

# The Dallas Morning News

## Cece Cox, one of Dallas' most influential LGBTQ leaders, announces her retirement

The head of Resource Center on leaving the nonprofit she transformed and the challenges facing her successor.



By **Sarah Hepola**

Staff Writer Feb. 25, 2026



Cece Cox, longtime CEO of Resource Center, has announced that she'll be retiring in early 2027.

Photo courtesy Resource Center; illustration by Jeff Meddaugh, staff

It's hard to imagine Dallas' Resource Center without Cece Cox, the beloved longtime CEO of one of the largest LGBTQ centers in the country. But Cox has announced she'll be retiring in early 2027, a date set far enough into the future that, throughout 2026, she can help oversee a national search for her successor.

"I'll be 65 next year, and this is a job that's 24-7," says Cox, proving the multitasking nature of her position by sneaking bites of lunch while she speaks to me. "I have high expectations of myself, but I feel very satisfied with what's been accomplished at Resource Center."

Resource Center started as a grassroots organization in 1983, during the AIDS crisis. When Cox came on board as associate executive director in 2007, the place had about 35 employees and a budget under \$5 million. Cox, who got her law degree at Southern Methodist University, became head of the nonprofit in 2010. In the almost 20 years she's been with the organization, the staff has grown to nearly 100 people and the budget has expanded to \$35 million. The center has 1,200 volunteers and serves more than 60,000 North Texans.

One of Cox's crowning achievements is Oak Lawn Place, an affordable housing complex opened in 2024 for LGBTQ seniors on a short stretch off Inwood Road. Cox spearheaded that \$31 million project, a five-story building filled with art and the kind of personal touches that make a place feel like home. The place is such a sunny counterpoint to the drab affordable housing stereotype that architecture critic Mark Lamster once called it his favorite new building in Dallas. It currently has an 18-month waiting period for one of the 84 units.

Across the street from Oak Lawn Place is another capstone for Cox, Resource Center Health, a 20,000-square-foot health care clinic and food pantry that opened in 2025 for the LGBTQ community.

"I really believe, based upon my own experiences and others', that the queer community is not being properly cared for," says Cox. "We've had bad experiences, or we're afraid of being discriminated against. Come to Resource Center as a queer

person, including being a trans person, and you'll be with medical professionals who understand what is required for your care. That's hard to find.”

Cox has a 27-year-old son, and she's married to Shelly Skeen, South-Central Regional Director for Lambda Legal, a national organization for LGBTQ civil rights and people living with HIV. As Cox sat in an upstairs meeting room inside the Resource Center Health building, she talked about the challenges of serving the LGBTQ community in a conservative state, the benefits of coming out in Dallas and what she plans to do in retirement.



Cece Cox speaks during a groundbreaking for Oak Lawn Place, an LGBTQ senior housing project in Dallas headed by Resource Center, on May 12, 2023.

Jason Janik / Special Contributor

During your tenure, there's been a lot of progress, like the advent of gay marriage, but more recently, we've seen pushback from Texas lawmakers, even over small things like removing rainbow sidewalks. How do you respond to that?

I'm at the age where I didn't lose 50 friends from the early days of the AIDS pandemic, but I did lose friends, and that history is where I start. I find comfort in knowing that this community can live through threatening, challenging times. I try to convey that in messages to staff. Whatever's awful right now is legit awful. Whatever feelings you have about it, they're legit feelings, but this is not the end of the world.

It is stressful, though. You don't know when funding is going to be cut, although that hasn't happened to us in a significant way. Arlington just overturned their anti-discrimination ordinance — on very questionable grounds, I might add. And Texas passed that "Death Star" law [House Bill 2127] that allows the state to challenge cities that offer more protection than the state does. Dallas has a nondiscrimination ordinance that includes LGBTQ people, and the state doesn't. I think red cities are under threat, but blue cities might be, too.

What are the challenges for your successor?

There's challenges in every business, but we have solid financials, a strong executive team, a great board and a supportive community. That said, I have a lot of relationships, so depending on what this person's background is, they may need to create connections that are brand new.

We're in a state that's challenging in terms of how it regards LGBTQ people. The bathroom bill went into effect in December, and that's threatening to individuals we serve. We can't provide health care to minors who are transgender. We would like to be able to help them, but we can't. So it's different from states that are more welcoming and inclusive. Oak Lawn Place has shown people the quality of work we can do. We'll need to continue to do high-quality work and raise the profile, because there are people we haven't reached yet that we need to serve.

You grew up in Oklahoma and didn't come out until your 20s, when you were living in Dallas. What role did the city play in your coming-out story?

It played a big part. I don't know if it would have happened differently in a different city, but I needed to feel part of a community. It took me five years to come out to my parents and brothers. We have a close family, but I was hiding, and I was afraid. So I needed to feel safe, and Dallas played a role in that. It was things as simple as, I could go to Hunkey's [an LGBTQ-friendly Oak Lawn burger joint], I could go to the Crossroads [the intersection of Cedar Springs and Throckmorton, the heart of the Dallas LGBTQ community]. It's important for queer people to have a neighborhood, and I value that about Dallas. Bill Nelson and Terry Tebedo, the founders of Resource Center, helped create a lot of that community. Their store, Crossroads Market, birthed what became Resource Center, because they knew it was the place where people gathered.



Dianna Grey, left, and Cece Cox hug as community members celebrate a groundbreaking for Oak Lawn Place, an LGBTQ senior housing project headed by Resource Center, on May 12, 2023.

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OK, low-stakes question. Tex-Mex or BBQ, and where?

BBQ! I don't have a spot, but I do love me some Terry Black's.

What are you most looking forward to in retirement?

Hanging out with my wife and son. Traveling. I have a ton of projects I keep saying, I'm gonna do that when I retire. One of them is archiving queer community history. I also want to tend to the giant planter in our backyard and learn to grow more things. I'm not gonna be a crazy gardening lady with a sun hat, but I'll do a little gardening. And yoga.