**Ross Valley Ecumenical Housing Association**

**Tam House Mission Statement**

We are a non-profit organization providing high quality, affordable housing for single seniors aged 62 and over. 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. They 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 find and determine the needs of seniors. They interviewed 120 Ross Valley residents over the age of 60. The survey was developed and results finalized 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 found a desire for housing for small numbers of people to avoid the institutionalizing effect which often serves to isolate seniors from the community as a whole. Because of this need, and to be cost effective and provide low rents, a shared house was decided upon which would provide the privacy of a room and the sociability of being with other residents in the common area 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 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

A Town Councilperson, Peter Toal, served on the RVEHA Board and close contact was maintained with the San Anselmo Town Council. Public sentiment and the leadership of the Town Council and Alan Bruce, the Town Administrator, had 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, a number of 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. The Town turned down a proposal to develop the Robson Harrington House into low income senior housing. 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.

In January, 1978 a proposal had been submitted to the 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 paid $10,000 for termite work and RVEHA paid $5000. The county exempted RVEHA from property tax. The Town of San Anselmo gave $40,000 and the Marin Community Foundation granted $166,200. Donations from individuals helped raise the total amount needed for acquisition and refurbishing.

On July 19. 1980 RVEHA held a workshop 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 congregate shared living home. The original minimal age was set at 60; it was later lowered to 55.

Plans for the renovation were done by Harold Wagstaff (Wagstaff and MacDonald) and were completed in January, 1982. The only room to stay intact was the living room. The home was enlarged to accommodate six bedrooms, two baths upstairs, with living room, card room, guest room, dining room, kitchen, bathroom and the manager’s suite downstairs. An area to the rear of the house was large enough for a second building with four bedrooms, two baths, living room and kitchenette, connected to the main house with a large deck and covered area to the dining room. (If more than six unrelated people lived in one building then it became more than a single family residence and would have to require rezoning.) Neighbors on two streets were invited to look at the plans before renovation was begun. The builders selected by competitive bidding were Bjork and Powers. Ground breaking took place on Sunday, March 28, 1982. The building was completed in November, 1982.

A seminary couple with a new baby (The Birds) moved to Tam House in November, 1982 as the first live in managers. The first residents arrived in December. Both houses were full a year later. Rent was $350 a month. The costs of insurance and office staff would need to be 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 just providing rooms and meals for the residents.

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

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 bought the property with his own money and held on to it until enough money was raised to purchase the property from him and build a new home. Jeff Kroot designed the building. Ground was broken in February, 2007 and the first residents moved in later in the fall. The total cost of $1.6 million was financed by private donations and from grants from the federal Housing and Urban Development Department and the Marin Community Foundation. Although many local 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. Public opposition has since switched to admiration and support.

In 2008, a $600,000 project was initiated to remodel Tam 1, adding four new bathrooms and remodeling the rest, installing new fire sprinklers and heating and air conditioning systems, and changing out to new energy efficient doors and windows. The number of rooms was reduced from 12 to 11.

In 2013 the back deck of Tam 1 was completely rebuilt, and over the years garden projects and repairs have been performed by the Ross Valley Rotary Club, St Nicholas Orthodox Church of San Anselmo, the local Boy and Girl Scout organizations, the Marin Conservation Corp, and many local individuals. Support from the initial four Church and civic groups has diminished over time, to be replaced by donations of time and money from other individuals and groups in the local community.

Since 1982, hundreds of seniors have called Tam House their home. Today, 21 seniors live in their own rooms within walking distance to stores, libraries, and restaurants. Some do part time work, and many volunteer their own time in the community. All receive delicious, healthy dinners nightly from our long time Chef, Martin Michel. Additional food is available for them to prepare their own breakfasts and lunches. And all for an average of $1100 per month. The eight volunteer Board Members continue to raise money to make up the yearly deficit between rent and expenditures. Our House Manager Sam Alexander monitors the well-being of the residents and takes care of the day to day problem solving, repairs and paper work needed to keep our organization afloat.

We are a happy and proud organization, hoping we can be an inspiration to other communities!