



“GAY POWER!”

On the night of June 27, 1969, a routine police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a known gay bar in Greenwich Village in New York City, sparked 6 days of resistance that led to a more visible, active, and organized LGBTQ+ rights movement. In the wake of the uprising, members of the LGBTQ+ community in Albany created what would eventually become the Pride Center of the Capital Region. It is now the oldest continuously operating LGBTQ+ community center in the country.

To commemorate the Pride Center’s 50th anniversary in 2020, the New York State Museum partnered with the center to collect oral histories from members of the community. Their memories, along with information found in their archives, in the collection of the M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives at the University at Albany, informed this exhibition.


We extend tremendous gratitude to the following individuals for lending their time, memories, and expertise in creating this exhibition: Cordell Boone, Nancy Burton, Richard Conti, Gloria DeSole, Judy Disco, Judith Fetterley, Candace Groudine, Sheila Healy, Scott Levine, Paul Leyden, Joanne Mattera, Maggie Morrison, Ken Mortensen, Frieda Munchon, Gary Pavlic, Libby Post, Ken Screven, Stephanie Slominski, Keith St. John, Cindy Swadba, Vince Quackenbush, Dr. Ray Werking, and Gwen Wright.

The interviews and historic materials that informed this history were made possible and accessible with the help of the following people, to whom we also extend our deepest thanks:

Cynthia Bott, Board President, Pride Center of the Capital Region
Martha Harvey, Executive Director, Pride Center of the Capital Region;
Melissa McMullen and Mark Wolfe, M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University at Albany

The Pride Center of the Capital Region’s building at 332 Hudson Avenue in Albany.





The gay bars were the social foundation of [the gay community in] Albany for a long, long time. And I think the reason there was a ‘key’ element [allowing entrance into certain bars, like the Eight Ball on Central Avenue] was three-fold: one was to keep the police from breaking in and raiding the place; two, was to keep people who were not gay from marauding in the building and causing trouble and hurting people; and three, was to minimize the presence of Black people in a public bar like that.

— Ken Screven, interviewed August 31, 2020

RAIDED — Club Capital is on the second floor of 351 Central Ave., Albany.

A SPARK IS LIT IN THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY:

“TREATED UNFAIRLY... NO LAWS TO PROTECT US”

In 1960, across the United States, you could be fired, evicted, or denied services such as education and public accommodations for being gay. Until 1966, it was illegal in New York State to serve liquor to a homosexual, as it was considered promoting disorderly conduct.

Bars were one of the few places LGBTQ+ people could go to be themselves and meet other like-minded people, but gay bars were often mafia-owned clubs and were frequently raided by police. Following a raid, patrons’ names and addresses were often published on the front pages of newspapers, putting them in danger.

Early in the morning of June 28, 1969, the Stonewall Inn, in New York City’s Greenwich Village, was once again raided. This time, the community fought back, launching a new era in the fight for LGBTQ+ rights.

▲ In 1981, Capital District Gay Community Center members protested after a police raid at a private bath house in Albany. Names of those who were arrested were published in the *Albany Times Union* newspaper, and led to lost jobs, family problems, and suicides.

Pride Center of the Capital Region Records, 1972–2017. M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

ORGANIZING IN ALBANY:

“I THINK WE JUST NEEDED TO STAND UP FOR OUR RIGHTS.”

I think my first introduction to the Pride Center was attending some sort of social event, or performance, or something . . . I immediately signed up to get their monthly newsletter, *Community*, which was printed at that point in time. And it was a lifeline. It came in a non-descript envelope, no return address, but I looked forward to getting it every month.

— Cindy Swadba, interviewed July 15, 2020

I think we just had to stand up for our rights. And it was time, and I think people were just tired at that point. Tired of being abused, and having no rights. So that's when we decided to organize.

— Gary Pavlic, interviewed June 4, 2020

► The first *Community* newsletter was created in November 1972 and continues today in a digital format. It is a vital means of connecting and communicating with members about events, services, and activism.

► Although the community house was conceived as a safe gathering space outside of the gay bars, the bar scene was still vital to the community and intertwined with activities of the Capital District Gay Community Council. This flyer advertised a fundraiser for the CDGCC at a popular bar in Latham, 1976.

▼ The first display of the CDGCC Lambda flag, a symbol associated with gay liberation, is held by John Cross and Larry Van Heusen, c. 1970s.

Pride Center of the Capital Region Records, 1972–2017. M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

▲ Marchers at one of Albany's first gay rights marches, which drew attendees from all over the state, 1971.

