

United We Stand: The Story of Unity and the Creation of The Center

**Memoirs of eight gay men who were involved in
envisioning, planning, organizing and opening the
Gay Community Center of Colorado*
from 1972 to 1977**

***“For united we stand
Divided we fall
And if our backs should ever be against the wall
We’ll be together, together, you and I.”***

[Refrain of the popular song “United We Stand”
Recorded by British rock group The Brotherhood of Man, 1970]

*Known today as the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center of Colorado



Editor's Preface

The organization today known as the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center of Colorado, or simply The Center, celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2016. The Center was officially incorporated in the State of Colorado on November 19, 1976 during the administration of President Gerald R. Ford. Its doors opened to the public on August 21, 1977. The Center is one of the longest-lived organizations of its kind in the United States, or anywhere. Historically, The Center has had its ups and downs, but it has remained operational continuously since the beginning.

Nearly two generations of Coloradans have been born and reached adulthood since The Center opened. A generation ago, it began serving people not yet born when it first opened. The Center was organized in an era when the Internal Revenue Service was refusing charitable tax-exempt status to gay organizations. The Center was among the first gay organizations to successfully obtain a 510(c)3 classification. In contrast, same-sex couples today enjoy the right to marry everywhere in the United States while transgender people are making landmark progress toward full recognition of their rights. We've come a long way.

The Center was founded by Unity, a coalition of gay/lesbian-identified organizations and businesses operating in Colorado during the early 1970s. Unity was the idea of Gerald A. Gerash, who also was a founder of the earlier Gay Coalition of Denver. Meeting first in Spring 1975 with nine organizations, Unity's ranks eventually reached more than two dozen organizations. In Fall 1976, nearly two dozen people associated with Unity held a retreat in Breckenridge, Colorado to lay the organizational framework for the organization they named the Gay Community Center of Colorado. Two months later it was incorporated, and less than a year later, it was open and serving the public.

In Spring 2016, eight of the known living individuals who participated in Unity decided to share their stories of that long-ago time. Each has written a short memoir to be published as part of The Center's 40th anniversary celebration. This publication includes seven memoirs. The first in the series is written by Gerald Gerash, whose historical involvement spans the longest period in The Center's pre- and early history and is most comprehensive in scope. His memoir is followed in alphabetical order by those submitted by Frank Aguilar, Bob Janowski, Donaciano Martinez, Phil Nash, Bill Olson and Christopher Sloan (a/k/a Christi Layne). (Richard "Bucky" Reed contributed to and edited Christopher Sloan's memoir and stated that his own account would be redundant, and is therefore credited on Sloan's memoir.)

We all appreciate the opportunity to share this historical information with all who have an interest today, and for generations to come. We are grateful to the current leadership of The Center, and to the Colorado LGBT History Project, for their support and guidance.

Phil Nash, Editor

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On The Shoulders of The Gay Coalition of Denver

By Gerald A. Gerash
Winter/Spring 2016

Happy 40th Birthday to the GLBT Community Center of Colorado! We celebrate your many achievements. And we celebrate your first achievement, the birth of The Center—a birth that took a little more than two years—from 1975 to 1977. We were there! In May 1975, gay and lesbian organizations came together to form an umbrella organization called Unity. Unity then led a community-wide campaign to create The Center. We were members of Unity, some of us from the very beginning. In our celebration of the 40th birthday, we remember all those who worked with us, celebrating them and their passionate commitment to create an amazing, successful institution. We would like to tell you the story of Unity and how it gave birth to The Center.

In 1972, gay Denver began its journey towards an organized community committed to defend and uplift the lives of its people. It took a few years to reach the point where the community's soil became sufficiently enriched into which an organization like Unity could be planted and grow. So what happened from 1972 to 1975 that finally made the soil rich enough and ready to form a gay community center? Astonishing and revolutionary changes in the gay community.

In 1972, gay Denver was an extremely closeted community. Gays and lesbians lived hidden lives and in fear of exposure that could, and did, result in loss of a job and professional career—even eviction from one's home. We ventured out to meet other gays only in designated spaces, mostly the gay bars. Once there, we were afraid to use our real names. And arrests were a real possibility. We lived underground—in a gay world, entirely separate from the straight world. And the straight world didn't know our gay world even existed. We preferred that—for our own survival; we knew they saw us as pariahs, perverts, criminals or, at best, as mentally sick. Everyone thought that, even some gays. Why? Because of the dominant heterosexual cultural tradition, as well as how the legal and medical establishments had long defined us. This had been the way of life for generations.

Only two gay groups existed in 1972, Rocky Mountaineers Motorcycle Club and the Metropolitan Community Church of the Rockies. After the New York City Stonewall Uprising in June 1969, gay liberation spread like wildfire. But, by 1972, it still hadn't arrived in Denver. As in other parts of the country, the community required an organization to support and demonstrate a gay liberation approach to life and to advance it in an organized way.

In Denver, that began in the late fall of 1972 when my partner, Lynn Tamlin and I hosted Terry Mangan, Jane Dundee and Mary Sassatelli at our apartment at 2330 E. 13th Avenue and formed The Gay Coalition of Denver (GCD). We embraced gay liberation and the revolutionary spirit of Stonewall. We knew Denver could not muster up the likes of a three-day massive demonstration such as at Stonewall, nor did we think that would work in Denver. There were other ways to make revolutionary change. Little did we know that the GCD would go on to change closeted gay Denver forever—as well as Denver itself—in profound and liberating ways, to such an extent that Denver would quickly become recognized nationally as a leading gay rights city.

GCD grew fast because people knew about Stonewall, the women's and black civil rights movements, and the anti-Vietnam War movement, and some of us sharpened our organizing teeth in these liberation struggles. We were already pent-up and ready to live an open, freer gay life by creating a liberation movement of our own. GCD's members, imbued with a yearning for gay freedom, immediately began to fill gay Denver's void with a new gay culture and joyful assertion of our inherent worth. It was now time for asserting "Gay is Beautiful!" GCD formed committees such as: speakers bureau; political committee; legal committee (with gay and lesbian lawyers); a library; "Beyond Lavender" Coffeehouse (an alternative culture to the bars and alcohol that presented movies, guest speakers, women's nights, poetry, readings, live music and a variety of entertainment); a hotline; counseling services (peer and professional); coming out "classes"; and discussion groups.

In the early months of 1973, the undercover Denver Vice Squad rounded up hundreds of gay men, illegally arresting them on charges of "offering a lewd act." A bus with a sign on it—"Johnny Cash Special"—was used as ploy. It turned out to be the police department's big mistake and GCD's golden opportunity. GCD protested, held press conferences, met with Denver City Council members, but got little more out of it other than good press coverage—the first press coverage of any kind about gay people's concerns and protest. When it was discovered that City Council had scheduled a hearing to review all Denver criminal laws, GCD began to organize for it. To halt police harassment and oppression of our community once and for all, we mapped out a two-pronged strategy of attack:

1. Organize the community to come to the hearing in mass. At that time, few gays would risk being seen at a gay event, much less one that was a protest. So thought the leaders of GCD. We were afraid no one would show up.
2. A lawsuit by GCD against the city to halt the illegal arrests against gay men and, more broadly, to finally end police harassment of the gay and lesbian community. The lawyers of GCD's legal committee filed the lawsuit in May 1973. What we couldn't get from the City Council, we would try to get from the courts.

