



Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays
 A joint publication of the Akron and Cleveland chapters

state meeting a great SUCCESS

By Ed Kancler, Akron chapter president

Congratulations to Cleveland PFLAG for hosting the very successful annual State PFLAG meeting in April. Over 40 members from across Ohio attended, including PFLAG chapters from Alliance, Cincinnati, Columbus, Dayton, and Youngstown, as well as Akron and Cleveland. Also in attendance were National PFLAG President John Cepek, National PFLAG Coordinator Brooke Smith, and Regional PFLAG Representative Debra Smith.

After a greeting from Cleveland PFLAG co-founder Jane Daroff, we were treated to a fast-paced program. Patrick Shepherd of the Cleveland International Film Festival spoke about LGBT films. Tami Brown from Positively Cleveland spoke about the really classy Cleveland LGBT Visitor's Guide and the important impact LGBT

tourism can have for the city. Brooke Smith, with much humor and prizes for those who knew the answers, reviewed the tangle of state and federal regulations that affect PFLAG chapters. John Cepek also spoke, and the participating chapters shared news of their activities.

However, the highlight of the meeting was guest speaker Mary Lou Wallner. Her story tragically began with her rejection of her lesbian daughter, who then alienated herself from Mary Lou and eventually committed suicide. This mother's pain over their separation and questions about why her daughter would take her own life led to much soul searching and research. Ultimately, Mary Lou's journey led her to develop relationships with LGBT people and reach out to them, transforming her attitude

from rejection to acceptance, and to the creation of TEACH Ministries to further the cause of equality.

In her own words: "Let us all remember that we are here to support one another as Jesus does us." Regardless of your religious beliefs, Mary Lou seeks to understand, support, educate, and advocate, just as we do at PFLAG. She and her husband, Bob, are remarkable people.

Again, kudos to Sharon Groh-Wargo and her exceptional Cleveland PFLAG crew who put the program together. Next year's state meeting will be held in Columbus. You should plan to attend.

This month's issue follows up on Equality Ohio's 4th Lobby Day and the introduction of House Bill 176 (see page 3). Thanks for all you do for equality.

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CHAPTER MEETINGS

Akron PFLAG

June 18, 7:00 pm
 N. Springfield
 Presbyterian Church
 671 N. Canton Rd.

Cleveland PFLAG

June 9, 7:30 pm
 Trinity Episcopal
 Cathedral
 2230 Euclid Ave., 44115

Alliance PFLAG

June 23, 7:00 pm
 Union Ave. Methodist
 Church
 S. Union Ave.

Wooster PFLAG

June 18, 7:00 pm
 Universalist Fellowship
 3186 Burbank Rd.
 Please call ahead to confirm.

Youngstown PFLAG

June 19, 3:00 pm
 Stonewall Comm. Ctr.
 1523 Poland Ave.

PFLAG lobbies LGBT rights in Columbus

By Quentin Jamieson, Cleveland chapter

May 13 was Lobby Day for Equality in Columbus. An annual one-day event hosted by Equality Ohio, Lobby Day invites ordinary people like you to flock to the state capitol and have conversations with our state legislators on issues facing LGBT and their families.

Armed with the power of poignant personal stories, citizens at Lobby Day shared with their senators and representatives a snapshot of the adversity the LGBT community faces in a society which deprives LGBT partners of the same protections it guarantees to heterosexual partners.

Equality Ohio's 4th annual Lobby Day boasted nearly 400 volunteer lobbyists, its largest showing, with people representing 100 percent of Ohio's Senate districts and over 70 percent of its House districts. The event was well-attended by several members of PFLAG Akron and PFLAG Cleveland, who proudly represented northeast Ohio's Senate



and House districts.

The main focus of this year's effort was promoting the Equal Housing and Employment Act (EHEA, HB 176) introduced on the House floor just one day prior to Lobby Day. Passing EHEA would prohibit discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations on the basis of not only sexual orientation but also gender identity/expression as an addition to the current list of

groups protected from discrimination in the State of Ohio (you can read the full bill as introduced here: http://www.legislature.state.oh.us/bills.cfm?ID=128_HB_176).