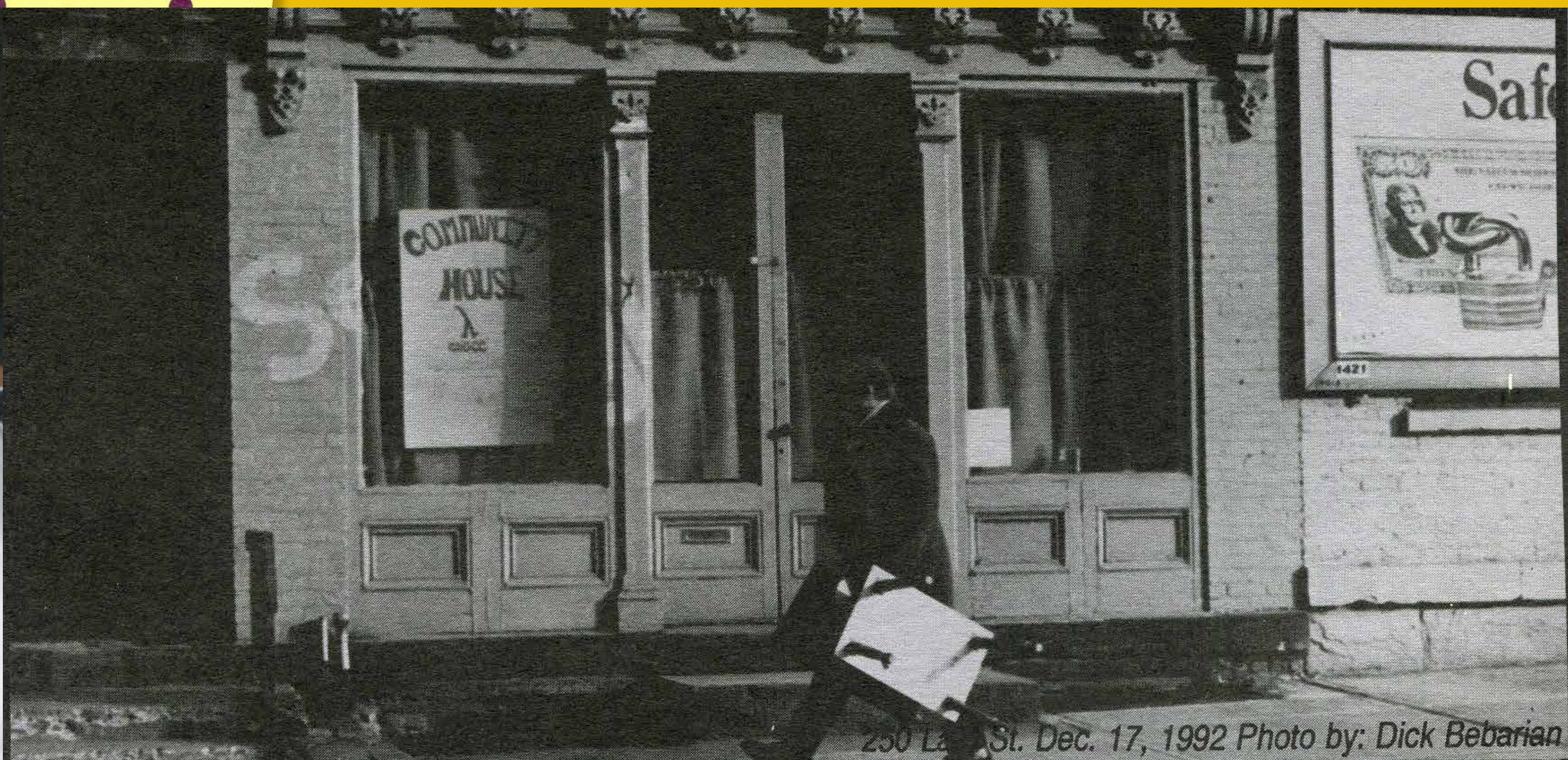
Yearbook Collection, 1900–2014. M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

Shortly after the Stonewall Uprising, a transgender woman who was a lead participant (likely Sylvia Rivera) came to Albany to speak about the uprising and the fight for gay rights. The group that heard her was inspired to form the Tri Cities Gay Liberation Front, which first met on September 9, 1970.

The organization transitioned into the Capital District Gay Community Council (CDGCC), and in 1972 opened a “Community House” in a small storefront at 250 Lark Street in Albany, where gays and lesbians could gather for group meetings and social events. The same year, a monthly newsletter, *Community*, was started, with editorials, poems and stories, and an events calendar. Other working groups organized social dances, community dialogue events, political actions, and publicity.

▼ The Capital District Gay Community Council's “Community House” on Lark Street, photographed in 1972 (not 1992, as was incorrectly labeled in this reprint of the photograph in *Community*).

Pride Center of the Capital Region Records, 1972–2017. M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.



