

A gay old time at new senior center

By DAVID SEIFMAN
City Hall Bureau Chief

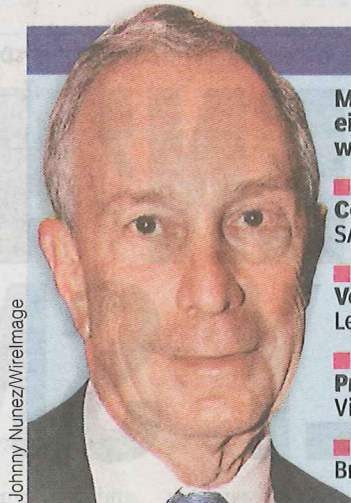
Coming out soon in Chelsea is the nation's first senior center geared exclusively to gay men and lesbians.

Three years after making a commitment in his State of the City address to revamp senior centers, Mayor Bloomberg announced yesterday that eight super centers would begin operations in January, including one catering to gay seniors.

"A lot of people never really felt it was going to happen," said Catherine Thurston, senior program director at SAGE, the city's leading service organization for elder gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

"People said they didn't expect to see this in their lifetimes."

Thurston said some



Johnny Nunez/WireImage

'Super' 8

Mayor Bloomberg yesterday unveiled plans for eight new super senior centers including some with these focuses:

■ **Gay and Lesbian Senior Center**

SAGE, Manhattan

■ **Senior Center for Vegetarians**

Lenox Hill, Manhattan

■ **Seniors with Vision Problems Center**

Visions, Manhattan

■ **Gardening and Nutrition**

Bronxworks, The Bronx

■ **High Tech and Nature Studies**

YM & YWHA, Manhattan

■ **Health Technology Self-help Ben Rosenthal Senior Center**

■ **Focus on Indian Immigrants**

SNAP, Queens

■ **Health and Fitness**

JCC of Staten Island

older gay people reported discomfort in traditional centers, where they felt they had to hide their sexual orientation.

Officials estimated that there are 100,000 LGBT seniors in the city. The SAGE center, which will operate out of its headquarters at 305 Seventh

Ave., plans to serve 130 meals a day.

Other centers are planning such varied offerings as vegetarian meals, programs for seniors from East Asia and services for the visually impaired.

There are also plans to teach seniors how to communicate online via Skype

and many wellness programs — all open to anyone 60 or over.

"This is how New York City will remain the most age-friendly city in the 21st century," Bloomberg boasted at a press conference inside the Jewish Community Center on Staten Island.

"We need to abandon the one-size-fits-all approach that has shaped our senior centers for the last 50 years and begin re-imagining them anew."

The first center for gay seniors will draw from all five boroughs.

The city is setting aside \$3.5 million to fund the super centers in their first year, supplemented by philanthropic donations.

From the looks of it, demand will be heavy.

Bloomberg said 1.3 million city residents are 60 or older and that age group is expected to increase by 46 percent over the next 25 years.

"Somebody who is born today, their survival rate is expected to be 105 years," said Deputy Mayor Linda Gibbs, drawing gasps from the Jewish-center audience. "So our world is changing."

david.seifman@nypost.com