While versions of this legislation have been proposed for six years now, only in the last year has it gained bipartisan support. While bipartisan support continues in 2009, however weak, there are also 26 co-sponsors of this legislation, which includes over one-fourth of the entire Ohio House of Representatives.

However, the fight for passage of HB 176 is far from over. The opposition is very loud and very ill-informed. Follow-up meetings in-district with our state senators and representatives are planned for the rest of the year, and we must rally more supporters to lobby our legislators to support the EHEA and guarantee our loved ones a future free from discrimination at home and in the workplace.

Film *(Continued from page 2)*

sents the group at public functions, including this year's Cleveland Zoo Earth Day celebration. Most recently he spoke on the Domestic Partner Registry at a Cleveland Black Pride meeting.

The film approaches the subject of marriage equality, not as a political argument or theological debate, but as an invitation for the viewer to be open to the possibility of new understanding through the sharing of personal stories.

The chapter support meeting is at 7:30 p.m. at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, 2230 Euclid Ave., 44115. All are welcome.



Cleveland Pride Parade & Festival

Join the festivities and celebrate diversity and equality! The 21st annual Cleveland Pride Parade and Festival will be held June 20, 2009.

The parade marches at 1:00 p.m. from West 3rd St. and St. Clair Ave. to the festival grounds at Voinovich Park at the north end of East 9th St. Festival runs from 1:00-8:00 p.m.

Join PFLAG Cleveland's pre-

parade brunch at the Old Stone Church, 91 Public Square, from 10:30 a.m. to noon. Brunch is free and open to all of our allies.

Those marching with the Cleveland chapter will receive a complimentary t-shirt to wear in the parade.

For marching/festival info, contact www.clevelandpride.org or call 216-226-0004.

Tell Congress: We want safe schools!

Take action to help support a critical piece of legislation to protect our students.

HR 2262—The Safe Schools Improvement Act of 2009 would amend the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act to add definitions for bullying and harassment. It also includes two pre-existing requirements on reporting and the use of funding. The bill is fully inclusive and specifically lists sexual orientation and gender identity as protected categories.

It is also reflective of a new language that refers to “association with a person or group” which adds a layer of protection for children of LGBT parents.

The bill, introduced by Rep. Linda Sanchez (D-CA), would strengthen policy, encourage preven-

tion strategies and professional development, and require schools to maintain data on bullying. Creating safe schools benefits all students and is a critical goal we should all strive toward.

Please contact your US House representative and urge him or her to cosponsor this bill.

For contact information for your representative, visit: <http://www.house.gov/htbin/zipfind>.



Joe Solmonese

HRC President has speaking engagement in Cleveland

Part of the KeyBank Diversity Thought Leadership series

Joe Solmonese, president of the Human Rights Campaign, will speak at The City Club of Cleveland, 850 Euclid Avenue, on June 12 at noon.

This event is part of the KeyBank Diversity Thought Leadership series. Tickets are \$18 for Friday Forum members or \$30 for nonmembers. Call 216-621-0082.

As president of HRC, Solmonese has helped to make the organization a powerhouse both in Washington and nationally. He has been instrumental in enacting legislation to pro-

tect LGBT rights and launched several programs to help expand education and advocacy.

Before coming to HRC, Solmonese was CEO of Emily's List, a national effort to elect progressive women to office. He has also worked with corporate leaders in influential businesses, such as Microsoft, to take public stances for fairness. Over 86 percent of Fortune 500 companies now include sexual orientation in their non-discrimination policies and more than half offer same-sex benefits to their employees.

Plexus Network addresses managing in a down economy

The Plexus Network, the chamber of commerce for the LGBT community and its allies in the Cleveland area, will feature the topic “The Complexity of Managing a Nonprofit in a Down Economy” at its June 9 meeting.