250 Lark St. Dec. 17, 1992 Photo by: Dick Bebarian

BROADENING THE SCOPE:

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

We made the decision . . . to change the name of the organization to 'The Pride Center of the Capital Region.' Many of the leaders and long-time supporters of the Pride Center really had a hard time with that. We went through a whole re-branding exercise . . . sent it out to the community for input. Some of the leaders felt that by taking 'gay' and 'lesbian' out of the name, what did 'Pride Center' even mean? . . . There was a lot of negotiating with a lot of people about how to do that, and changing the name, and what that meant organizationally, what that meant historically. Were we erasing 30 some-odd years of history by taking out 'gay' and 'lesbian'?

—Gwen Wright, interviewed June 5, 2020



▲ Members of the CDGCC marching in an LGBTQ+ rights march in New York City, c. 1972.
Pride Center of the Capital Region Records, 1972–2017. M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

The Pride Center began as the Tri Cities Gay Liberation Front, then became the Capital District Gay Community Council (CDGCC), and later the Capital District Gay and Lesbian Community Council (CDGLCC). These changes reflected the broadening scope of the organization and changes in the language used by the LGBTQ+ community. In the early years, the organization was predominantly gay men, but lesbian groups met in the community house, and adding “Lesbian” to the organization’s name emphasized their presence and importance in the organization. Straightforward names made the organization easy to find by those seeking help or community. When the “Gay Community Center” (what the CDGCC building was called) appeared in the Capital Region phone book in 1976, the listing was the first in the area to have the word “gay” in the title.

In 2011, the name was changed again to The Pride Center of the Capital Region. For many, this new name was more inclusive of the entire community, including people who identify as trans, bisexual, and queer. Others felt that the new name was a step backward, as it was less “out.”



▲ Postcard announcing the new name and branding of the Pride Center, 2011.
Pride Center of the Capital Region Records, 1972–2017. M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

THE COMMUNITY CENTER BUILDING AT “332 HUDSON AVENUE HAS SAVED MY LIFE”

In 1974, the CDGCC moved to a basement space below the Washington Park Free Clinic at 332 Hudson Avenue. When the building became available for purchase, a group of members pitched in their own money to make the down payment.

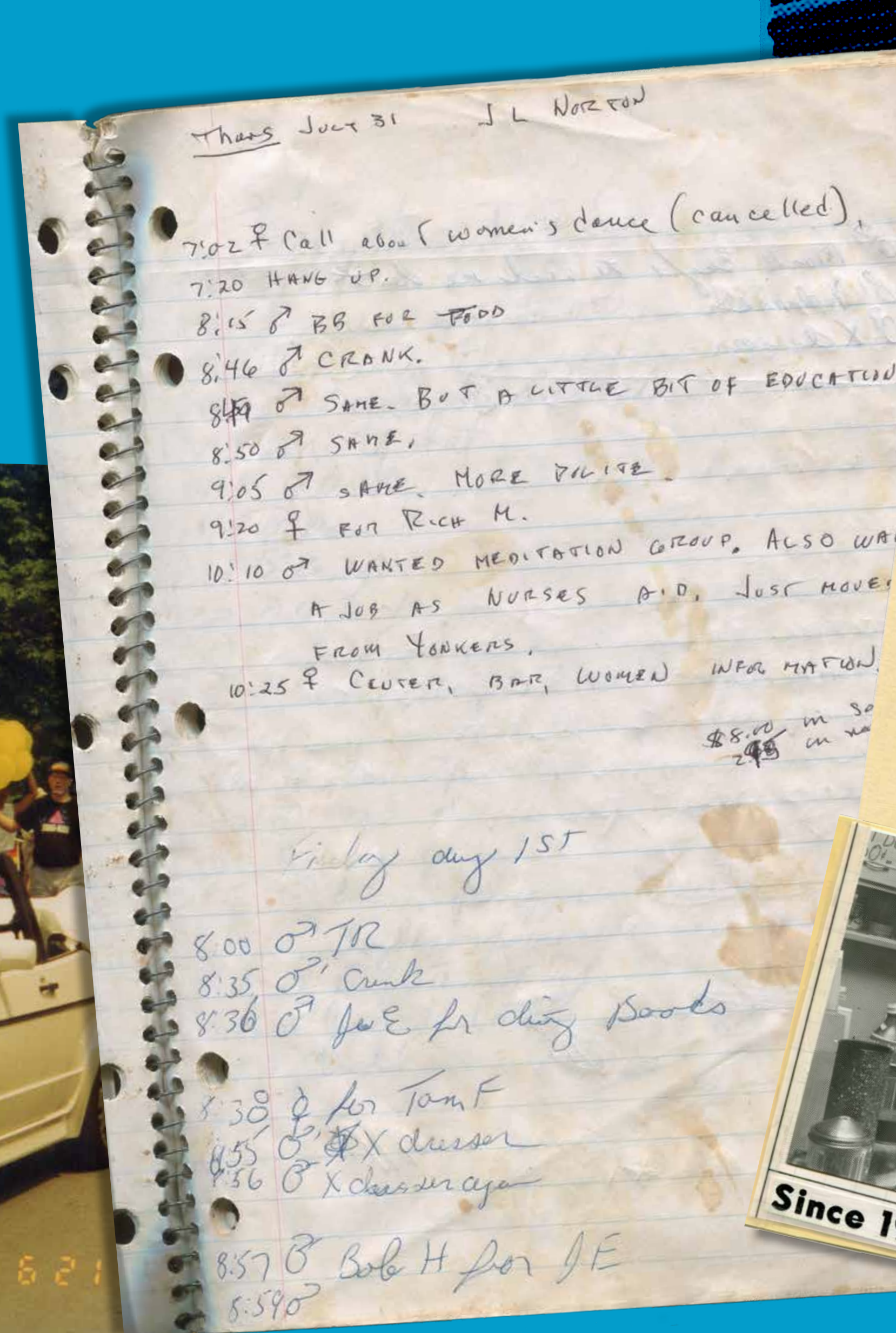
The community house was conceived as an alternative space to gather, outside of the bars. A “coffee house” there served this goal for many years. The building also served as a meeting space for peer support groups. Especially in earlier years, when it was more difficult to find like-minded people to talk with, these groups were a lifeline to many members.

