

Local Feature

Ed Jones, today at 70, taking time at a recent birthday party to look at a photo when he was in his mid-20s.



Meet Ed Jones

Local SAGE Founder Turns 70 Years Young

By Bill Hawkins

Ed Jones believes in giving back.

When he celebrated his milestone 70th birthday at a party last month, it wasn't to anyone's surprise that he didn't want any gifts for himself. In typical Jones style, he asked his party guests to support some of his favorite groups — like Senior Action In A Gay Environment (SAGE) and the MCC Sunshine Cathedral Foundation.

The event raised nearly \$3,000.

But it wasn't the first time Jones had asked others to help with a cause. Twenty-four years ago, he started a gay business group that continues today to build a network of gay professionals.

And seven years ago, Jones was among a handful of people who believed there was a need to have an organization advocating concerns of gay seniors. SAGE was born and continues to grow today with more than 400 members.

"The gay community has been so supportive of me in my own journey that I have always believed in giving back," said Jones.

A strong religious base has always been a part of Jones' life. He grew up in a small town outside of Pittsburgh where his father was a Methodist minister. Out of five children, three of them—including Ed — followed in their father's footsteps into the ministry.

For 19 years, Jones was a pastor of various churches in Ohio and also married and became a father of a daughter and a son.

But, there was something missing in his life and, in 1972, at age 41, Jones said he decided to "stop leading a double life."

He divorced his wife, left the ministry and accepted the fact that he was a gay man.

"I guess I had known it all my life, but the social pressures and other factors of the time led me in another direction," explained Jones.

In 1976, he decided to move to Fort Lauderdale and pursue a career in financial services. It's a job he loves and continues to enjoy working to this day with his clients.

"I have no plans to retire because I love what I am doing and I can do it out of my house so I can go at whatever pace I want," he said.

When he began his second life, Jones discovered that he wasn't meeting the kind of quality people he had hoped he would

when he moved to Florida so he founded, in 1977, the Gay and Lesbian Business Group. It's goal was to bring people together to share ideas and common concerns while also making it an opportunity to meet new people.

The group, with a new name of Business and Professional Group, continues to meet weekly.

"I was able to make some wonderful friends through that group and have always been happy that we were able to get it going," Jones said.

His religious base also led him to become in 1989 an active member of the MCC Sunshine Cathedral — serving the church in a number of capacities. He has led the adult growth classes of self-discovery and more recently has been a worship team leader. He's also helped with fund raising and special projects.

As senior citizen status began to impact Jones' life, he was one of a handful of people seven years ago who gathered to start a local chapter of SAGE.

"I had been involved with a seniors group at the Sunshine Cathedral, but we wanted to be able to expand it to a broader audience so SAGE was formed," explained Jones. He's served in almost every possible leadership capacity: president, vice president, social and education chairman and current newsletter chairman.

"SAGE has offered me an avenue to express my intent to give something back to the community that has given me so much," said Jones. "I have been so blessed by the gay community in this town that giving back whatever I can is my own personal reward."

Although a stroke a year ago may have slowed down Jones' walk a bit, it hasn't slowed his drive to help serve as a volunteer coordinator of many SAGE programs and get the monthly newsletter out to its 400-plus members.

"There are so many more opportunities today for gay men and women to meet people and come out in a more positive environment than what I experienced so many years ago," explained Jones. "SAGE is so fortunate to have so many dedicated volunteers who only have to be asked to help."

Jones isn't giving up on his own personal goal to continue to work in his career and also his volunteer work. He also looks forward to making more time to travel and spend with his companion of the past six years.

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RSVP: 561-691-5108 by November 1, 2001 Seating is limited.

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