy amid change…

Lavina Tomer is currently transitioning from her role as Executive Director to board member and part-time staff member supervising the Advance Medical Care Planning Program. Our community is lucky to continue benefiting from her energy, experience, and leadership. We can also celebrate the consistent leadership of others, who continue to hold (sometimes changing) key positions.

Joyce Bolinger continues to write grants, organize cultural events and workshops, and serves as Board Secretary and Chair of the Cultural and Social Events committee. Robert Bell, after many years of service, will now share his expertise in the role of Board Chair. Luis Ortega will step into the role of Vice Chair. Fred Rodriguez continues to serve as Board Treasurer and a member of the Cultural and Social Events Committee. Lee Crosby continues now in her third year coordinating the Community Cares Program, and as a board member. Bruce Hyland is retiring from the board, but continuing as a volunteer. Pam Witting, who chaired the Health & Well-Being Committee, has relocated to Massachusetts.

However, the entire group of new volunteers who have brought the Health & Well-Being program to life continue to dedicate their time and energy to the project. Constancy amid change…

Of course, the energy and leadership of brand new volunteers is equally important. You can read in this issue about Tammy and Harrison Orr who have taken on creating and editing this newsletter. John Wielebski successfully launched, and is wonderfully maintaining, the new GBTQI+ men’s loss group. Fred Rodriguez and Luis Ortega have just this year joined the board of directors, bringing with them their many years of nonprofit experience.

The list of those involved for many years, and those just arriving, goes on and on. While I can’t name you all here, we as a community can see your contributions creating the whole that is Senior Pride. The same can be said of our donors – many are foundational, many are new.

As I shift into the role of Interim Executive Director, I am honored to be part of the change and constancy that prove Senior Pride to be such a wonderful, living thing.
LAVINA TOMER STEPS INTO NEW ROLE ON THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
By Joyce Bolinger

Need a speaker passionate about LGBTQI+ older adults? Lavina. Need an invoice processed? Lavina. Need someone who will give hours responding to a person asking for help? Lavina. Need someone to lead a LBTQ womens grief support group every week for five years? Lavina. Need someone to plan a volunteer orientation—“let’s use a speed dating model!” or to kick start a new program? Lavina.

After eight years (including Steering Committee chair), Lavina Tomer has decided that it’s time to turn over the wheel to the capable Keith Ashley. Along with a cadre of dedicated volunteers with exceptional skills, she has made possible Senior Pride’s growth.

I have been asked to give a few impressions of Lavina’s contributions — as her partner, I am admittedly completely biased. Audre Lorde says “we must do battle wherever we are standing.” Lavina took where she was standing as an older Lesbian to make Senior Pride a part of the long stream of the continuing battle for equity and justice for the LGBTQI+ community. Her commitment to this work goes very deep and her almost obsessive drive is a very personal expression of what gives her life purpose and meaning.

I know Lavina’s dedication better than anyone because I often see her nearly as a blur from morning to night on her computer working on projects or grants; meeting with others on program management; doing outreach to LGBTQI+ and older adult organizations, funders and supporters, and attending to a myriad of administrative details. For Senior Pride, she used skills burnished by starting a successful business and by founding the LGBT Domestic Violence Project—now the SAAF Anti-Violence Project.

Lavina has often told me that to get things to happen, “You have to show up. Visibility matters.” She attended monthly Pima Council on Aging Neighbors Care Alliance meetings for one and a half years before policies were adjusted to include the non-neighborhood-based Senior Pride Community Cares Program. Community Cares offers companionship to otherwise isolated members of our community.

That is only one example of the energy and persistence she has brought to Senior Pride. Now, as she moves on, I can only wonder What’s Next? I know both Senior Pride and Lavina will chart new territory.
THOUGHTS FROM MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY ON THE FUTURE OF SENIOR PRIDE

“AARP works to enhance the quality of life for all as we age. AARP’s unwavering commitment to the LGBTQ+ community reflects our core belief in the dignity, worth, and potential of every individual. To that end, AARP is creating a culturally proficient and competent LGBTQ+ member experience by connecting to communities, driving awareness, and improving AARP’s organizational understanding of the needs of LGBTQ+ stakeholders. As a community partner, I have seen Senior Pride work to provide much needed caregiver support groups, grief support groups, assist with isolation during the pandemic and much more. I am looking forward to Senior Pride’s advocacy and growth for the future. Congrats on becoming an independent 501(3) organization!” – Maria Ramirez-Trillo, Associate State Director Community Outreach, AARP Arizona

“They are so pleased to see Senior Pride on an upward trajectory with sustainable growth that our community can be proud of. At a time when so many of our rights and freedoms are under attack, organizations like Senior Pride are critical to providing robust and resilient opportunities for Southern Arizona’s LGBTQ+ loved ones. It’s why we’re ecstatic to support your work for the next two years as we expand our philanthropic commitment to leading organizations like Senior Pride.” – Andrés Cano, Director of the LGBTQ+ Alliance Fund, an initiative of the Community Foundation for Southern Arizona

