

Ross Valley Ecumenical Housing Association

Tam House Mission Statement

We are a non-profit organization providing high quality, affordable housing for independent, low-income seniors. We are focused on cooperative living, shared respect, and well-being within our homes and the larger community.

Our Story

In 1968 the non-profit Ecumenical Association for Housing (EAH) was formed to address the needs of lower income families and seniors living in Marin County. EAH encouraged regional groups to form with similar interests.

In 1974 members of the Social Concerns Committee of the First Presbyterian Church in San Anselmo decided to do something about affordable housing for seniors in the Ross Valley area of Marin County. Other churches in the area were invited to join, and on September 4, 1975 members from the First Presbyterian Church in San Anselmo, St John's Episcopal Church in Ross, and St Anselm's Catholic Church in San Anselmo met to discuss forming a new non-profit. In June 1977 the Ross Valley Rotary Club joined the other three founding organizations and the Ross Valley Ecumenical Housing Association (RVEHA) was incorporated.

RVEHA conducted a community workshop and San Francisco Theological Seminary (SFTS) students undertook a door to door survey of the Ross Valley to quantify the needs of seniors. They interviewed 120 Ross Valley residents over the age of 60. The survey was developed, and results compiled, by Sue Hedin, a sociology major at Sonoma State University. The survey found a need for suitable housing for senior of modest means. It also cited a desire for housing for small numbers of people to avoid the institutionalizing effect which often serves to isolate seniors from the community at large. Based on these findings combined with the need for cost effective, affordable housing, a shared house model was decided upon. Key elements included the privacy of a room along with the sociability of shared mealtime and common areas with fellow residents and with the surrounding community.

In March 1979, with a \$1500 grant from the Ross Valley Foundation of Greenbrae, RVEHA opened its first office at First Presbyterian with a telephone and answering machine. Norma Dougherty became the first paid staff person of RVEHA, as the part time Senior Services Coordinator at \$5 per hour for one hour a day. The services developed and offered from the office were:

- Information and referrals to community resources for seniors
- Meal delivery (food from Whistlestop) to seniors
- Transportation services for seniors without cars (before Whistlestop offered this service)

- POP (Parents Outreach Program), a small home repair service for seniors offered by the Ross Valley Rotary Club

Town Councilperson Peter Toal served on the RVEHA Board and established close contact with the San Anselmo Town Council. Public sentiment, the leadership of the Town Council and Alan Bruce, the Town Administrator, had each shown support of the efforts of RVEHA over a long period. In the late 1970's, when the Second Unit Ordinance was passed by the Town Council, RVEHA was asked to provide advice and information to help implement the Ordinance. RVEHA was designated to register second units and to advise on legalizing unregistered units and to keep them low in rent.

With the help of a realtor, Elizabeth Anderson, and alert Board members, several properties were considered desirable, but none were available. There were many conversations with the San Francisco Theological Seminary about developing intergenerational housing in a residence on campus or building on undeveloped land owned by the Seminary. In 1978, a committee formed with representatives from SFTS, RVEHA and the First Presbyterian Church to study integrating housing and services for seniors with an internship for seminary students interested in older adult ministry. Called the "Center for Creative Aging" they held a conference at which Loy Veal, a pastor with housing experience, told of possibilities of a joint venture. The intergenerational housing did not materialize, but shortly after a suitable house was finally acquired. On April 25, 1980, a home at 34 Tamalpais Ave was purchased from Darrell and Lola Eastman for \$192,000.

Meanwhile, in January 1978 a proposal had been submitted to Marin County's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and by July RVEHA received notice they would receive \$75,000 in each of the next three years for property acquisition and rehab purposes. The Marin Municipal Water District approved a variance for the water hook up and reduced the fee to \$1089. The previous owners had paid \$10,000 for termite work and RVEHA paid another \$5000. The county exempted RVEHA from property taxes. The Town of San Anselmo gave \$40,000 and the Marin Community Foundation granted \$166,200. Donations from individuals helped raise the balance of the amount needed for acquisition and refurbishing.

On July 19, 1980 RVEHA held a workshop attended by community members at the house. Organized by Howard Creighton and Michael Meeder, and led by Debbie Ward, the group of 25 made decisions regarding the renovation and operation of the newly named "Tam House" as a shared living home. The original minimal age was set at 60; it was later lowered to 55 and is now 63.

