

notes from SASG

Fostering personal development - Embracing queer identities - Cultivating community strength

Spring/Summer 2004

Volume 04, Issue 01

Farewell from Susan

It seems impossible that the time has come for me to say goodbye to SASG and all the people here who mean so much to me. It seems impossible, and yet saying goodbye has been a major motif throughout my 17 years here. I should be used to it, but I'm not.

I look at the bulletin board in my office with the pictures of so many dear friends who shared the last years of their lives with us. Brian Bredeson, who served on the committee that hired me in March of 1987. Colin Harris, the penultimate Board Secretary. Dennis Sook, who oversaw the renovations which had to take place before we moved into the house at 303 17th Ave. East. Ross Eddy, the first and most formidable Friday Feast chef. David Morris and Jack Mallaghan—the former created our garden, the latter saw that it flourished and taught others his craft. Robert O'Brien, the writer who shared his saga of living with AIDS with everyone who read his column in *The Seattle Times*. John Kolling, the guy who first said, "Let's sell Christmas trees!" Tom Hammond who left a personal legacy as Facilitator Coordinator in the early 90s. Facilitators like Ray Woods, Michael Heide, Morgan Peterson. Phone volunteers like Dale Inman and Larry Black. All-around helpers like Troy Zamora. Board Presidents like Mick Mellor, David Nord and John Stewart.

They represent just a small portion of the nearly 800 people on our Passages List, yet each of them was huge in my eyes because they gave extraordinarily of their talents, their fading energy, and their vanishing time. They exhibited enormous courage and generosity of spirit; they were my heroes.

For many years of my tenure here, I believed that it was my role to be the guardian of the ideals exemplified by the people above. I wanted SASG to remain, in spirit and reality, the place they had known it to be: non-bureaucratic, easy to access, friendly, inclusive and welcoming. In my own version of that incredible fantasy portrayed in the movie, "Longtime Companions," I pictured all of them returning someday, coming up the front steps of the porch, joining a group, touring the house, and exclaiming that everything was just as they remembered.

In my eyes, SASG is a sacred place. The work that went on here in the midst of the epidemic was sacred work. Support groups, when they are functioning at their highest level, provide a sacred space for human connection. The best I've seen of human nature, I've seen at SASG. The truest sense of community I've experienced has been at SASG.

It is because I identify so much with our past that I know it's time for someone else to take us into the future. I believe that Deborah Witmer is eminently qualified to do that, and I wish her every blessing and success as she steps into the role which I am vacating.

These past 17 years have been the most valuable ones of my entire life. I am profoundly grateful for the experience, profoundly grateful to have known and worked with all of you, and very proud of what has taken place within these walls.

My personal gratitude to each of you who has played a part in making this house a home to so many.

With love,
Susan

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From Tim Jenkins, Board President...

After seventeen years as Executive Director of SASG Susan Dunshee recently stepped down. These are difficult words to write. She joined our organization in 1987, when we shared offices with the Dorian Group down on Pike Street. Since then we've moved twice, settling into our current home in 1990. Many people have walked through our doors during Susan's tenure and way too many of them are no longer with us. SASG has grown and changed as the times and the needs of the communities we serve have also grown and changed. Throughout all this Susan has headed us up with skill and intelligence, boundless grace and an inexhaustible love for the house and the people it serves. Like the house itself, she came to be seen as one we could always be sure of being there, who we could always rely on throughout all the many changes and often terrible losses we experienced. To say she was our rock and our beacon is trite. What is truer is that, in a very real sense, she embodied the house and its mission. She was it.

Nothing is forever, however, and Susan has decided to take a well-deserved early retirement and move to her family home in Oregon. She leaves behind an organization that is growing and thriving and is immeasurably richer for her contributions. No words I can come up with could really capture the essence of those contributions. I doubt that there are any such words. What she has given us cannot be spoken; but it can be felt in the spirit of SASG, which has everything to do with Susan. Those of us that continue to work here are committed to sustaining that spirit, that beautiful gift. On behalf of all of us here at SASG I thank you, Susan. Have a wonderful life. You will be sorely missed. You are deeply loved.

Community Dinners Benefit Our House!

Pat Donohue, newly elected Court of Seattle Prince, sponsors a community dinner every month – all proceeds benefit programming here at our House.

3rd Wednesdays, monthly

6:00 pm – 8:00 pm

Full Circle, 1413 14th AVE

\$7 – All You Can Eat!

Each month features a different theme.

Debora Witmer is our House's new Executive Director!

Even if you've already been getting to know her, you might not know that...

She has a degree in Theatre and Political Science from Kent State University.

She once ran for Seattle City Council against Tom Weeks (in 1993).

She has 3 feline children: Smudge, Othello, and Valmont, who all like to drink out of the bathroom faucet!

