

Friday, March 24, 2006

## Tennis Star Billie Jean King Signs on With S.F. Gay Retirement Community

**By Polly Summar**

*Journal Staff Writer*

Being gay and a sports legend is finally paying off, says Billie Jean King.

"For someone who lost all her endorsements within 24 hours of coming out, to actually be involved and get paid for it is mind boggling," King said.

King announced Thursday her role in a six-figure endorsement with RainbowVision Properties Inc., the developer of Santa Fe's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender retirement community on Rodeo Road.

But in a disappointment for her Santa Fe fans, King won't be appearing at the community's grand opening June 10 because of a scheduling conflict. Instead, singer Lesley Gore will perform at the " 'It's My Party' Party." Gore, a '60s teen idol, has said publicly she didn't know she was gay until she was in her 20s.

King's endorsement deal was announced at the same time RainbowVision disclosed it was building a second retirement community in Palm Springs, Calif. At both facilities, there will be a Billie Jean King Fitness Center & Spa, which King has helped plan. RainbowVision is looking toward building another six to 15 properties.

During the teleconference, King said she was ecstatic when she learned of RainbowVision's plans for an LGBT community but added, "What I didn't want to be is a spokesperson, but involved and committed." King said she would be making appearances at the retirement communities and that she set up the design of the tennis court in the Palm Springs plan.

King's involvement with RainbowVision coincides with a larger role she is assuming as a gay activist, including her role as ambassador for the Gay Games this summer in Chicago.

"It's important to reach athletes and other people who are gay or transgender," King said. "We need to be visible."

King also called upon male athletes to support their fellow gay athletes.

"Women don't have the hangups about this," she said. "The straight men have to come up and say, 'It's no big deal and everybody be quiet, and let's go win some games.'"

"In our (women's athletes) press conferences, we're always asked about our sexuality," King said, "but with men, they don't say a word. It should be a non-issue."

Along with her concern that members of the LGBT community have a place

to retire where they're comfortable, King stressed the feelings about retirement she shares with Joy Silver, the president/CEO of RainbowVision.

"We're on the same page about body, mind and spirit," King said. "People don't have to be alone when they get older. There will be somebody there to be with until the end. That's so reassuring."

Silver emphasized that the RainbowVision developments are not about retirement but transition.

"Nobody seems to be retiring," Silver said. "We want to maintain what we have as we move into the next 50 years."

Members of older generations, Silver said, didn't seek help until there was a crisis.

"With baby boomers, we're much more into enhancing our body, mind and spirit," she said. "We really want to celebrate life all the way to end."

That's why the RainbowVision communities will have amenities like a cabaret and a piano bar— "things that are traditional to our cultural," Silver said.

"Our communities are directed to the people who are going to live in the community," Silver said, as opposed to older generations where care was provided from the caretaker's point of view.

Silver said her idea for the RainbowVision community dates back to the violent Stonewall Riots in New York City, when police officers raided a gay bar called the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village.

"I took up the mantle to say it was time," Silver said. "When the drag queens fought back in New York, Judy Garland had just died and civil rights took a main step on the stage. Gay people had been guarding their past and protecting their present."

Silver said she chose Santa Fe as RainbowVision's first retirement community locations because it's known as the City Different and seemed the best place to begin: "a good and safe place."