Plans for the renovation were prepared by Harold Wagstaff (Wagstaff and MacDonald) and were completed in January 1982. The only room unchanged was the living room. The home was enlarged to accommodate six bedrooms, two bathrooms upstairs. Downstairs was the living room, card room, guest room, dining room, kitchen, bathroom and the manager's suite. An area to the rear of the house was large enough for a second building and thus the Annex

comprised of four bedrooms, two baths, living room and kitchenette came to be. The Annex is connected to the kitchen / dining room in the main house by a large, covered deck. (At that time, if more than six unrelated people lived in one building, it would no longer qualify as a single-family residence, which would have required rezoning.) Neighbors on two adjoining streets were invited to look at the plans before renovation was begun. The builders selected by competitive bidding were Bjork and Powers. Groundbreaking took place on Sunday, March 28, 1982 and the building was completed in November 1982.

A seminary couple with a new baby (the Birds) moved into Tam House in November 1982 as the first live in-house managers. The first residents arrived in December and by the end of 1983, both the house and the Annex were full. Rent was \$350 a month. The costs of insurance and office staff were raised by donations and annual fundraisers.

A Board fundraiser became an annual event. Donor letters were sent twice a year and employers like Chevron and IBM were tapped for specific things. A van was purchased in January 1982, to be used for the residents and for other services RVEHA wished to provide to seniors in the community. After Norma Dougherty left in 1991, the van was sold, and services were pared down to providing rooms and meals for the residents.

A second renovation of Tam House was done in 1996, at which time the dining room was expanded and additional footage was added to the house. A total of 12 rooms were then available to rent. Jeff Kroot donated his architectural services and general contractor Blair Burke generously discounted his services.

In 2006 the Board embarked on a new project to add another home in San Anselmo. A suitable plot with dilapidated buildings was found on the corner of Woodland and Cedar. Jack Olive acquired the property and bridged the time needed until enough money was raised for RVEHA to purchase the property from Jack and build a new home. Jeff Kroot designed the building. Ground was broken in February 2007 and the first residents moved in in the fall of 2007. The total cost of \$1.6 million was financed by private donations and from grants from the Community Development Block Grant program and the Marin Community Foundation. Although some residents initially opposed the structure on the grounds of being too large, the Town Council saw the need for more affordable housing and approved the plan. As Tam 2 became a reality, public opposition dissipated, and a general sense of community admiration and support took hold.

In 2008, a \$600,000 project was initiated to remodel Tam 1: four new bathrooms were added, and the rest were updated. Fire sprinklers, new energy efficient doors and windows, heating and air conditioning systems were installed. The number of rooms was reduced from 12 to 11.

With a generous grant from the Tamalpais Pacific Foundation of Tiburon, the rear deck of Tam 1 was completely rebuilt and an accessible ramp installed in 2013. Over the years garden projects and repairs have been regularly performed by volunteers from the Ross Valley Rotary Club. St Nicholas Orthodox Church of San Anselmo, Drake High School students, local Boy and

Girl Scout organizations, the Marin Conservation Corp, and many other local individuals have also contributed their efforts. Support from First Presbyterian Church of San Anselmo has been steadfast since inception. While support of other founders has diminished over time, other community supporters have stepped up with donations of time and monetary gifts.

Since opening its doors in 1982, hundreds of seniors have called Tam House home. Today, 21 seniors reside in the two Tam Houses, each within easy walking distance of stores, the library, parks, and restaurants. Some continue to work part time and others volunteer their time in the community. Each resident enjoys delicious, healthy dinners served nightly. Our long time Chef, Martin Michel, has been planning menus, shopping and preparing meals for Tam House residents over two decades, always with a ready smile. Food is on hand for residents to prepare their own breakfasts. The combined room and board is offered for an average of \$1100 per month. Board Members oversee the operations, staff and house stewardship and continue to raise money to bridge the deficit between rental and expenditures. Our House Manager Sam Alexander monitors the well-being of the residents and takes care of day-to-day problem solving, repairs and administrative work needed to keep our organization afloat.

We are a happy and proud organization, serving a real need for affordable housing for independent seniors in the Ross Valley community. We hope we are an inspiration to other communities, as well!

To learn more about how you can apply to be a resident or make a donation to support our mission, please visit www.tamhouse.org. Thank you.

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