On October 23, 1973, 350 gays and lesbians overflowed the Denver City Council chambers and out into the corridors. President Robert Koch tried to thwart us at every turn. First, he made us wait three hours, taking up other matters. Then, when he was ready for us, he announced that the 35 signed-up speakers had a total of 30 minutes—just 51 seconds each! When people wildly applauded for their first speaker, he threatened every one of us with arrest the next time we applauded. "Sheriff's buses," he warned, "are lined up waiting outside." Gay activism and gay rights were being treated like a joke.

Skipping over the thrilling highlights of that evening,* such as the "obscene slide" and how the 30-minute limit was overturned, the end result was that, after three-and-a-half hours of speeches and what turned out to be a Gay Teach-In, much like the anti-war Teach-Ins, a majority of the city council changed their initial hostile and rejectionist attitudes. Slowly, they became willing to listen, and, at the end, some even complimented the protestors on their presentations. At the next meeting, City Council repealed the four anti-gay criminal laws we had been protesting! For the first time in the country, a gay community succeeded in repealing anti-gay laws resulting from a redress of grievances by those so aggrieved. This was Denver's Stonewall. Denver became recognized as a national leader in gay rights.

As a result of this stunning victory, the bigger victory was that gay people no longer felt so voiceless and powerless. A new confidence and cohesion and strength permeated the community. GCD flourished even more than before. The owner of Club Baths, Dale Bentley, who had flown in from San Francisco for the

hearing, was impressed with us; he forked over \$2,000 cash to me for GCD. With that, GCD opened an office with a full-time coordinator. Now people could drop in to discuss the common problems of gays and lesbians trying to survive a homophobic world, to network, or to form their own groups of common interest. Like a magnet, GCD's office drew people in, wanting to be in a safe and gay-affirming, nurturing space. It began to look and feel like a gay community center.

However, financing GCD's office was a problem. Other Denver businesses and wealthy gays didn't want to help fund the office. Cordell Boyce, the intrepid and brilliant coordinator, decided to apply for grants for funding of a gay community center, but time was running out. Before he could make headway, the office was forced to close due to lack of funds. Still, some of GCD's services and activities continued through the initiative of volunteers working from their homes, and through community meetings and events.

The gay community's soil continued to be enriched more and more with a new confidence and cohesion. A dynamic GCD continued to blaze new paths. That "second prong" lawsuit to stop the generations-long police harassment concluded on October 24, 1974, a year and a day from the City Council gay revolt, with another critical victory. The judge ordered that the police halt their illegal arrests and round-ups, forbade the police to arrest gays and lesbians for public acts of affection, such as kissing or holding hands in public or close dancing at bars—or for any affection expressed in public which straight couples are allowed. Additionally, the court ordered that the police "shall not tolerate oppressive and harsh police activity against homosexually oriented persons or establishments where they gather." The court ordered that the police department establish a liaison to the gay community. Yes, indeed, what we couldn't get from City Council, we got from the courts. This court order, another monumental achievement by GCD, further elevated the community's sense of confidence and security. Also, the lawsuit was another "first in the country," further burnishing gay Denver's reputation as a leading center for gay rights.

Many more gays and lesbians began to understand a life in the closet was no longer necessary. Besides GCD, the only other part of the community that had significant numbers and a following was the drag entertainment community. In the early days of GCD, that community, centered in the bars, didn't care to be associated with the GCD and its people. Asked to help by attending the city council hearing, they refused, asserting "we're social, not political."

However, when they learned that the GCD got the anti-drag law repealed, which now meant they were no longer being arrested for being in drag in public, their views changed. They now recognized the importance of working closer with the GCD and its gay liberationist approach. With the community galvanized, broadened and elevated to a more cohesive level of communal purpose, it appeared that its soil was now sufficiently enriched for Unity to germinate and be planted and grow.

After three years of gay activism, it was time for me to re-evaluate where the gay community was going, as well as the direction of my own activism. I was having certain doubts. We did have incredible victories. We won the repeal of four anti-gay criminal laws at city council and a successful lawsuit a year later that halted police harassment. Now it was 1975, and we had just made progress in the arena of the Colorado Legislature where we got a bill passed by the House of Representatives protecting us against discrimination in applying for credit. Most of all, we had a more organized, confident, cohesive, freer and dynamic community. However, I believed we needed to completely change course.

We needed our own seat of power, our own institution where we, ourselves, would protect and shelter and strengthen our own. We needed to start to work on a gay community center. We knew how successful the GCD office had been as a hub of gay life. I was dragging my feet. What was I waiting for?

The trigger that lit my activist fire was a state legislator at the Capitol. With a hooting barrel of laughs, he asked me for a bunch of my buttons I was handing out, "Gay Rights At The Legislature." He said he wanted to take them home to his rancher friends who, no doubt, would have a rip-roaring time sporting them about. What was I doing here asking for protection laws from people like this when I could be working with gays and building a gay community center for another kind of protection that was deeper and further reaching? The heterosexual world was not going to empower us. (Their history was all about suppressing our lives and criminalizing us—depriving us of any power.) Only we could empower ourselves. An inkling of which was well illustrated by the successful "gay revolt" at Denver City Council and the lawsuit against the police. GCD's office, which for one year acted like a gay community center, demonstrated the potential of a gay center. Our community needed a lot of help with our high rate of alcoholism, low self-esteem and suicides. Only we could best tend to our own, and the reality was that there was a lot of damage done to us by heterosexism and homophobia and their omnipresent institutions—always and everywhere around us. We needed a lot of building up, both individually and as a community. I was convinced that a community center was the best way to start this process.

It took me a while to figure out how to start building interest. My group, the GCD, which no longer had an office, couldn't do it alone and neither could any one group. We needed a lot of people -- a mass base of support. It seemed that the best way to achieve that was to bring other groups together under one umbrella, each group swelling our umbrella with its own volunteers.

I figured an apt name for the umbrella group would be "Unity." Actually, it was perfect—embedding the concept of a unified and cohesive community in our very name. Each time anyone said the word "Unity" it would reinforce who we were and what we strove for. I phoned all nine groups at the time, told them about my idea of a gay community center, and asked them to attend our first meeting.

Being involved with my law practice and with the activists of GCD in our three-year whirlwind of changing our gay community world, I never got to know the people in the other new organizations very well, or at all. I had no idea what they would think of a gay community center, or if they even appreciated the concept. I was so nervous they wouldn't accept my idea for a center that, in my handout, I decided to first list three other purposes of Unity, hoping they would agreeably warm up to the fourth purpose: a gay community center. Here is the language from that handout:

General Statement of Purpose

- (a) To work for and to provide a forum for unity among the Gay organizations of the Denver area.
- (b) To recognize that in spite of the difference of the emphasis of each organization our common goals are the same: to improve the quality of life and to develop a sense of self-respect, dignity, and unity among Gay people.
- (c) To foster an atmosphere where Gays will seek out and build upon our common ties and to discourage that which tends to divide us.
- (d) To work for the establishment of a Community Center for Gay people.

