Rainbow House Bridges Tufts Community

Queer Community Forms New Social Outlet

by ELIZABETH OYEBODE
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With the formation of the Rainbow House next fall, many students are again asking a question that always seems to arise with the approval of a new special interest housing unit: “Why do these people want to segregate themselves from the rest of the community?”

Most members of the Tufts Transgender, Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Collective (TTLGB) feel that being posed this question, they have been misunderstood. For them, the establishment of a house centered around the concerns of "alternative" sexual lifestyles is not an attempt to distance themselves from the community. It is an effort to strengthen the bonds within the queer community at Tufts, and in doing so, improve the group's connection to the community at large.

TTLGB co-coordinator and future house resident Carl Sciortino said that having the house "helps us feel more affirmed on campus and also provides us with a personal opportunity to make a contribution to the gay community at Tufts and in the surrounding area."

The rainbow is a symbol of diversity in the queer community. Sciortino said, "We chose the rainbow as the symbol of our house to represent the variety of people we are, in gender, race, ethnicity, religious beliefs and, of course, sexual orientation."

Though most of the house's residents are openly queer, several heterosexuals will be living there as well. Sciortino strongly supports having straight students live in the house. "The more diverse a group we have, the more successful the program will be," he said. The only qualification for residents is that they be "dedicated to the goal of educating all of Tufts about homophobia and heterosexism," he added.

A 1992 task force on queer issues formed by Vice President for Arts, Sciences and Technology I. Melvin Bernstein had initially recommended the creation of a TLGB house on campus. Sciortino, a sophomore, decided to follow the task force's suggestion. He began the application process last September with the following mission statement: "The Rainbow House is committed to providing a specifically gay-friendly atmosphere for students to live and interact in. The Rainbow House exists to provide lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered students and allies a housing option where their sexual orientation will not be an issue of conflict."

"The Rainbow House will serve as a social outlet for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered students and allies. Students can count on finding events..."

Crafts House members enjoy a dinner in their suite in Latin Way, the site for the future Rainbow House.

Rainbow

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where they are free to discuss their sexual orientation freely and to interact with other students without the fear of rejection simply because of who they choose to love."

Proposed events for next year include monthly dinner parties with faculty and staff members, alcohol-free parties and weekly movie nights centered around the theme of sexuality on film. The house also intends to do community service that will include serving as mentors for a high school's TLGB organization members and serving meals at an AIDS Outreach program.

Next fall, the house will be located in the 460s of Latin Way. The residents originally had wanted to live in a wood-frame house because, as is explained in their application, they felt that a "house would provide the stability and security of a TTLGB safe space that would be difficult to achieve in a dormitory or a suite." However, it is a policy of the Housing Office that newly recognized special theme houses reside in the dormitories during their first year.

For all the debate stirred up by the recognition of the Rainbow House, neither Sciortino nor Director of Residential Life Anne Gardiner seem very concerned about homophobic vandalism in or around the suite. "People are targeted whether the house exists or not," Gardiner said. "We have homophobic graffiti up on walls every year in the residential system. I don't perceive that somehow we're setting up an unwitting target for vandalism." She continued, "Certainly, the house's existence may mean there might be a more prevalent door to be targeted, but it doesn't create vandalism."