“I read about the Gay Men’s Peer Support Group, which literally, and I’m not overstating this, saved my life . . . I had been by that building so many times, and it’s become a cliché that everybody drives by it a given number of times before they garner up the courage, and many times people just drive home and then they do it the next week. It took me a while before I finally decided that I’m going in, and I climbed the front stoop, that was equivalent of a flight of steps, three more, and made it to the room at the top, where we met at that time. The psychodynamic of these people was something beyond anything that I’d ever experienced. . . I was lucky enough to have come into contact with a gay person but not a *group* of gay men.”

— Dr. Ray Werking, interviewed June 18, 2020

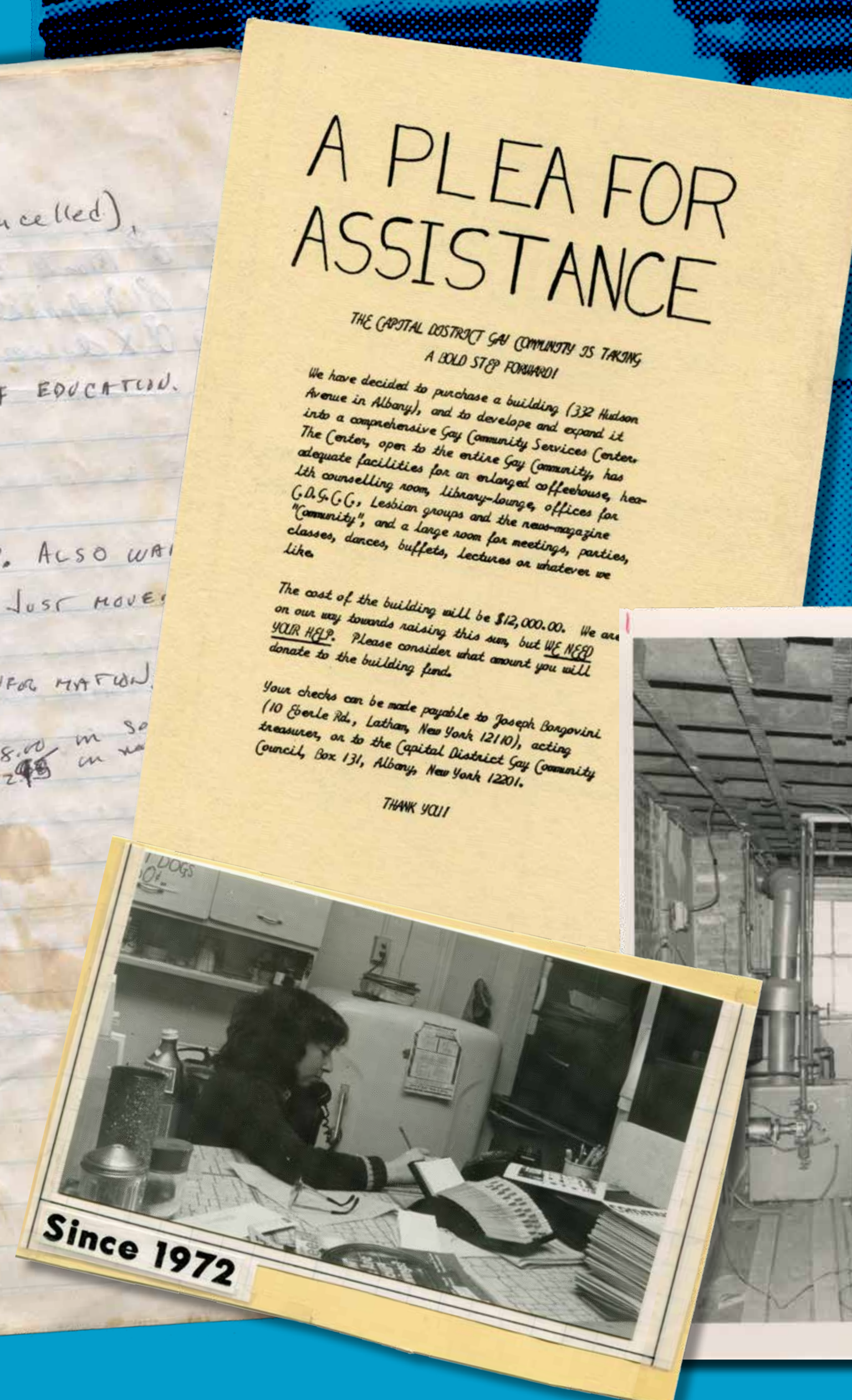


▲ Dr. Joe Norton served as Grand Marshall of the Albany Pride Parade in 1997. Norton stepped up to take on the mortgage for 332 Hudson Avenue, as the organization was not legally set up to do so. The CDGCC celebrated outright ownership of the building with a mortgage-burning ceremony in June 1988.



▲ A page from a 1986 logbook, where volunteers at the coffee house recorded the calls they received on their shifts. “...you answer the phone. They had a big resource book. If it was something that you weren’t comfortable handling, you took their number and had somebody call them back . . . The book was very extensive, a lot of gay-owned businesses, a lot of doctors who you could go to if you were trans or gay...”

— Frieda Munchon, interviewed June 12, 2020



▲ Members of the CDGCC saw the purchase of 332 Hudson Avenue as an opportunity to greatly expand programs, events, and services for the community. At the same time, the age and setup of the building have sometimes been a liability, leading to numerous emergency fundraising efforts for building repairs.

▲ A volunteer answering the phone at the Pride Center coffee house, c. 1980.



▲ The Capital District Gay Community Council’s community center at 332 Hudson Avenue had four floors and a backyard, with a mix of gathering and office spaces. The 19th-century building has presented upkeep and renovation challenges for the organization.

▲ In 1996, the basement level underwent extensive renovations to make it a more useful gathering space, and a lift was added at the front of the building to improve access to the space. The rest of the building has never been fully accessible.

POLITICS AND ACTIVISM:

THE “HEART AND CENTER AND SOUL TO OUR ACTIVITIES”