In early April 1975 about 20 people showed up at the first meeting. Many I didn't recognize. After my presentation, no one asked any questions. Oh my God, I thought, no questions means they're against a community center or were just not interested! I asked if they were sure they had no questions. They didn't. There was nothing else to do, but to vote. It was unanimous for Unity and the gay center! We immediately got up out of our chairs and threw our arms around our neighbors' shoulders. A lone male voice started to

sing "United we stand, divided we fall." We all joined in with full-throated voices. And then we sang it again. Try as I might, I could not hold back my tears.

*Please see the film, "Gay Revolt At Denver City Council, Oct. 23, 1973 And How It Changed Our World." Available at the GLBT Community Center of Colorado, Denver Public Library, and at: www.denvergayrevolt.com for an excerpt and further information and reviews.

Statewide Reach From the Start

By Frank Aguilar

May 2016

In the 70s we began as a small social group that usually met in people's homes. We evolved into the Fort Collins Gay and Lesbian Alliance, a vibrant college campus group with community outreach. We were able to petition for funding and office space in Lory Student Center. With eyes wide open and hearts full of dreams we established a strong organization that was composed of students and nonstudents to offer support for the gay community of Northern Colorado. We established a speakers bureau, had gay symposiums with national speakers like Franklin Kameny, and social events like our dances held in a "grange" building. We were proud, out, and ready to address as many concerns as possible.

We received an invitation to attend a meeting for Unity. We saw it as a chance to meet organizations and people who could possibly expand our horizons and explore the idea of a statewide sharing of knowledge for gay liberation and fellowship. This meeting offered us a greater goal for establishing a home base for gay people—a chance to do more than what we had done in the northern section of our state.

My friend Roger Haas and I decided to take part in this and were able to exchange ideas with a gregarious group of people who had good intentions for the greater good of gay people.

We met for weeks in peoples' apartments, homes and office spaces. Eventually, the concept for a community center was born. There were numerous trips to Denver, discussions and debates to lay the foundations, to set rules and regulations, to make this a reality. It was at a retreat at the Bunkhouse, infamous for male bonding, that we brought The Center into its final phases of reality. It was there that Roger's and my hope was fulfilled, that it become a statewide—not merely a Denver—project. [It was] an institution open for all Colorado gay ("gay" at the time being the inclusive term for both men and lesbians) people. It was also something that Cara Heller, the lone lesbian advocated, and hence became the GCCC (Gay Community Center of Colorado).

I am proud to be part of the history and congratulate The Center on its 40th anniversary and its many accomplishments. A proud moment was marching with the Interim Board members at the head of the Gay Pride Parade that year. (What a surprise for my family when broadcast on local news.)

Many thanks to the founding stalwarts: Jerry, Don, Cara, Phil, Bob, Bill, Christi, Bucky, and so many more!

A Unity Memoir

By Bob Janowski

April 2016

There are stark, scary moments in life when you leave one path and chose another. Even with careful thought and planning, there's that instant when you step off the edge.

Phil Nash and I arrived in Denver in March 1976, the first stop in a multistate road trip as I looked for a job. Relatively fresh out of medical school, but without a foot on the tightly packed rungs of the professional ladder, I intended to work as a general practitioner until I could get into a Family Medicine residency program. But this was also an opportunity for the two of us to concentrate on building a life as a couple. We had committed to one another less than two years earlier, but this was the first time we, together, were laying the foundations of a home and careers as well.

I didn't get the job I interviewed for, but in just a few days we both sensed that Denver could nurture our plans. We found jobs to steady our finances and an apartment convenient to the connections we were making. As we grew comfortable with the new town and new routines, I realized that this was the moment to set the tone for the rest of my life. From then on, I knew I wouldn't bother to hide my gay identity.

Phil and I had met in Ann Arbor. Social life in that university town often carried political overtones, so we got used to it. It seemed no time at all before we were also racking up acquaintances in Denver with people who were similarly looking beyond their own gay liberation. These were people building community consciousness, and our goals were interwoven.

Perhaps the first and most influential Denver friend was Jerry Gerash. He had already spent years building a respectable image for the gay community of the city, so his confidence and perspective were sometimes shocking. Learning that I was a doctor, he practically ordered me to open a medical office for gay men. When I told him I planned to get several more years of training and hadn't even begun to think about business, he brushed my concerns aside and said, "Just do it!"

Imagining the community center became a central preoccupation of our circle. We had no particular agenda, but we exchanged ideas of what we wanted this new home to look like. For some it was a space without boundaries, and for others it was safe and embracing. Some envisioned it as a door; others as a stairway, a hearth, or a library. We all saw it as multifaceted, a bright array of lives emerging from shadows. In retrospect we were giddily naive, but in those days we were bold.

The Bunkhouse Conference was solid evidence of our conviction and determination. Like Unity itself, the Pre-Incorporation Committee came together somehow with the intention of representing many pre-existing groups bundled under the heading of sexual minorities. At least we consciously and sincerely believed we were reaching across unfamiliar boundaries of the time, linking arms toward a common goal. And that was,

basically, to go public. We were all convinced that the invincible strategy toward complete respect was complete openness. The Gay Community Center of Colorado, as it was first named, would be a place where gays (the single, inclusive term we knew would be most recognizable) would find refuge, history, and friendship, and a place where anybody could find respect, information and help. From that starting point, we pounded out fundamental documents, and the Center came into being.

In 1977, one year after arriving in town, I was accepted into a residency program shortly after being interviewed on a local television show as an openly gay physician. "Just do your job," said the Medical Director, which made sense, and I became very busy for the next few decades. Phil's career interests were stimulated by the creation of the new Center, sending him on a path in Communications and Philanthropy that is still active today. But neither one of us looks at the past 40 years without recognizing the context that has grounded and nourished us. The influence we have on a community and the influence a community has on us are two sides of a coin. The same goes for responsibility. We make an enduring commitment to one another...and another...and another, and this is Unity. But the flip side is the Unity of self –living one honest, conscious and purposeful life.

For both of us that step off the edge started amazing journeys. We have been determined to chose our own paths and found there really aren't many locked gates and often no fences at all. Sharing this wisdom -- hiding in plain sight -- is what the Center still means to us.

A Memoir About Unity in Denver

by Donaciano Martinez

April 2016

In late October 1975 I was reading the help-wanted ads in *The Scene* (Colorado's only gay paper at the time) while socializing at the gay Hide & Seek Bar in Colorado Springs, where I had lived since the 1940s. The most unusual ad was the one about a job opening for a gay secretary. I showed the ad to Truman, my longtime friend with whom I had been an activist since the mid-1960s. The ever-suspicious Truman grinned and said the ad was probably a prank by Ron Wilson, who published *The Scene*.

The next day, I called the Denver phone number listed in the ad and reached Jerry Gerash, who reiterated that he was indeed seeking to hire a gay secretary. Being gay and having experience as a clerk-typist and paralegal at the nonprofit Legal Aid program that provided legal services to low-income people in civil cases in Colorado Springs, I told Jerry that I was definitely interested in the job. We briefly swapped information about his role as the 1972 co-founder of the Gay Coalition of Denver and my role as the 1969 co-founder of the Gay Liberation Front in Colorado Springs. We met in person two times (once in Colorado Springs, once in Denver) before he and his lesbian law partner decided to hire me at the law firm they shared with two Chicano-movement lawyers, one of whom was a gay man in the closet due to the anti-gay views of the Chicano movement back then.

