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# Growing old gracefully

## Toronto queer life comes of age



JOSHUA MELES

**ANY GREY YET?** Buddies' David OIye and Jim LeFrancois aim for a gritty 25th season.

### INSTITUTIONS

Kerwin McLeister

**T**HOUGH THE STRUGGLE for lesbian and gay rights in Canada goes back a long way, the mid-1970s and early 1980s were particularly rich times for the founding of queer institutions in Toronto. Perhaps it was something in the water.

Several of the cultural, social and support operations that define Toronto's robust queer scene are celebrating big anniversaries this year. The Canadian Lesbian And Gay Archives is 30, Buddies In Bad Times Theatre is 25 and so is Gay Fathers Of Toronto. The AIDS Committee Of Toronto is turning 20.

These are grand old ages for institutions that opened on shoe-string budgets in a world that didn't very much like the ideas they were proposing.

Though each of these community anchors launched with a sharp focus — an artistic vision or a particular target group — one of the things each shares is an expanding definition of who they are and who they serve.

Thinking about the 25th anniversary year for Buddies, founder Sky Gilbert says that one of the reasons the company is still around is because he isn't.

"Listen, things are more conser-

vative now," says Gilbert, citing times when Buddies hosted a female ejaculation pyjama party and an SM workshop. "Everything is less wild and crazy. They couldn't be doing some of the wild things we did and still get funding. City council was raising objections to some of the stuff we were doing."

But if Buddies is no longer hosting events that prove women can shoot as far as men, Gilbert insists that space Buddies inhabits is still vital.

"It's important that Buddies is there," he says. "As much as I love bars and bathhouses, it's nice to have something else."



When my friends and I — including my then girlfriend — started the company, we did it because we wanted something different, more avant-garde.... That's what the name is about. The name didn't originally refer to the gay community, although I did come out during Buddies' early years. It referred to artists who wanted something different. But I'm happy to say that I was able to help create something that has lasted."

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Continued on page 27

recting material relevant to gay the archives anniversary we're going through our side the context of a heterosexual