“I got very active in the gay community in Nancy Burton’s campaign for the Common Council. It was in the 6th Ward, and she was running against the old Democratic machine. That race was led by openly gay politicians. I had recently come to Albany from New York City . . . [I found] reformers and a whole campaign movement built around gay leaders who were working in coalition with a wide range of other groups. Political groups, nuclear frees . . . the anti-apartheid people were there. It was my portal into many people that I got to meet, and I found my way to the Pride Center . . . for many of us, the kind of heart and center and soul to a lot of our activities.”

— Sheila Healy, interviewed June 24, 2020

I remember the first march that we had—it was called ‘coming out’ or something like that. It was in the early 70s . . . there were 5,000 of us, and we couldn’t get a permit to march on the streets of Albany. So we had to walk single file, down the sidewalks of Albany, to the Capitol.

— Gary Pavlic, interviewed June 4, 2020

The Pride Center has served as a hub and incubator for numerous other organizations that serve the LGBTQ+ community in the Capital District. While the center avoided directly promoting political causes to protect its non-profit status, the space has been used for meetings for activism, advocacy, and political work.

Many CDLGCC members were also involved with the Eleanor Roosevelt Democratic Club (ERDC), an Albany LGBTQ+ political organization. ERDC members worked toward passage of a Human Rights Ordinance in the city to provide protections to LGBTQ+ individuals (there were no such protections at the state level yet). A 5-year battle ensued beginning in 1986, led by activist Jim Perry. Victory was achieved through coalition-building with other groups and flipping several seats on the Albany Common Council.

Pride Center members were involved, through the Empire State Pride Agenda, with lobbying and demonstrations toward the passage of several state-wide LGBTQ+ rights laws, including the Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act (SONDA) in 2002, Marriage Equality in 2011, and the Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act (GENDA) in 2019. The *Community* newsletter continues to provide readers with updates, information, and activism opportunities related to state-wide and



▲ The center was often a place for political work and activism, at the local, state, and national levels. This group is gathered on the back steps of the center following political organizing work for the Michael Dukakis presidential campaign in 1988.