Although being in a different city and starting a new job were part of the appeal for my move to Denver in late 1975, there were three other situations that tied into my decision to leave Colorado Springs. The move was an effort to ease my sorrow about the end of a longtime relationship with my live-in male lover. The move also was an attempt to put on hold my unresolved grief over my mother's death, and the move was my desire to leave behind my longtime hatred of my stepfather whom my mother divorced in my teen years after an eight-year unhappy marriage. In short, my move to Denver was born in the pain of ending one life and beginning another.

Even before my suitcases and boxes were fully unpacked, two Chicano gay friends asked me, "Whose side are you going to be on?" The question was in reference to a big split in Denver's Chicano movement – the Waldo Benavidez faction vs. Corky Gonzales faction. I wondered to myself that Denver certainly was going to be an eye-opening experience with gay issues and Chicano issues.

In early 1976, I accompanied Jerry Gerash to my first meeting of Unity held at the home of Paul Hunter and his live-in male lover Don. With about 12 people in attendance, the meeting focused on the need to get broad-based support to lay the groundwork for a gay community center. As the new kid on the block, I mostly sat back to listen and observe. The idea of a gay community center was not new to me because such a center had been the specific goal of the nonprofit Lambda Services Bureau (LSB) co-founded in 1973 by Truman and me in Colorado Springs. The community center there got sidelined when LSB ended up in a lengthy legal battle with the IRS when LSB refused to sign the IRS form that required nonprofit gay groups to refrain from publicly stating that gays were as normal as straight people. [LSB eventually won the case in 1977 in a landmark ruling that paved the way for all nonprofit gay and lesbian groups – all over the U.S. – to obtain tax exemption without signing the longtime IRS form that restricted gay public speakers.]

The organization name Unity was a yawner for me at that time because that word had been overly used and frequently contradicted by people working for social change in the course of my activism over the previous 11 years since 1964 (knocking on doors for peace) and 1965 (the start of marching for justice). Despite not getting warm fuzzies about the Unity name, I was deeply impressed with the serious commitment of Jerry and other Unity members in starting a community center. As an umbrella organization, Unity was comprised of gay businesses and several diverse community groups representing both social and political segments of the community. Despite all of the talk about being unified, early on I detected some level of friction between people in the social and political factions. Indeed, that underlying friction eventually manifested itself openly the following year in October 1977 about five months after the community center finally opened.

After my first Unity meeting at Paul Hunter's home in early 1976, I became a regular attendee at subsequent Unity meetings held in church basements and at the gay Pearl Street Complex Bar located at 13th and Pearl in Denver. It was at that bar that an idealistic young man named Phil Price showed up at a Unity meeting in March 1976 to announce that he planned to start a new publication. Phil told the crowded room of attendees that his publication was going to be an alternative to, but not necessarily in competition with, *The Scene*. Sure enough, he produced the first issue of *Out Front* in early April 1976 and subsequently reported on all Unity events.

By the time mid-1976 rolled around and Unity committees were being formed, I became one of the five Coordinator Selection Committee members who had the task of interviewing applicants and recommending who should be hired. There were some very good applicants (we didn't use the "candidates" term that is used nowadays) who were interviewed by the committee over the summer. In early September 1976 the

committee reached the decision to select Christi Layne as the Coordinator. The *Out Front* news story that month used the words “dramatic and unexpected moment” to describe Christi’s announcement at that month’s Unity meeting at which Christi declined to be considered for the job after all. The committee subsequently hired Phil Nash in May 1977. He accepted the position and began working in June. The location finally opened in August 1977. Long before the center opened, Phil was unrelenting in his dedication to numerous tasks at almost weekly meetings from the time of the September 1976 Unity retreat in Breckenridge to mid-1977. With his delightful sense of humor and his special skills at dealing with all types of people, Phil did an excellent job as the center’s first chief executive until his resignation in 1980.

The center’s original name Gay Community Center of Colorado (GCCC) – which was decided at the September 1976 Breckenridge retreat – reflected its male-dominated origins at a time in U.S. history when many women formed separate groups and did not coalesce with men.

After the Pre-Incorporation Committee (chaired by Unity activist Bob Janowski) completed several weeks of meetings involving the laborious process of bylaws and other governing documents for the center, in late October 1976 I typed the Articles of Incorporation that were hand delivered to the Colorado Secretary of State in the latter part of November 1976 in order for the community center to become an official nonprofit corporation. One of the Unity historical documents caught my eye with a brief reference to Dave Woodyard as the person who typed the Articles of Incorporation. Although nothing is to be gained by splitting hairs over who did or did not type the document, it was definitely me who typed it – on an old-fashioned electric typewriter, no less.

As one of the known surviving veterans of Unity, I thank my fellow veterans for including me in this opportunity to offer my reflections. Our respective lives have gone down different paths over the past four decades, but somehow we have come full circle to once again reconnect now that it is the official 40-year anniversary of The Center. In my salute to you in solidarity, I end this memoir with the following one-liner that was in young historian David Duffield’s March 2016 message to us: “Unity is, in essence, the plow by which the seed was planted and our garden of identities took root.”

Unity: My Career Began Here **By Phil Nash**

April 2016

In March 1976, Bob Janowski and I decided to make our home in Denver. We had met at the end of our college years in Ann Arbor, lived together for a year on the Texas Gulf coast, and spent another seven months biking around Europe. We were in our mid-20s, broke, and ready to settle down. Bob was a newly minted M.D. and had job interviews set up across the Western U.S., including one in Denver. Even though he didn’t get a job offer, Bob’s fondness for Colorado (he had lived in Colorado Springs for several years as a child) led to a decision to spend our few remaining dollars to move into a Congress Park apartment and buy a second-hand mattress.

In Ann Arbor, we had both flirted with post-Stonewall gay activism, somewhat intimidated by the radically flamboyant Gay Liberation Front, but more comfortable in the private parlors that hosted meetings of the newly formed Gay Academic Union. (In fact, our eyes first locked on each other at a GAU meeting in January 1974.) Thanks to a gay advocacy office at the University of Michigan, we had the chance to read gay-positive books and newspapers, hear inspiring gay speakers and socialize with out-and-proud liberationists. It was a privilege to come out as a gay young

adult in an affirming environment. A year later, when we lived in Galveston, Texas during Bob's medical internship, we saw the flip side: a deeply closeted gay community with no options other than a couple of shady back-street bars.

We did not take our decision to settle in Denver lightly. After Galveston, we bicycled around Europe for nearly seven months. On our return in early 1976, we both longed to put down roots in a place where we could live a good life by building connections to new friends, good neighbors and worthy causes. And no cause seemed more worthy than fighting the lies, injustices and psychological damage inflicted on gay people—especially those who were isolated from the gay-and-proud mantra that started emerging in the early 1970s. I was nearly 23 before I found the courage to come out. The moment I did, rage welled up in me over the myths and lies that had misdirected my life to that point. I vowed to devote part of my life to helping erase the ignorance, shame and fear that deprived gay youth and young adults of a healthy, optimistic vision of their future.