“For me, Senior Pride is more than a service provider organization. It’s a community. It’s a family that I’ve chosen. It’s where I meet old and new friends who light me up when I see them. Coming to a Senior Pride event is like walking into a big warm hug, whether I already know the people there or not. Moving into our future as an independent organization, we have the opportunity to meet and serve and engage so many more people than we’ve reached in the past, and for me, that’s incredibly exciting.” – Tom Buchanan, Lead Development Volunteer, Southern Arizona Senior Pride

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Pima County Public Library’s LGBTQ+ Services Committee has collaborated with many organizations over the past quarter of a century serving our community, among them being Senior Pride. The Senior Forum newsletter is distributed to all 27 Library locations, and Senior Pride generously promotes Library programs and services to our community. Our partnership with Senior Pride has grown over the years, and we recently co-presented a virtual program with local author Carlos Valenzuela as part of our Committee’s 25th Anniversary Celebration. We applaud Senior Pride for their success in transitioning from a group of dedicated volunteers to a nonprofit. We are proud of Senior Pride’s commitment and passion to bring unity and acceptance to our community, and we look forward to their growth as a vibrant and vital component of Southern Arizona’s LGBTQ+ community.” – Tobias Wehner, Library Associate, Joel D. Valdez Main Library

PCOA
Pima Council on Aging
Help Line: 520.790.7262
(M-F 8:30am-5pm)
help@pcoa.org

To learn about in house LGBTQ Elder Care specialists on PCOA’s staff, email: SBahnson@pcoa.org
Senior Pride’s writing workshops have attracted talented people, both published writers and those who are exploring personal writing for the first time. In 2021, the wonderful poet Joan Larkin (http://www.joanlarkin.com) instructed the “Catching Fire” poetry workshop. See Senior Pride’s website and select its YouTube channel to find the “Catching Fire” poetry reading.

Feeling Alive
In my sixth decade
I’m grateful to feel so alive
Inside.
Taking care of plants and chickens,
there’s always something to propel me forward.
Taking the girls treats
today,
after kale and tomatoes
and a handful
of old crackers,
cleaning, I find
a long-forgotten pomegranate:
the skin so leathery and hard,
I can’t cut it with a knife.
Gripping it tightly,
bringing my arm up high,
I smash it with force on the countertop.
The girls go bonkers
with the tiny red, jewel-wrapped seeds
surprisingly juicy.

Daydreaming Green Legs
It’s so hot,
I’m delirious
With needing relief
With craving
Any green leg
Of any journey,
The leg that climbs out of the desert
To cool and moist,
to pull on a shirt with sleeves.
But we’ve got heat; lots of hot hot heat
This walking through a hair dryer heat blues.
The dry hot wind whips my body,
Sandy grit in my mouth.
No comfort in sight,
Until I remember
that overripe melon
In my fridge, that cold orange sweet
dripping,
Refreshing,
It’s all I want,
Right now,
My green leg.

Also on the website, select programs
> arts and culture > writing
Catching Fire anthology.
https://soazseniorpride.org

When Deb Jacobson isn’t harvesting,
composting, growing, processing, baking
or distributing food, she is studying
Torah, Spanish, the tao, tai chi, flute,
laughing with friends or reading a lot of
books. She is looking forward to more
time to write.

Senior Pride Connects Our Community -- Your Donations Keep Us Strong!
Senior Pride’s cultural events, support groups, Community Cares Program, workshops,
website with local resources, Facebook page, YouTube channel and weekly e-news
updates provide a hub for our community.
Our success is made possible by supporters like you. Please donate today.

By Check: Make checks payable to Senior Pride
or So.AZ Senior Pride
Mail to: 1632 N Country Club Rd,
Tucson, AZ 85716

Online: Go to our website
soazseniorpride.org
Click on “DONATE”
Tammy and Harrison Orr are the mother-son duo who have risen to the task of co-editing Senior Pride’s bi-monthly newsletter, Senior Forum. As artists and writers, these two creative perfectionists both contrast with and complement one another. They found their way to Senior Pride through Volunteer Coordinator Susannah Myerson. Senior Forum was a perfect project for them to work on together, as they both love to hear people’s stories and find it easy to relate to others. They have discovered over the past few months of working together that their writing styles are so similar that it’s nearly impossible to tell who wrote what.

Tammy and Harrison are used to defying traditions and they find delight in busting people’s false assumptions of them. When being interviewed for this article, they played off each other like Lucy Ricardo and Ethel Mertz. Both are smart as a whip and wickedly clever. Yet, they are authentically humble at the same time. As a child, Tammy played with G.I. Joe action figures and bonded with her dad over a love for photography. She also helped her dad work on cars and joined the boy’s baseball team. Now in her retirement years, she has rediscovered her passion for photography, especially of nature and animals. She is also a ham radio operator; a hobby she enjoys with her husband, Jim.