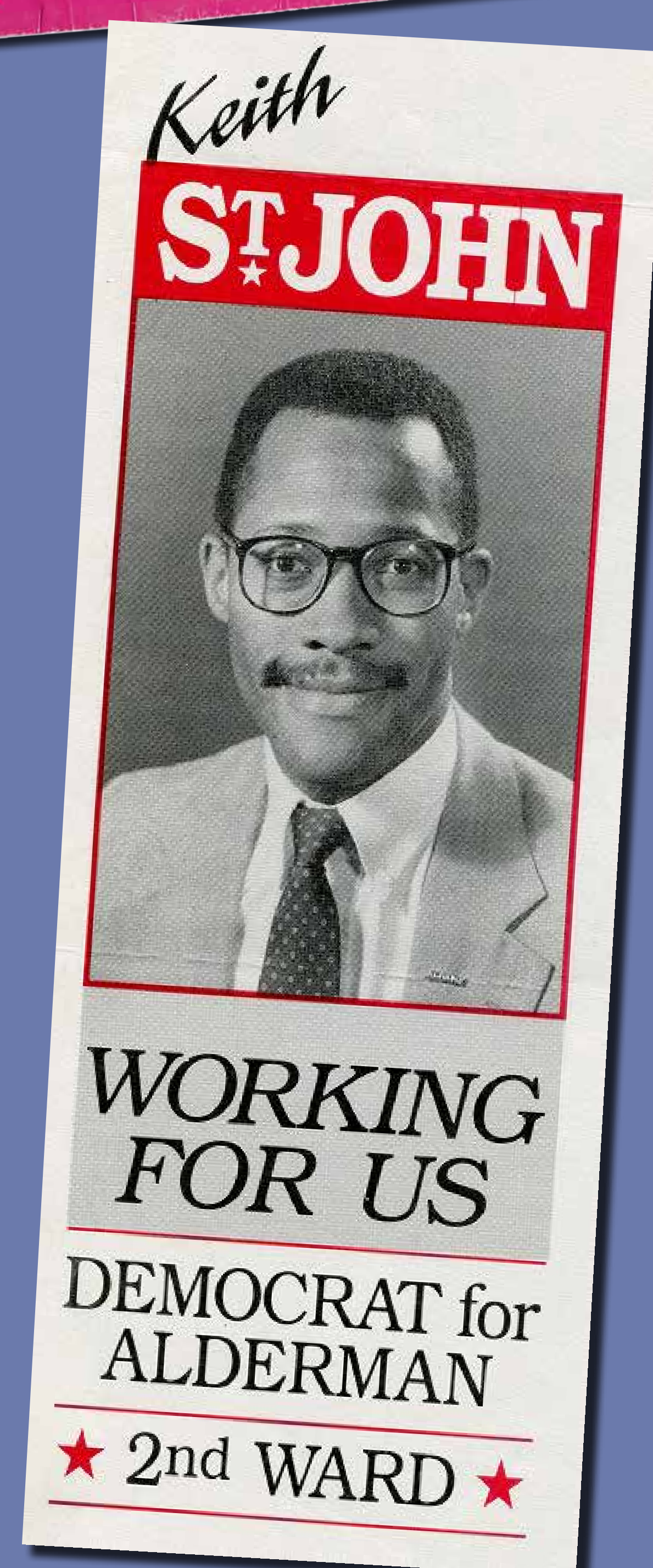
Collection of Sheila Healy

▲ A banner carried by the Eleanor Roosevelt Democratic Club (ERDC) in Pride Parades and marches.

New York State Museum

▶ Detail from Keith St. John campaign letterhead, 1989. St. John’s election to the Albany Common Council made him the first Black, openly gay elected official in the United States. During his tenure in office, he was able to pass the Human Rights Ordinance, first proposed to the Common Council by Nancy Burton in 1986.

Pride Center of the Capital Region Records, 1972–2017. M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.



PRIDE:

“WE MARCHED FOR WHO WE ARE, WE MARCHED FOR WHAT WE NEED”

The Pride Center’s most visible work in Albany is the annual Pride parade and festival. Over time, Pride parades have shifted from activist marches to celebratory parades. The first “gay and lesbian march” in Albany, organized by the Gay Liberation Front, was held in 1971. Gay rights marches and rallies were held sporadically in Albany through the 1980s and early 1990s.

Albany has traditionally held activities throughout Pride month in June that provide opportunities for the community to gather, celebrate, learn, and remember how far it has come. The tenor and specific schedule of events have changed over the years, depending on the needs of the community. During the height of the AIDS crisis events of remembrance were important, as well as activist actions demanding greater government support.

In 1997, during the CDGCC’s 25th anniversary, the Albany Pride parade was revived and became an annual event. The parade provides visibility for the community and includes LGBTQ+ organizations and activist groups, businesses, and politicians.