Within a few weeks of settling into the Antoinette (our Congress Park apartment building), I saw a short article in *The Scene*, an early Denver gay newspaper, about a group called Unity. The article announced an upcoming meeting to help lay plans for a gay community center; for more information, it listed someone named Jerry Gerash and a phone number. I called. I told Jerry I was interested in learning more. He explained that Unity was an umbrella organization—a coalition of gay organizations—working together on a shared project: a gay community center. Since I didn't belong to any gay groups, I couldn't have a voice in Unity. But I was welcome to attend as an observer.

The memory of my first Unity meeting is vague. It was in April or May of 1976, no doubt in a church basement somewhere on Capitol Hill. It was my first exposure to Denver's organized gay community. Several organizations were local chapters of national religious organizations I'd read about—Metropolitan Community Church, Dignity, Integrity. Others were new to me: the Imperial Court, the Tobie Foundation, Lesbian and Gay Legal Workers. Two newspapers were represented; *The Scene*, which mostly covered gay bars and the social activities, and the brand new *Out Front*, first published on April 1, 1976.

Because I did not represent an organization, I continued to attend Unity meetings as an "outsider" through the spring and summer of 1976. I also volunteered to help with tasks in order to help move things along. It was a good way to become immersed in the organized gay community and make friends with some of the leaders. But none of the organizations involved in Unity held much appeal for me—only the organization that they had come together to create. The vision that Unity's members were envisioning together was an idea that resonated deeply with me: a physical space that would become a beacon and safe harbor for gay people, and a fortress to nurture gay pride and vanquish homophobia.

Somehow, I made myself useful enough to be invited, along with Bob, to attend a Unity retreat to hash out the organizational structure of the new gay community center. The retreat was held on the weekend of September 18-19, 1976 at The Bunkhouse, a rustic gay men's guest house just outside of Breckenridge. It was a group of about two dozen—all men except Cara Heller, representing the Lesbian Task Force of NOW. One invitee was Don Michaels from Buffalo, New York, where he ran the local gay community center. Michaels, who later became editor and then publisher of *The Washington Blade*, provided Unity's members with sound, practical guidance from his hands-on experience running a gay organization.

For The Center, the Breckenridge retreat was, in microcosm, what the Constitutional Convention was to the United States of America. The marathon meetings covered how the new organization would be governed, some core principles (for example, it would serve both gay men and lesbians), a laundry list of services it might provide, and even the neighborhood where it would be located: Denver's Capitol Hill. The retreat laid out a sequence of

organizational phases that would need to happen to establish a legal and functioning nonprofit organization—details such as articles of incorporation, bylaws and officers; outreach and publicity activities; and administrative chores such as organizing meetings, keeping minutes and maintaining a contact list.

One of the most important decisions we made was the name of our new organization. While we decided it would serve both men and women, in that era most people—at least those who were at the table making these decisions—felt that “gay” was an umbrella adjective covering same-sex-loving people of both genders. (Within just a few years, the prevalent argument for lesbian visibility in the movement pushed organizations to become more inclusive in language and structure.) In line with the times, we chose Gay Community Center. But where?

The majority of Unity’s organizations were located in Denver, and the group had already determined that the center would be located in Denver. However, two retreat attendees representing the Fort Collins Gay Alliance, housed at Colorado State University, advocated for a statewide name. Boulder Gay Liberation, housed at the University of Colorado/Boulder, was also a Unity member, though not represented at the retreat. After some deliberation, the group voted to name the organization Gay Community Center of Colorado, GCCC for short.

I plunged in during the retreat, taking minutes and recording decisions. From the end of the retreat through mid-1977, meetings were held almost weekly to keep the momentum going. During Fall 1976, a small working group called the Pre-Incorporation Committee, chaired by Bob Janowski, worked to integrate the decisions and ideas from the retreat into Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws. Jerry Gerash’s law office provided legal support, as did attorney Maurice Brog. Articles of Incorporation were filed with the State of Colorado on November 19, 1976. On December 5, five people were chosen to serve as the GCCC’s Interim Board of Directors: Jerry Gerash served as board president; other members were Chris Sloan (a/k/a Christi Layne), Michael Graczyk, Cara Heller and Frank Aguilar. This group served until July 17, 1977, at which time the formal board election process outlined in the Bylaws was implemented. Gerash, Graczyk and Heller were elected to the permanent board along with Timothy Offutt, Stephen Springer, Jeffrey Mulligan and Michael Jefferson (a/k/a Michael Rosener).

From the retreat onward, I served as the appointed, nonvoting board secretary. I wrote the minutes, helped manage contact lists and tended to miscellaneous administrative and outreach activities. I seemed to have a natural talent for these kinds of tasks, fueled with enthusiasm for the organization we were creating. In my first year living in Denver, Unity introduced me to many new friends and allowed me to become thoroughly immersed in the community. I began to understand some of the underlying tensions and dynamics among different groups without taking sides. I got along with everyone. Most important of all, I had never felt more useful; I don’t recall ever being part of starting something new and important where I could see ideas turn into plans, plans turn into action, and action turn into results so quickly. The commitment was infectious; the momentum was exciting.

When the board formed a selection committee to pick the GCCC’s first coordinator, I decided to apply. My college and post-college jobs in the food and beverage industry were reaching a dead end. I had worked my way up from a truckstop dishwasher to a suit-and-tie dining room manager at a prestigious country club. I had an adult “AHA!” moment one day in the posh country club dining room after a busboy called in sick. Usually, I had the afternoon off. This day, I was on my own to clear dirty tables and reset them for dinner. Fuming, it occurred to me that just about any career path I chose would involve stress. And hell if I would keep pushing forward on a career path that would *always* involve being stressed out about hung-over busboys and half-full saltshakers.

When the selection committee notified me that I was chosen to be the GCCC's coordinator, I was thrilled. I was grateful. And most of all, I was naïve. I had no idea just how much this opportunity would change my life; it was the most important work I've ever done. That's a longer story for another time.

Few people today remember that two-year period when a couple dozen people worked together to establish the organization that became The Center—creating something much bigger than the sum of its parts. There are many good reasons to record this history. Here's one. Unity's gift to Colorado two generations ago is living testimony to the oft-cited wisdom of lesbian anthropologist Margaret Mead: *"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has."*

Unity and How the Gay Community Center of Colorado Came To Be ***From my recollections and research into publications, newsletters and organizational minutes***

By Bill Olson
April 2016

After completing almost eight years with the U.S. military, I returned home to Denver, Colorado in 1964 and accepted a job which took me out of Colorado for most of the time. Traveling grew tiresome and in 1969 I returned to Colorado full time. In my leisure time, at a gay bar called the Tic-Toc, I met a group of men who had started a gay motorcycle club the year before. Within a few months, I was an active member of The Rocky Mountaineers Motorcycle Club, which, in 2014, when they retired their colors, was the oldest gay organization in Colorado. This was also the group that I represented as a founding member of Unity. We are talking about the late 60s and 70s when Denver gays could lose everything if it were discovered they were gay. There was a lot of fear; the club only used first names and last initial in the club rosters and newsletters. We were a member of the American Motorcycle Association, but there was no mention of the club being gay.