Earl Pike, CEO of the AIDS Taskforce of Greater Cleveland, will speak on this topic at the Melt Bar and Grilled, 14718 Detroit Ave., Lakewood, at 6:00 p.m.

The taskforce is Cleveland's oldest and largest HIV/AIDS service, education and advocacy organization. It provides services to over 20,000 greater Clevelanders and has received numerous awards.

Pike is the author of *We are all Living with AIDS*, a book on AIDS policy for workplaces and social service agencies, and coauthor of *Case Studies in Ethics and HIV Research*, as well as numerous articles, video scripts, and training manuals. He has developed several AIDS initiatives, including programs specifically for prison inmates, the hearing impaired, and Native Americans.

Pike has served in a number of leadership positions in the Cleveland nonprofit and civic community, and was the recent recipient of the Cleveland Foundation's Homer Wadsworth Award for nonprofit leadership demonstrating “imagination, insight, compassion, courage and integrity.”

For information on this event, call 888-PLEXUS9 (753-9879) or visit www.thinkplexus.org.

Akron PFLAG awards scholarship

The PFLAG Akron chapter is pleased to announce that Jay Smith is the recipient of its University of Akron PFLAG/Harold Sylvester Scholarship Fund for the academic year 2008-2009.

Jay, a senior majoring in Hospitality Management, Ohio, is president of the University of Akron's LGBTU chapter and a Medina resident. (Medina was also the hometown of businessman Harold Sylvester, who left his estate upon his death to our chapter and allowed us to establish his scholarship fund.)

Jay is also a highly effective leader. As noted on page 4 of last month's newsletter, he initiated two resolutions before the University of Akron Student Senate concerning LGBT issues, leading to a more inclusive environment for students, staff and faculty.

Members of the PFLAG Akron chapter congratulate Jay as the ninth recipient of the PFLAG Harold Sylvester Scholarship fund since 2002. We wish you success Jay in reaching your goals!

Florida must honor second-parent adoptions

The Florida Court of Appeals has ruled that Florida must fully recognize adoptions granted to same-sex couples by other states, giving them the "same rights as any other adoptive parent in Florida."

The court based its decision on the Full Faith and Credit clause of the U.S. Constitution and a Florida statute requiring the state to honor adoptions from other states.

The court ruled that regardless of how an out-of-state adoption was viewed in terms of Florida's public policy, it could not refuse to give another state full faith and credit for its own laws. *The Advocate* reported that about half of U.S. states allow second-parent adoptions by same-sex couples.

According to a 365Gay news report, the case arose from a custody issue between two lesbians who each gave birth to a child and adopted the partner's child in Washington state. When the couple later separated in Florida, they shared

custody. However, recently one of the women cut off all contact between herself and her biological child and her former partner and the other child. The suit alleged that the children were deeply bonded as siblings and the separation was not in their best interest.

The National Center for Lesbian Rights represented the plaintiff who wanted to reestablish shared custody. A lower court did not recognize her second-parent adoption. The appeals reversal was hailed by one of her attorneys.

"This decision resolved an important constitutional issue and protected the legal bond between parent and their children," said Attorney John Blue in the 365Gay article. "[The ruling] ensures the permanence and stability of parent-child relationships across state lines."



Cleveland native wins PFLAG National scholarship

Kelsey DeForest is every parent's dream child — an excellent student, a political activist, and a social justice advocate for so many



causes that the list is too long to mention here. The fact that she is also a lesbian might make some parents cringe, but her mother, Donna, a member of PFLAG Cleveland, cannot stop beaming when speaking of her.

Kelsey is one of ten scholarship winners presented annually by PFLAG National. The essay that she submitted with her application chronicles her adolescent experiences in the "liberal" Shaker Heights school system from fifth grade through high school, where she felt the brunt of an insidious gay-bashing culture that is sometimes prevalent in those with a more liberal mindset. You can read her essay in its entirety on page 6 of this newsletter.

She has also worked as an intern with several programs that work with marginalized populations, including the LGBT Center of Cleveland's Metro Youth Outreach program and the Cleveland Rape Center.

