

# OVER THE RAINBOW, BUT NOT OVER THE HILL

## Prime Timers Proves That Gray Is One of the Rainbow's Prettiest Colors

**W**e're quite the group," Harry Hartigan says simply. "We are quite the group." After that sentiment-in-stereo lingers in the air for a long moment, Hartigan seems to think on it, then speaks again.

"I'm clearly passionate about this," Hartigan, 61, observes, more by way of apologia than apology, "because when I joined this group 10 years ago, I was alone and isolated as a gay man."

The group to which Hartigan refers is the local chapter of Prime Timers, of which he is the secretary.

Hartigan notes, "The Prime Timers are defined as gay and bisexual men who are older and our younger admirers."

In fact, Hartigan serves a local post that is part of a worldwide confederation, with 60 chapters spread over North America, Europe, and Australia. The group's name is one that he takes seriously...and literally.

"We are in the prime time of our lives," Hartigan insists. "We're at the midpoint. It's like primitive TV. Along with that comes the quality of an individual or individuals. We really bring to the table a great deal of value and wisdom."

Hartigan adds with a wry laugh, "We've seen it all."

Yeah, OK, but who in the name of Adam Lambert are these "admirers"? In this Idol-worshipping culture of ours, do silver foxes really have fanciers of their own? Like, really for real?

"What I found is that there are a lot of men who actually want to be with someone older," Hartigan shares. "These are men who are educated, who have a better sense of themselves than we gay baby boomers did. They value things differently than we did."

This experience isn't just theoretical.

Hartigan relates, "The younger guys

I've met through the Prime Timers seem to be much more balanced, much more interested in developing relationships. They see the value of the older gay men. I think the game is out of it. There's not a lot of gaming going on."

It's gaming's opposite that the Prime Timers address by virtue of their very existence.

"One of our greatest concerns is that, as gay men age, they tend to isolate," Hartigan frets. "You go invisible. And part of that is our own doing, because we're less likely to be out in the standard venues for gay men. Most of your mature men are looking for different venues. Maybe it's a deeper quality of life. It's not so self-centered and so self-focused."

That happy blurring coagulates in the venues Prime Timers visit.

Hartigan points out, "A lot of our guys are into educational components, theater, music—you name it. The local Prime Timers are more into trying to get something deeper into their lives. I don't know if it's spiritual. I think it's just a quality of life that people are looking for."

Another member appreciates that quality of life in his own way: "I joined Prime Timers to meet people who had similar life goals. My membership in the Prime Timers pops up at the weirdest times. I'll see a fellow Prime Timer at a restaurant, and go over and say hello, and make new friends of whomever he's with. Being a Prime Timer means making a connection to the larger community—not just the gay community, but the Twin Cities community."

That connection is key...but what form that key takes can and does vary.

"It's amazing," Hartigan opines. "We see a certain group [of Prime Timers] that is out and active, and then there's a group that wants to be connected, but they may not ever attend an event. But they get the

newsletter. They stay connected that way."

Each member connects to the others in a singular way.

"Our members run the gamut," Hartigan recounts. "Some of our members are very closeted. They are desperately afraid that somebody will find out that they're a member of Prime Timers. We do offer those folks the anonymity of not being rostered. We never compromise what they need. Our hope is that we bring them out and more into a comfortable setting with people just like themselves. These guys need a place to connect. If we get five of these guys out to an event, we've succeeded. If we get two of these guys out to an event, we've succeeded. We've done something good."

Hartigan wonders if society's penchant for embracing youth isn't a resistance to one generation's implicit duty to mentor its successor.

As Hartigan muses, "I think we're afraid to embrace our actual age and what that represents, because along with age, there's a great responsibility—clearly, a greater responsibility—to the GLBT community. We've lived it. We've seen some things. We've got some valuable things to offer. We do what we can to support the local community. If someone were to come to us, and ask, 'Will you help us?' we'll always say, 'Sure, we'll help you.' We're very willing to do those things."

Put another way: They're quite the group—they are quite the group. ■

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