In 1973, I became aware of a gay activist group called the Gay Coalition of Denver (GCD) that had just been formed a year earlier. After a few meetings, I became a member and it didn't take long until I was sitting in on Colorado legislative sessions, Denver City Council meetings and lobbying elected officials. It was my introduction to real activism and I realized I loved it. It also gave me the chance to learn from those that have become an inspiration to me, such as Gerald Gerash, who founded the GCD (and later was the motivator to form Unity) as well as Paul Hunter, Maurice Brog and Phil Price, to name a few. Looking back, I believe it was the GCD that was the inspiration for the activist, feminist and volunteer that I am today.

In Spring 1975, after a number of community members received phone calls from Jerry Gerash, the first Unity meeting, sponsored by the GCD, was held. There were about 15 attendees representing nine organizations: Gay Coalition of Denver, Rocky Mountaineers Motorcycle Club, Fort Collins Gay Alliance, Imperial Court of the Rocky Mountain Empire, Tobie Foundation of America, Lesbian Task Force of NOW (National Organization for Women), Boulder Gay Liberation Front, Metropolitan Community Church of the Rockies and Dignity/Denver. Jerry Gerash spoke to the group emphasizing the fact that, although we had made recent advances with the Denver City Council and the Denver Police and were making some strides with the Colorado State Legislature, we could not depend on the heterosexual world to empower us. We had to take control of our own lives if we were going to better our condition. Upon finishing, he asked for questions, and there weren't any. A lot of discussion ensued concerning getting more organizational and

business involvement in Unity so there would be more participation in our goals of unifying our community and creating a community center for the gay people of Colorado.

My records show that our second Unity meeting was held on May 13, 1975. This meeting was sponsored by Dignity/Denver and took place at the Oxford Hotel. The emphasis again was centered on more participation and each organization and business selecting one person to represent them and vote for their group.

Shortly after the second meeting, Unity established the Gay Community Center Trust Fund at Midland Federal Savings on East Colfax Avenue. The trustees for the account were William A. Yuwan, Craig Ball and Gerald A. Gerash. From the records I could currently find, the first two deposits made to this account were \$380.12 from the proceeds of the second annual Gay Pride Week event on 29 June 1975 called "Gay Pride Week GAY IN," and \$35.00 from ICRME Emperor 2 Bucky Reed's "Something Different" show on August 31, 1975.

On September 18-19, 1976, Unity organized a two-day retreat at The Bunkhouse in Breckenridge, Colorado for the express purpose of planning the establishment of a Community Center for the gay community of Colorado. Don Michaels of Buffalo, New York was invited as the weekend moderator. The 20 voting participants, as a group, became the Pre-incorporation Committee of the Gay Community Center of Colorado and began meeting weekly.

On November 19, 1976 the Articles of Incorporation were submitted to the Colorado Secretary of State for the GCCC to become a nonprofit corporation in the State of Colorado. The Articles had, over several months, been worked on by the Interim Board, and in October were typed and notarized by Donaciano Martinez. Eleven people were listed as GCCC incorporators; these being Jerry Gerash, Cara Heller, Phil Nash, Bob Janowski, Rick Trout, John Riley, Maurice Brog, Jay Morris, Frank Miller, Frank Aguilar and Kenny MacDonald. Of the above named incorporators, five were listed in the Articles of Incorporation as the initial Board of Directors: Phil, Bob, Rick, John and Maurice. Jerry Gerash was listed as the Registered Agent of the nonprofit corporation.

In November of 1976, Unity's members took on a new role as the Board of Governors of the Gay Community Center of Colorado, as prescribed by the newly written bylaws. As a group they participated in fundraising and the election of the GCCC Board of Directors. On December 5, 1976 the Board of Governors of the GCCC elected five members to the GCCC Interim Board of Directors. The interim board had its first meeting on December 19, 1976. The Interim BOD served until July 17, 1977, when the first GCCC board was elected, four members chosen by the GCCC General Membership and three by the Board of Governors. The Board of Governors voted on October 8, 1979 to dissolve itself.

I think that others in this project, all of whom I am proud to call my friend, have covered other aspects of how The Center came to be, that I do not need to repeat. As with this and so many other projects, the I, ME, MY could not have happened without the WE, US, OUR. Thank you **Jerry, Bob, Christi, Phil, Bucky, Frank and Donaciano.**

Unity: A Recollection

By Christopher Sloan a/k/a Christi Layne
April 2016

Representative to Unity 1975/76, participant and organizer of The Bunkhouse retreat, member of the Pre-Incorporation Committee and the Interim Board of Directors

Edited by Richard “Bucky” Reed

Representative to Unity from the Imperial Court of the Rocky Mountain Empire

Any history should be viewed in its entirety. Three different people reporting on the same event will most likely have three different perspectives as to how it should be written in time. My goal here is to give an honest perception of what took place in Unity and the creation of The Gay Community Center now known as the GLBT Community Center or simply, The Center. But as with all history, it is colored by the social environment of the time. This is what I remember.

Unity began at a meeting in Spring 1975. It met at various locations throughout Denver for about two years. It was to include every possible organization and business and those interested in coordinating a community-based organization. It was to define its own purpose with the primary goals suggested of seeing to the needs of the gay community, and especially the formation of a gay community services center. Unity was originally composed of representative volunteers, foot soldiers, messengers and “go-fers.” It is important to note that there was no operating budget for Unity. Everyone at the table chipped in to pay for whatever was necessary to help us continue—for copies, meeting spaces, mailings, refreshments, and all those odd expenses that occurred, and no one ever thought about being reimbursed.

Progression

Unity was representative democracy at its finest. Inspired by the community activism of Gerald Gerash, along with anyone he could motivate to come to meetings and get involved, Unity was formed at a unique time in our history. People of like minds came together and put away any issues between them to learn about each other and work to form a brighter future. The timing of these events turned out to be serendipitous for gay people. The tenor and temperament of the Unity meetings were always “can do” and “how can we make it happen?” rather than “it can’t be done.” The progression began with Gerald Gerash and community activists working on issues at the City Council of Denver. Then came the idea of Unity, followed by the Pre-Incorporation Committee, then the Interim Board of Directors and the election of the first Board of Directors for the Center. There were assorted subcommittees, such as selection committees and numerous committees to help bring awareness and education to the body of Unity. These fluctuated throughout the span of Unity and its meeting schedule.

Who Did What

Here are the names of some of the representatives to Unity:

Christi Layne/Christopher Sloan representing the Tobie Foundation, a nonprofit organization for giving awards for outstanding community achievement, and humorous camp awards. Also, Sloan represented the Imperial Court of the Rocky Mountain Empire (ICRME) for the Gay Community Service Fund, and as coordinator for Denver's first Gay Pride Festival March/Parade as requested by the Tobie Foundation.

Phil Nash, community activist

Jim McNulty, business owner and community activist

Bill Olson, representing the The Rocky Mountaineers Motorcycle Club, and speaking for the leather community and the social community

Richard "Bucky" Reed, representative for ICRME and the social community, and founding board member of Unity

Michael Rickard, a banker and representative of The Terrace, a night club

Bob Janowski, doctor and community activist

John Sheppard, representing the Sovereign Court

Cara Heller a/k/a Noriko Nakano, speaking to women's and lesbian issues, and representing several women's organizations

Gerald Gerash, attorney and community activist, founder of Unity, and speaking to many issues around political interests

Virgil Scott, assistant pastor of Metropolitan Community Church of the Rockies and speaking to religious issues

Michael Graczyk, speaking to youth issues and representing The Apartment, a local business

Unity representatives included many people and its membership was always in flux. Over time, there were others involved in Unity, including attendees at the eventual retreat at the Bunkhouse: Frank Aguilar, Maurice Brog, John Drummer, Roger Haas, Ken McDonald, Jay Morris, John Riley, Ed Smith (a/k/a Mad Edna), Rick Trout, Ron Reicker. To be sure there were many more people involved in Unity; this list just represents those I have documentation for.