“The Pride celebration started off as ‘we demand our rights.’ It was a march and a rally. We marched for who we are, we marched for what we need . . . we rallied, we screamed. But we also have come far and we need to celebrate. But it’s not just a celebration, it’s also a reminder that we’re here . . . Especially as rights start to get rolled back and chipped away.”

– Scott Levine, interviewed September 3, 2020

▲ A 1971 march on the New York State Capitol brought together LGBTQ+ rights organizations from across the state, including the Buffalo chapter of the Mattachine Society and the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (NYC). CDGCC members kept in touch with activists across the state and helped with local arrangements for the protest.

Yearbook Collection, 1900–2014. M.E. Grenander. Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

▲ “Stride with Pride,” a state-wide LGBTQ+ rights march in Albany organized by the Empire State Pride Agenda, 1991. CDGCC members were active in planning for this event and getting information out through the *Community* newsletter.

Pride Center of the Capital Region Records, 1972–2017. M.E. Grenander. Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

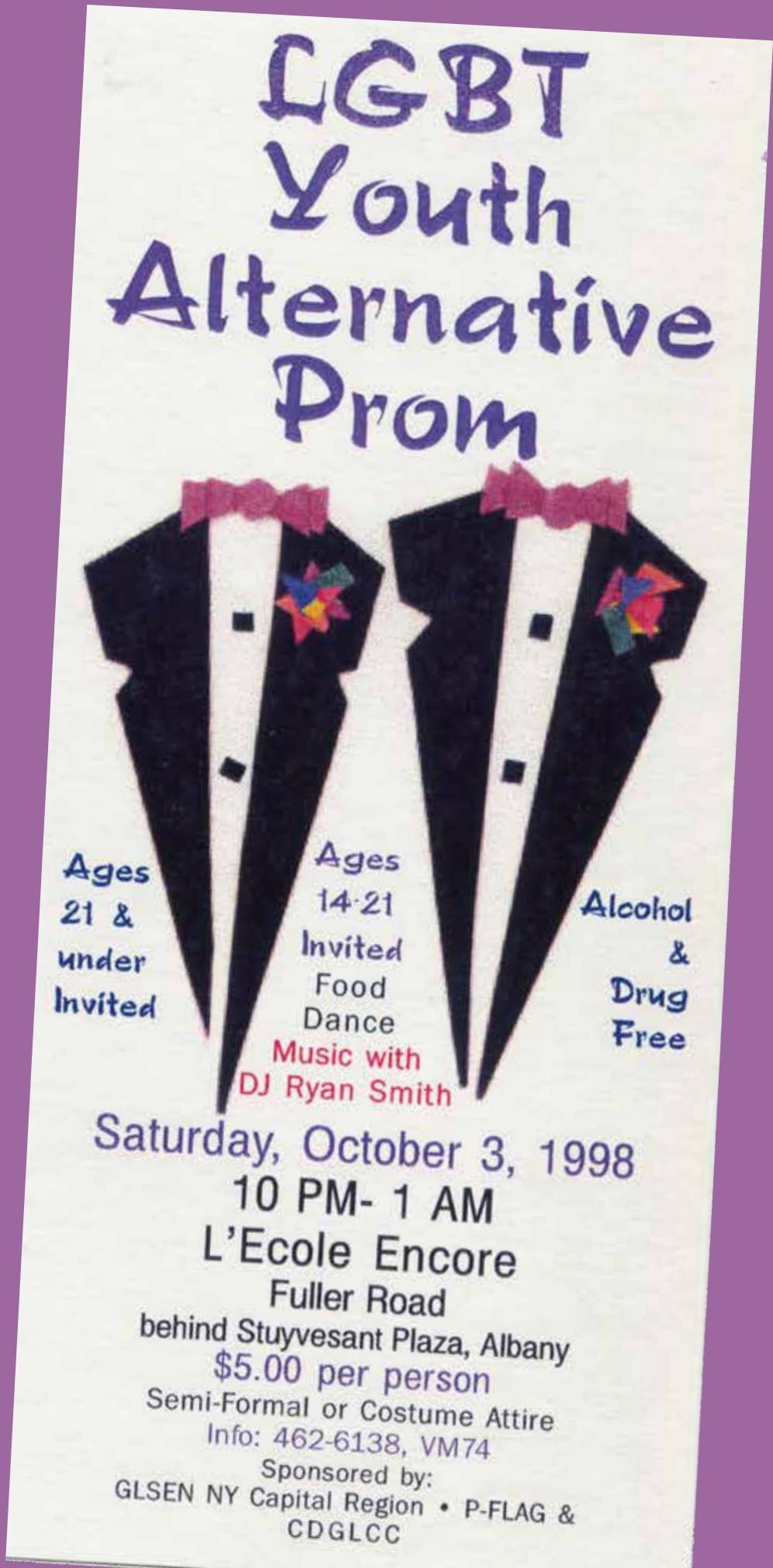
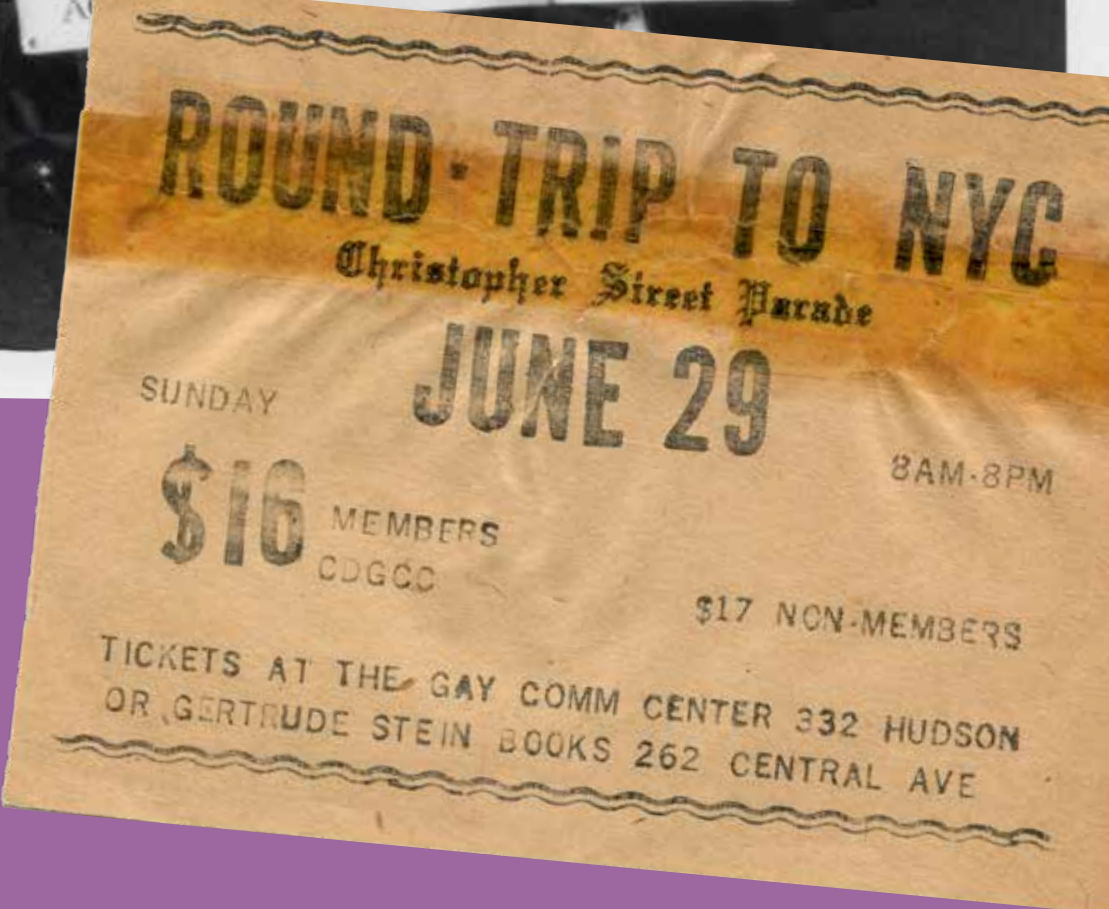


▲ Stride with Pride Button, 1991
New York State Museum



▲ Pride marches originated in New York City in 1970 with the Christopher Street Liberation Day Parade, held to commemorate the first anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising. The Pride Center regularly put together bus trips to the Christopher Street Liberation Day Parade, and later, the New York City Pride Parade.

Pride Center of the Capital Region Records, 1972–2017. M.E. Grenander. Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.



▲ The Alternative Prom, often held in conjunction with Pride festivities, allows LGBTQ+ youth from across the Capital Region to gather and have fun in a space that is safe and non-judgmental.

Pride Center of the Capital Region Records, 1972–2017. M.E. Grenander. Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

▲ Lining up in Washington Park for the Albany Pride March, c. 1997.

Colleen Brescia, Pride Center of the Capital Region Records, 1972–2017. M.E. Grenander. Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

▲ Poster announcing a Pride march in Albany, 1988. This poster shows the dual nature of pride marches, asking participants to “celebrate,” and also to “break our silence and invisibility.” The march concluded in a demonstration outside of an Albany Common Council meeting, where the Human Rights Ordinance was being considered.

Pride Center of the Capital Region Records, 1972–2017. M.E. Grenander. Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, State University of New York.

