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## Rallying for equality

### **There's a busy weekend of events for gays and their allies. Page XX**

By Robert Strauss

For The Inquirer

Craig Richie is well aware that gay marriage is the proverbial hot button these days, but as a gay teen, he has other concerns.

"Yes, that is clearly the advertised issue, the sort of mainstream for GLBT [Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender] people," said Richie. "But for gay teenagers, the main thing is that they should know to get involved now. Find out what your political or social issue is. Don't assume that people will do what you want them to."

Richie, a senior at Jenkintown High School and its first openly gay student body president, will be the moderator at the James Wheeler National Youth Panel, one of the signal events (at 1 p.m. Saturday at the Prince Music Theater) of the Equality Forum, the largest international GLBT gathering, which wraps up a week of activities this weekend. Organizers expect that 50,000 to 75,000 people, mostly from the Mid-Atlantic region, will be drawn to the events.

The Equality Forum is the brainchild of Philadelphia attorney Malcolm Lazin, the former head of the Pennsylvania Crime Commission. Lazin said he was moved to have a large and diverse gathering when he started the Equality Forum 17 years ago because he thought the gay activist movement had to change direction.

This year's big event is the National Equality Rally from 3 to 4:30 p.m. Sunday at Independence Hall. It is to unite old heads like Lazin, young people like Richie, and just plain friends of the GLBT community, according to Lazin.

"We feel this is a defining moment in time and place, a similar moment in time as the African American civil rights movement had in 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial," said Lazin. "We feel this is an iconic moment for the gay civil rights movement, and there is no better place than at the place where there are symbols of liberty at Independence Mall."

Lazin said the forum has a First Amendment permit to use the mall and there will be at least 100 groups either set up to show their thoughts or having representatives speak during the rally.

"It seemed that it was all about gay pride parades, but we needed a different paradigm," said Lazin. "I viewed it as more of a civil rights movement. We needed to talk more about issues and rights and the law, not just pride. We needed to be more like the African American civil rights movement, which had a whole range of concerns."

Lazin will be part of a panel called "Cutting-Edge Strategies and Real Results," which examines how people like him in the business, political and legal worlds have gotten gay rights issues before influential people.

Saturday night's schedule offers the big honoree event - the International Equality Dinner. San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom will get the International Role Model Award for his support on the gay marriage issue. The New York Times Co. has won the International Business Leadership Award, and Gov. Rendell will be the honorary dinner chair.

Lazin said the issue of same-sex marriage has brought the overall issue of gay civil rights to the fore in the last year.

"We don't want to just limit ourselves to same-sex marriage, though," he said. "For those coming this year, we want to use it as a reason to further all issues of discrimination and equal rights."

Sunday, too, will have the annual SundayOUT, what Lazin characterized as the largest GLBT street festival, along Market Street from Second to Fifth Street, adjacent to Independence Mall, from noon until 7 p.m. There will be more than 100 artisans and food and souvenir vendors, as well as live music, plus the artistic and culinary establishments along Market Street and elsewhere in Old City will be open.

There will also be no dearth of parties over the weekend.

Tonight, there is everything from a Shabbat Service at Congregation Rodeph Shalom, 615 N. Broad St., at 8 p.m., to the black-and-white dress Emerge Women's Party at Transit, Sixth and Spring Garden Streets, 9 p.m. to 3 a.m.

On Saturday, there is the BB"Q" from 5 to 8 p.m. on 13th Street between Walnut and Locust Streets, with outdoor grilling and Q102 DJ Richie Rich hosting. The main men's event Saturday night is a dance party, Liberation, from 10 p.m. to 3 a.m. at Pure, 1221 St. James St. The complementary women's event, the Hottest Lesbian in the USA Finals, will be at Sisters, 1320 Chancellor St., from 8:30 p.m. to 2 a.m.

Throughout all three days, there will be a variety of panels and films. Check the schedule at [www.equalityforum.com](http://www.equalityforum.com) or call 215-732-3378.

"What is unique about the forum is that we don't hold it in a convention center, but all over the city," said Lazin. "It is about our presence and our visibility and about our inviting in our straight allies. Civil rights movements go nowhere unless they are everywhere - and unless they are embraced by their allies."

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## Equality Forum Events

**8 tonight:** A Shabbat Service at Congregation Rodeph Shalom, 615 N. Broad St.

**8 tonight:** Voices of Equality Concert, Church of the Holy Trinity, 1904 Walnut St.

**9 tonight-3 a.m.:** The black-and-white dress Emerge Women's Party at Transit, Sixth and Spring Garden Streets.

**1-2:15 p.m. Saturday:** James Wheeler National Youth Panel, Prince Music Theater, 1412 Chestnut St.

**5-8 p.m. Saturday:** BB"Q", 13th Street between Walnut and Locust Streets.

**7-10 p.m. Saturday:** International Equality Dinner, National Constitution Center, Fifth and Arch Streets, \$200 per person.

**Noon-7 p.m. Sunday:** SundayOUT! Street Festival, Market Street between Second and Fifth Streets.

**3-4:30 p.m. Sunday:** National Equality Rally, Independence Hall, Fifth and Chestnut Streets.

**2:30-3:30 p.m. Sunday:** March for Equality on Independence Mall, starts at Fifth and Market Streets.

For a full schedule, tickets and information,

go to [www](http://www.equalityforum.com).

[equalityforum.com](http://www.equalityforum.com).

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