What Did Unity Seek to Accomplish?

Unity began acting as a scheduling clearing house so events wouldn't be scheduled on top of each other. It also coordinated public awareness of current political situations that gay people needed to be aware of. But most important of all, it was a sounding board for our common goals—a wish list, if you will—looking for a panacea of inclusiveness. How would we navigate those issues that divided us in a male-dominated society where women's rights were considered something that just had to be dealt with instead of explored and learned and trusted? Among the various issues addressed were:

- Drag, which some claimed to be subjugation of women

- The nature of the leather community and the issues surrounding dominance and submissiveness. Lack of understanding about the leather community helped to create a distrust that spoke directly to the fears in the woman's community of ongoing violence toward women and left them wondering if equality would ever be a possibility.
- Consideration of other issues such as prostitution, drugs, alcoholism, pedophilia, transvestism, mental health, classism, elitism—all these issues and so many more that had to be considered in almost every discussion.

We were novices defining what an equal society might include. Could this ever happen? Would our lofty goals survive?

You bet! An ongoing learning community could happen! Though we weren't quite sure how we would get there, it was our commonality, it was our dream. Lofty ideals! A knowledge of Stonewall and the politics of gay and women's rights helped. Many questions and concerns remained:

- How to include the youth
- How to realize the current social aspects of our community (there was no Facebook then) and the values of the social norm
- Being sensitive to the needs of our gay-oriented businesses
- An ongoing needs assessment of services that may be needed in the gay and lesbian community
- Being sensitive to marginalized subcultures in our own community—transvestites, transsexuals, bisexuals, feminists, male-oriented women, female separatists
- Learning to be aware of the subcultures in the gay community and how we learned to interrelate and look for commonalities.

The meetings eventually gravitated towards the nuts and bolts of founding a community center. The Pre-Incorporation committee was established, followed by the retreat at The Bunkhouse.

Direction

In our discussions about creating a community center, the direction of the Unity meetings turned to a wide range of topics: governance and infrastructure; membership; election of officers; employees; financial aspects and ongoing financial needs; expanding our ranks by bringing a friend; who is represented, who is not, and how do we bring them in; who do you know and how can they help; coordinating times of meetings and community events; future intercommunication of representatives, organizations, and businesses in Unity; medical and legal referrals; phones and electricity; suicide outreach and counseling; library; designing the community center as a drop-in center which would be a safe, welcoming environment to the public; outreach to allies; a suggestion box; collecting the bylaws of other existing centers and/or purposed centers; exploring scope of services; priority list of what is needed first; what would create a natural progression for success; how to establish a trust-based relationship with the future Center and the community at large; legal and political experience and knowledge; how to be sensitive to the religious community; mailings, addresses lists and privacy concerns; substance abuse and mental health.

We aspired to reach out to all aspects of our community trying to make sure we did not alienate different subcultures within our community unknowingly. We coordinated how we communicated within each element through the representatives of groups and organizations and businesses and professionals within Unity, as well as relating to the social elements within our community such as bars, bath houses, restaurants, and retail outlets.

In Conclusion

We had our work cut out for us. But, actually, it wasn't work; it was a goal—a dream and a vision for the future, an ongoing sorting of the wishes against the reality of what we could do. We had the idea, first crawling with it, then baby steps, next standing, then walking and finally running—running toward our future! Keeping positive and motivating our community even with all the missteps and mistakes in between and the dream turned into The Center of today.

The ending of Unity is a mystery to me. I don't recall that it existed after the Interim Board was formed. I believe that Unity morphed into the various committees and Interim Board. But as in all things—I may have missed it, and that brings us to today and THE CENTER! What a journey!

A Timeline Leading to the Founding of The Center, 1972-1977

The creation of the **Gay Community Center of Colorado** (today known as the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center of Colorado, or simply **The Center**) was rooted in two organizations that preceded it—first the **Gay Coalition of Denver** and, later, **Unity**. The histories of these organizations overlap, as do some of the people who took part in them, forming a continuous thread of history. It is not possible to understand the creation of **The Center** without knowing about **Unity**, and it is not possible to understand why or how **Unity** was formed without understanding the history of the **Gay Coalition of Denver**. This timeline presents key milestones on the journey taken by **The Center's** founders in Colorado during the early to mid-1970s. It is subject to future modification as key information is discovered and verified.

October 1972

Terry Mangan, Jane Dundee, Mary Sassatelli, Lynn Tamlin and Gerald Gerash form The Gay Coalition of Denver (GCD), the first gay liberation political, educational, gay advocacy and cultural group in Denver.

January to March 1973

The Denver Police Department's undercover vice squad officers illegally arrest hundreds of gay men using the "Johnny Cash Special" bus, an entrapment tactic. GCD begins planning and organizing to confront the city and its police.

October 23, 1973

Denver's Stonewall: "Gay Revolt at Denver City Council" takes place at Denver's City and County Building. GCD leads the protest against the illegal round-ups with 350 gays, lesbians and allies flooding the chambers and speaking for three and a half hours to protest discrimination and abusive policies of the police and Denver's political establishment. They also speak out about who they are as a people, what it's like to live as a gay person in Denver, and exposing the widespread homophobic terror that oppresses their everyday lives.

November 1973

As a result of the GCD protest, Denver City Council repeals four anti-gay criminal laws, a first in the country. Denver is nationally recognized as a leader in gay rights.

Late 1973

Thanks to a \$2,000 donation from a gay businessman pleased with GCD's victory, GCD opens an office at 1250 Pennsylvania Street. It becomes the first gay facility for outreach to the gay and lesbian communities and is a "drop-in" safe space with supportive services and a paid staff person. While an arm of the GCD and its civil rights, advocacy and cultural programs, the office also functions much like a gay community

center including, support, crisis intervention, counseling referrals, speakers bureau, a library, educational activities and the like.

October 24, 1974

One year and one day after the “gay revolt” at Denver City Council, GCD wins its lawsuit against the City of Denver. The police department is broadly enjoined to no longer arrest and harass gays and lesbians on the streets or at their meeting places, such as the bars. The court sets out specific examples, such as kissing and holding hands, for which the police shall no longer arrest and harass. The judge also entered a general prohibition of arresting same-sex individuals for public acts of affection for which they wouldn’t arrest a heterosexual couple. In an unusual move, the judge’s order had no expiration date; this court order still prevails. It was the first successful gay and lesbian lawsuit halting police terror in the country. As a practical matter, attorneys were able to use the court order to have excessive and frivolous jaywalking citations dismissed several years later when infamous Denver cop James “Buster” Snider ticketed gay men near a popular gay bar.

January and February 1975

GCD’s Civil Rights Committee introduces bills to include gays and lesbians in Colorado laws that protect minorities and women against discrimination. The Colorado House of Representatives passes, by a wide margin, a bill that would protect gays and lesbians against discrimination in credit. The measure lost by only three votes in the Republican-dominated Senate.

