

Gay City NEWS

04/19/2007

Philadelphia Freedom

By: PAUL SCHINDLER

Equality Forum, a weeklong array of symposiums, panel discussions, speeches, and parties exploring and celebrating the LGBT civil rights struggle, in the U.S. and worldwide, will be held April 30 through May 6 in venues across Center City Philadelphia.

The gathering, produced by a non-profit organization of the same name, celebrates its 15th anniversary this year and organizers estimate that the nearly four-dozen separate events will enjoy a total attendance of roughly 75,000. Malcolm Lazin, a civic activist and philanthropist in Philadelphia, is the executive director of Equality Forum.



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The week is, by any standard, ambitious both in its scope and its seriousness of purpose. While pride celebrations in most cities typically revolve around parades, street fairs, and lavish parties, Equality Forum will host discussions of key LGBT agenda items, for the most part with nationally known leaders in the field under consideration.

A panel April 30 on black and urban issues will include, among others, H. Alexander Robinson, executive director of the National Black Justice Coalition, and Mark McLaurin, who heads up the New York State Black Gay Network. The politics forum, on May 3, will feature Marty Rouse, national field director of the Human Rights Campaign, who as head of MassEquality played a critical role in defending the Bay State's gay marriage court ruling against political attack, and Neil Giuliano, the former Tempe, Arizona, mayor who now leads the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, or GLAAD.

A panel on marriage May 4 will include Kevin Cathcart, Lambda Legal's executive director, Marc Solomon, the current leader of MassEquality, and Suzanne Goldberg, a Columbia University law professor who was a lead attorney in Lambda's successful challenge to Colorado's anti-gay Amendment 2 at the U.S. Supreme Court in 1996. The discussion of LGBT family issues on May 5 will feature Terry Boggis, who heads up the Center Kids program at the LGBT Community Center in New York, and Jenn Crisler, executive director of the Family Pride Coalition, which among many initiatives organizes the gay presence at the annual White House Easter Egg Roll.

Public conversations will be staged with writer Andrew Sullivan and with Dr. Renée Richards, the transsexual eye surgeon who won a landmark case in New York affirming her right to play tennis at the U.S. Open as a woman. Both events will be held May 6.

The week will also include parties as well as a rare choral event at the Kimmel Center on May 4, bringing together the New York City Gay Men's Chorus (pictured above), the Lollipop Guild of the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus, and Philadelphia's Anna Crusis Women's Chorus.

Lazin took pains to point out that the week's events are not ghettoized in the city's famed Gayborhood, but are visibly spread across Center City, which will be decked out in street banners.

The annual gathering is undoubtedly the major thrust of the Equality Forum's work, though the organization has also produced quality historical documentaries including: "Gay Pioneers" about pre-Stonewall activists including Washington's Frank Kameny and Philadelphia's Barbara Gittings; "JIM IN BOLD," an experimental film that juxtaposes the tragic suicide of a young gay man in rural Pennsylvania with the determined efforts of LGBT activists to reach youth across small-town North America, even if they have to travel to them by car; and Glenn Holsten and Brendan Fay's "Saint of 9/11," a 2006 film about gay Fire Chaplain Father Mychal Judge, who died at the Twin Towers.

Equality Forum last year launched a video/Internet project in connection with Gay History Month in October that profiled 31 LGBT leaders chosen by a panel of community leaders and academics. Installment two is promised for this October. As well, the group works on promoting workplace fairness in dialogue with Fortune 500 companies.

According to Lazin, all of this work is carried out with a budget of \$850,000.

For complete information on Equality Forum, at which the panels and talks are all free of charge, with admission fees for dinners, parties, and the choral concert, visit <http://www.equalityforum.com>.

A horizontal banner with a blue background. On the left, two women are smiling. The text "LESBIAN-FRIENDLY GETAWAYS" is in large, bold, orange and white letters. To the right of the text is a white sunburst icon containing a key and a house. Further right is the Orbitz logo in white on a dark blue background, with the tagline "AND GO!™". Below the logo, the text "Travel your way!" and the URL "orbitz.com/gaytravel" are displayed. A "Book Now" button with a right-pointing arrow is also present.

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