In contrast, Harrison enjoyed playing with Barbies with his sisters as a child. His parents always supported his freedom of expression and introduced him to the world of art and cinema early on. Growing up smack dab between New York City and Boston, he insisted on visiting the Museum of Modern Art on his birthdays. He discovered a talent for drawing early on and chose a career as an art educator as an adult. He is now the Education Manager at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tucson. He leans on his experience in Tucson’s arts community as a member of Senior Pride’s Cultural & Social Events Committee. He has helped provide Senior Pride with opportunities to visit local museums, including MOCA Tucson and The Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures. Tammy says Harrison has always been an “old soul” and his friends describe him as an “older man in a millenial’s body.”

Tammy and Harrison know that they do not fit the traditional Senior Pride demographic. Tammy identifies as an ally, while Harrison is a gay 33 year-old. Both emphasize that their service to Senior Pride comes from the heart. They want to help LGBTQI+ seniors connect with their community through Senior Forum. Harrison asks seniors to embrace intergenerational friendships, seek out new opportunities, and step out of their comfort zones. Tammy wants us to know that she is here for us. While she hasn’t had all of the same experiences we have, she is eager to support us as a strong ally in being who we are and who we can still become.
HONORING A LIFE: ADVANCE MEDICAL CARE PLANNING WORKSHOPS

These workshops give LGBTQI+ older adults the opportunity to explore planning for medical care in the event of an unexpected medical need. We cover all the necessary directive documents as well as other considerations to make sure your health care wishes are recorded and your identity as a LGBTQI+ individual is protected in those situations.

Erin Russ and trained volunteers facilitate these workshops and offer optional “Meet and Complete” sessions for those wanting extra help, plus one-on-one coaching by special request. Workshops will be both in-person and on zoom, unless otherwise noted. Location TBD.

Next Workshop dates:
July 18, 2022, 10:00 am - 12:00 pm
Register Online – https://soazseniorpride.org or (520)312-8923 by July 11, 2022
August 22, 2022, 2:00 - 4:00 pm
Register by August 12, 2022
(Zoom workshop only)

For more information or to schedule one-on-one coaching, contact Erin at eol@soazseniorpride.org or (520) 312-8923.

SENIOR PRIDE BOOK CLUB – https://soazseniorpride.org for more information and registration. Or email: info@soazseniorpride.org

JULY SELECTION:
Crossing the Yard: Thirty Years as a Prison Volunteer By Richard Shelton

World renowned writer Richard Shelton is the author of a dozen books of poetry and creative non-fiction. His book Crossing the Yard is the culmination of several decades of work with prisoners, beginning in 1970 when, as a young English professor at U Arizona, he agreed to tutor Charles Schmid, a prisoner on death row who submitted his dark verse to Shelton. This began a 30-year association with the AZ State Prison system in which he organized writing workshops to help these often forgotten men and women express themselves in a repressive environment. The book has been called “a testament to the transformative powers of writing.”

Shelton still lives in Tucson. He and his late wife, Lois, were both instrumental in the development of the Poetry Center at the University. Register Online.

AUGUST SELECTION:
Klara and the Sun By Kazuo Ishiguro

Kazuo Ishiguro is the British Pulitzer Prize-winning author of The Remains of the Day. “In this, his eighth novel, Klara, who narrates it, is an Artificial Friend, a humanoid machine — short dark hair; kind eyes; distinguished by her powers of observation — who has come to act as companion for 14-year-old Josie”. (Radhika Jones, The New York Times Book Review).

Klara cares for Josie, who is ill with an unnamed disease, but can Klara really love and feel? Josie has an intense connection to her Artificial Friend, but is it the same as love? If so, what then becomes of our belief that there’s “something unique” and “unreachable” inside each of us human beings? Something that’s unique and won’t transfer? Register Online.

Fruit Pizza -- from the Kitchen of Pam Witting

First, wash and slice a variety of fresh fruits: strawberries, melon, bananas, apples, blueberries.

For the crust, you’ll need: 
• 1 C butter or margarine, softened (Note: do not use low fat or fat free margarine), 2 eggs, 6 Tbsp sugar, 2 tsp vanilla
• 2 C flour (can use almond or buckwheat flour for added nutrition)

Crust:
Cream together the butter/margarine, eggs, sugar and vanilla before thoroughly mixing in the flour. Spread or roll the dough out on an ungreased cookie sheet or pizza pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 10 minutes until golden brown. Sprinkle lightly with a bit of sugar and set aside.

For the filling, you’ll need: 
• One 16-ounce package of low-fat cream cheese, softened
• 4 C low fat thawed Cool Whip
• 1 C powdered sugar (or sweetener of choice; or arrowroot powder)

Mix all the ingredients together until creamy and just before serving, spread the filling on the golden brown, cooled crust. Arrange fresh fruit on top.