May 1975

Unity meets for the first time. Nine gay and lesbian groups invited by Gerald Gerash come together to discuss options for how they could cooperate to improve the community. After leading political battles in Denver’s city hall and the Colorado legislature, Gerash felt the need to change the course of gay activism, and that the greatest need at that time was a community center by and for gay people. At the meeting, he presented the concept of **Unity**, an umbrella organization consisting of all interested and willing gay and lesbian organizations and businesses to work for community-wide goals. One of the four goals he suggested was to form a gay community center. The group agreed unanimously to this goal. With their vote, they created **Unity**, an umbrella organization for gay and lesbian groups, as the vehicle to create The Center.

August 31, 1975

Richard “Bucky” Reed, Emperor 2 of the Imperial Court of the Rocky Mountain Empire, holds a show called “Something Different” as a fundraiser for the proposed gay community center. Bringing in \$35, it is the first community fundraising event for the organization that would not open its doors for nearly two more years.

June 1975-August 1976

Unity meets monthly at different hosted sites in central Denver, often in churches. The organization is composed of people representing community organizations and businesses, and each entity represented at Unity had a vote, although most decisions were made by consensus. **Unity** quickly morphs into an assembly of volunteers and becomes the nucleus-brainstorming unit for reaching the goal of a Center. It also was a forum for exchanging information about events of interest to all groups, such as Pride Week activities. Unity had a steering committee chaired by Gerald Gerash, and eventually eight working committees that made reports about their work at each meeting. Gerash started each meeting with a proposed agenda, but opened the floor for changes by the assembly. Unity meets monthly throughout 1975 and increases meeting frequency to twice a month during 1976.

September 18-19, 1976

Unity holds a retreat at The Bunk House, a gay-owned bed-and-breakfast inn near Breckenridge, Colorado. This weekend brainstorming session, attended by 22 delegates, was held for the purpose of reaching agreements and decisions on key governance and program elements of the proposed gay community center. Don Michaels, former director of the Buffalo gay community center, informs us on the nuts and bolts and problems they had in starting and sustaining their community center, and advises us on general policies.

Purposes of the Center were discussed in detail and each was given higher or lower priority status. The name for the Center was approved: Gay Community Center of Colorado after compelling reasons offered by delegates from Fort Collins and others who supported a statewide focus. The group discussed incorporating and made decisions as to who would follow up and finalize the legal documents. They also charted a governance path that would (1) draft articles of incorporation and bylaws reflecting decisions reached at the retreat; (2) select an Interim Board of Directors charged with undertaking the activities that would lead to establishing the community center (i.e., fundraising, communication, staffing, location, etc.), and; (3) oversee a process to elect a permanent board of directors. These responsibilities were to be carried out by a temporary group named the **Pre-Incorporation Committee** consisting of Unity representatives who had attended the Breckenridge Retreat.

Retreat attendees decided to have a membership-based Center—one in which paying members (a minimum of \$10 a year) would have a right to a voice in the policies of The Center. Initially, however, **Unity's** voice would be strong, reflected in a governing body elected by the Board of Governors. (The membership of the **Board of Governors** was essentially the membership of **Unity**—organizations and businesses committed to creating and operating the GCCC.) The Board of Governors would elect five-member Interim Board of Directors. Subsequently, it would elect three of the seven directors of the GCCC's permanent board. Each year thereafter, the general membership's voice would increase by electing one more board slot a year until the Board of Governors phased out of the election process. (By 1979, the Board of Governors was no longer involved in electing GCCC board members and was disbanded.)

November 19, 1976

Articles of Incorporation for the Gay Community Center of Colorado (GCCC) were filed with the Colorado Secretary of State. The Center is legally "born."

December 1976

The Board of Governors (Unity's members under a new name), chaired by business owner John Sheppard, elects five members to the GCCC's Interim Board of Directors. They are Gerald Gerash, Frank Aguilar, Michael Graczyk, Cara Heller, and Christopher Sloan (a/k/a) Christi Layne. The Interim Board chooses Gerash as chair and appoints Phil Nash as recording secretary, a volunteer position without vote.

January-July 1977

The Interim Board of Directors met weekly, usually on Sunday evenings in a private home. In addition to the board members, meetings drew interested parties including people who had been involved in Unity and/or the Board of Governors. Committees formed to take on critical tasks such as fundraising, membership, public relations, site selection, coordinator selection and other activities.

While the GCCC Interim Board of Directors' main focus was to open the new center, it also served as the main gay and lesbian organizing hub in Denver and Colorado. Consequently, the Interim Board, like Unity before it, also served as a forum for information exchange and discussion about issues affecting the entire community, such as 1977 Pride Week activities. While many community activities were organized and led by other groups that had been part of Unity, the GCCC—even in its developmental phase—played a leadership role in fostering communication and connection among diverse community groups.

Simultaneous to the community organizing underway to open the GCCC, a major political battle was taking place in Dade County (Miami), Florida with the "Save Our Children" campaign mobilizing voters to reject the inclusion of "sexual orientation" in Dade County's antidiscrimination ordinance. Led by musical celebrity Anita Bryant, this local gay rights battle took on national significance; for the first time, gay and lesbian organizations all over the country raised money to fight Save Our Children and its deplorable message: gay people's rights should be curtailed because they are a threat to children. Gays and lesbians called for a national boycott of Florida orange juice, for which Anita Bryant was a spokesperson. An ad hoc Denver group called the June 7th Committee (June 7, 1977 was voting day in Dade County) formed to raise money for both the new center and to fight Save Our Children. They sold T-shirts emblazoned with the slogans "I Am One. Are You?" and "Human Rights Are Absolute," an oft-quoted maxim of President Jimmy Carter. Save Our Children's campaign succeeded—a loss for gay rights, but a gain for gay and lesbian community organizing nationwide. Locally, as the Interim Board of Directors was working to open the doors of a gay community center, the defeat of gay rights in Dade County opened many closet doors; the GCCC would reap the benefits of a cadre of newly minted activists who were ready to volunteer for the cause.

May 1977

Phil Nash is selected to be The Center's Coordinator, the only paid staff position.

June 1977

The GCCC's general membership reaches 150 members. The Board of Governors also dramatically increases its membership to 39 organizations and businesses; Unity began with just nine organizations and businesses. Fundraising reports a total of \$8,385 banked to support the GCCC.

July 10 and 17, 1977

On July 10, 83 voters from the GCCC's general membership elect four people to the permanent board of directors: Gerald Gerash, Timothy Offutt, Cara Heller and Michael Jefferson (a/k/a Michael Rosener).

At its July 17 meeting, 32 members of the Board of Governors elect three people to the permanent board: Michael Graczyk, Jeffrey Mullican and Stephen Springer. Subsequently, elected Cara Heller president.

August 1, 1977

The GCCC rents space at 1436 Lafayette Street from the First Unitarian Society of Denver for \$245 per month. Their church at 1400 Lafayette Street is used as a meeting space for larger gatherings.

August 21, 1977

The GCCC officially opens its doors to the public with speeches and a ribbon-cutting ceremony featuring pink, lavender and purple ribbons. Approximately 100 people attend an afternoon open house.