She has seen every episode of every Star Trek Series (and has most of them on tape); she also reads (and is trying to collect) all the Star Trek books ever written.

She makes a heavenly coconut cream pie!

Her biggest life regret – she doesn't have the voice to be an opera diva.

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NEW
STAFF
AT
OUR
HOUSE

I am pleased to announce two new additions to our SASG Staff!

Kim Holstein is a dedicated volunteer and familiar face here at the House; he joins us as the new Development/Administrative Coordinator, he will also be serving as the Drop-In Center Coordinator. This part-time position was added as a result of a re-design of the Programming Manager positions, adding more capacity for fundraising and formalizing the Drop-In Center coordination role. Kim will be a daily presence in the Drop-In Center, adding activities and coordinating the cooking and shopping activities, including Friday Feast. He will also play a role in the Christmas Tree Lot and other fundraising and marketing activities throughout the year. Kim will also be the main support staff for our wonderful Front Desk Volunteers.

Our new HIV/AIDS & Men's Programming Manager is Jamie MacKay, who will be joining us at the beginning of July. Jamie hails from Vancouver, Canada, where he has been doing peer-support group work for several years in the queer community. An experienced trainer, peer educator, HIV/AIDS prevention specialist, and volunteer coordinator, Jamie's personal vision is closely aligned with SASG's values of compassionate support and individual development. We are looking forward to having Jamie on board!

~Deborah, Executive Director

Friday Feast needs you! Sign up to help clean up today.

One of SASG's most appreciated traditions needs your support. "Friday Feast" has always relied on the dedication of SASG volunteers. Although we currently have enough cooks to sustain this treasured event on the first, second, and third Fridays of each month, we are constantly in need of volunteers for the "Friday Feast" **Clean-up Crew**.

Please take a moment to sign up for a clean-up shift the next time you're at the house. Check with the Front Desk Volunteer on duty for directions to the sign-up sheet. Also, don't forget to leave your **full name and contact phone number and/or e-mail address** for Kim, Drop-in Center Coordinator. Thanks in advance for helping us to sustain SASG's "Friday Feast."

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Dear SASG Supporters and Community Members,

Seattle AIDS Support Group (SASG) has been providing emotional support services for those affected by HIV/AIDS for 20 years in this community. In addition, for a number of years now, our programming has expanded to offer emotional support, discussion, and skills-building groups and personal development services to the entire spectrum of the gay/queer community – gay men, bisexuals, lesbians, transgendered persons, and those questioning and searching for their own truth.

Our expanded programming presented a new challenge: we found that many people didn't realize we had programming to offer them because our name implies we "only do AIDS." It has become clear that for many in the community, our name is now a barrier to accessing our services.

SASG has many wonderful supporters who know and love us as the old "Seattle AIDS Support Group" – but we have become (and will continue to grow into) so much more than what that name says about us as an organization serving the entire spectrum of queer communities. The dilemma: how to honor the past and the many people who support us because of that past, while also speaking to a new set of people who need and want the many other services we also provide. (If you are confused and wondering what those "other services" are, take a look at the complete list of groups and events on our website, www.sasg.org – and then come and participate in a group!)

At the April 2004 Board of Director's Meeting, the issue of the SASG name was again discussed when a specific name idea was brought to their attention. It seemed to address the need to honor the past, in several ways, while providing a name that would not tie us into providing only one area of service. After much discussion and gathering feedback from the SASG community, the Board voted in May to change the name of the agency to "Dunshee House".

For those in the community who continue to support our work because of their connections to our traditional HIV/AIDS programming, the "Dunshee" name will remain a familiar and important connection to them. For those in the community to whom SASG is not known, Dunshee House will come to stand for the wide range of services this House provides to all queer-inclusive communities.

There have been many people over our 20-year history who have made important contributions to SASG and a lot of them are no longer with us. Susan Dunshee, during her 17 years as Executive Director, made sure their work and sacrifice was never forgotten, always carrying on with grace and strength in the face of overwhelming grief and loss. Honoring her in this way, we continue to honor SASG's beginnings, while also looking towards a larger future. Thank you for being a part of this Dunshee House community!

Tim Jenkins, Board President

Deborah Witmer, Executive Director

P.S. Look for an announcement of our 20th Anniversary Celebration, coming this fall!

notes from SASG is our quarterly newsletter. Issues will be distributed seasonally as follows: Winter (January-March), Spring (April-June), Summer (July-September), and Fall (October-December). The inclusion of persons' names in this newsletter in no way identifies their sexual orientations, gender identities, or HIV statuses. Please direct your ideas for, feedback on, or questions about the newsletter to **Airen Lydick**, SASG Programming Manager/Volunteer Coordinator: 206.322.2437, airen@sasg.org