Kelsey has also garnered the honor of being a Plain Dealer Senior Standout. You can read the article on her at www.cleveland.com/seniorstandouts.

Congratulations, Kelsey! And best wishes for a bright future.



An active voice against wisps of hate

By Kelsey DeForest

I was blessed to attend a relatively liberal, open high school. The majority of students were Democrats and political awareness and activism was encouraged. I settled in happily, but quickly learned that there was a quiet harassment going on all the time. Students would deface our GSA's announcement board and at the activity fair the GSA's stall would get heckled. Students who claimed to be liberal activists turned a blind eye and let "gay" slip into their speech as a synonym for "stupid." While I can see how lucky I was to attend a school where no one was bashed or directly harassed, trying to convince people that even in such small gestures they spewed hate and prejudice is much harder when they have convinced themselves they have open minds.

I worked to be an active voice against these wisps of hate that seeped into what on first glance was a liberal haven. I called out peers on their casual and incorrect usage of "gay." At activity fairs, I convinced other members of our GSA to try and ignore the harassment and remember the goals of creating equality and ending prejudice. For many of my peers, I was the first out lesbian they ever met. With that in mind, I tried to stay informed of LGBTQ issues and related legislation. Whenever LGBTQ rights were brought up in class, I was expected to talk and share a viewpoint others could not. I faced stereotypes and derision but tried to hold to the ideal of informing my peers.

The summer before my sophomore year I set out a plan to educate

myself further in LGBTQ issues. I interned with the Metro Youth Outreach program, a branch of Cleveland's LGBT Community Center. Two or three days a week I rode half an hour on the train and another half hour by bus to work with at-risk and homeless youths to establish job skills training programs, provide referrals to safe housing and raise community awareness of the link between LGBT issues and homelessness. I had never been aware of the link before that summer. I worked with teens my age or slightly older who had been kicked out of their homes or just couldn't face their parents anymore. I learned of how they were surviving and their goals for the future. When I returned to school, I made sure my peers were informed of this connection and the hopelessness it wrought in people our own age.

My experiences with Metro Youth Outreach shaped me as an LGBTQ activist and taught me the importance of seeking out new experiences to learn about social issues. While that summer was trying and startling, I faced a deeper struggle in my high school. In the liberal community I sprouted from, the constant clash against little prejudices proved to be a battle just as difficult as those fought in conservative, closed communities. When I spoke out against the defamation of our GSA's board or the common use of "gay" as a synonym for "stupid," my peers asked why I was making a fuss, said it didn't really matter or assured me of their liberal leanings. No one likes to see the shadows of hate within themselves, particularly when they

already consider themselves pure of intolerance. Coming out of those four years, I understand better how universal little prejudices are and the importance of ridding myself and my peers of them. I am now well equipped as an LGBTQ activist to face all types of people and inform them of gender issues and the importance of equality.

I was one of the lucky ones that got accepted to my dream school. In the fall I will attend Hollins University, a small women's college in Roanoke, Va. I plan to study gender and women's studies and political science. The GWS program is one of the few in the country that successfully balances feminist studies, masculinity studies and queer studies.

Having already done internships in youth programming and resource development with Cleveland area nonprofits, I am set up well to have internships in Washington, D.C., during the summer months throughout college. I look forward to learning more about nonprofit administration and lobbying by working with LGBTQ and women's right organizations.

These experiences will lend themselves well after graduation to my desired career in nonprofit management or lobbying for LGBTQ and women's rights on the state and national levels. I hope to one day run a major nonprofit that blends these interests, such as Advocates for Youth.

Within these organizations, I can work for state and national change in policy with regards [sic] to issues such as gay marriage, transgender rights and equality. I believe that by working outside of but in alliance with the government I can create the most change.

No one likes to see the shadows of hate within themselves, particularly when they already consider themselves pure of intolerance.

When you no longer need PFLAG, that's when PFLAG needs you!