

feature

Lambda Archives – Heroes, Pioneers & Trailblazers

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The mission of the Lambda Archives of San Diego (LASD) is to collect, preserve, and teach the history of GLBT people in the San Diego and Northern Baja California region. Although most of the collections date to post-1970, there are original materials dating back to the 1930s. History is best served by the records and cultural artifacts of those people who are directly involved in its events. Lambda Archives (founded as the Lesbian and Gay Archives of San Diego) has dedicated itself to preserving and interpreting this important historical record.

Lambda Archives will honor its 2010 Heroes, Pioneers & Trailblazers at a fundraising and awards event on Friday, Feb. 26, at The San Diego LGBT Community Center at 6 p.m.

The event will include food and beverages from sponsoring restaurants and bars, entertainment, a raffle and live auction, along with the opportunity to meet some of San Diego's outstanding supporters of the GLBT community. Tickets are \$65 per person and can be purchased by visiting, www.lambdaarchives.org.

Following is a list of Lambda Archives 2010 Heroes, Pioneers & Trailblazers:



Toni Atkins

Toni Atkins, previous San Diego councilmember and politician

Toni Atkins moved to San Diego in 1985 and joined the staff of Womancare Health Center, where she served as Director of Clinic Services. Before taking office herself, Toni worked on the staff of then-Councilmember Christine Kehoe. Toni served two terms on the San Diego City Council, from 2000 to 2008, representing the City's Third City Council District. She was chosen by her council colleagues to serve as Deputy Mayor of the City of San Diego from July 25 to December 5, 2005, during a vacancy in the Mayor's Office.

As a councilmember, Toni was considered a leader in the areas of affordable housing, worker's rights, and neighborhood services and revitalization. She also helped push through the City's first inclusionary housing policy and led the Council to approve a Living Wage Ordinance. One of Toni's key accomplishments on behalf of the GLBT community was her work to persuade the City Council and the Mayor to add the City of San Diego to a friend-of-the-court brief in support of marriage equality in 2007.

Toni has received dozens of awards for her work both in and out of office, including the "Coastal Champion Award" by San Diego Coastkeeper; the "Historic Preservation Award" from the American Institute of Architects; and the San Diego Democratic Club's "Doug Scott Award for Political Action." In 2006, Toni received the Gay and Lesbian Leadership Award from the National Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund in honor of her leadership as San Diego's Deputy Mayor. Since leaving office, Toni has joined LeSar Development as a Senior Policy Analyst, where her focus is affordable housing



Frank Buttino

projects.

Frank Buttino, first publicly gay FBI agent, author and teacher

Frank Buttino was born in Canstota, NY and received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Colgate University. In 1969, he received an appointment as a Special Agent of the FBI from Director, J. Edgar Hoover. He was assigned to Tampa and Detroit, where he took part in investigations of the radical left and the Ku Klux Klan. In 1973, Frank was assigned to San Diego and was one of the first FBI agents selected for specialized training by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

Despite Frank's distinguished record and valued recognition by every FBI Director, he was fired by the FBI after learning that was gay. Frank filed a lawsuit charging the FBI with discriminating him based on his sexual orientation. In 1993, his federal class-action lawsuit began, and Attorney General Janet Reno issued a statement for the Department of Justice, prohibiting any agency within the Dept. of Justice from discriminating against any employee based on sexual orientation.

Frank has been featured on numerous TV shows including "60 Minutes," "Larry King Live," and "The Oprah Winfrey Show." He co-authored *A Special Agent: Gay and Inside the FBI* in 1993. The book chronicles Frank's life, his twenty-year FBI career, and his landmark civil rights case. Frank has spoken to numerous clubs, organizations, universities and corporations about his experiences in the FBI and issues of cultural diversity. Since 2001, he has been employed as a teacher and as a Business Community Liaison at the San Diego Job Corps Center.



Jeri Dilno

Jeri Dilno, lesbian political activist and first female executive director of The Center

Jeri Dilno is a San Diego native, but has lived all over the U.S. After leaving SDSU in 1958, she joined the Air Force following in her father's military footsteps. Sadly, Jeri received an Undesirable Discharge three days before her Date of Separation due to her sexual orientation, but with help from The Center's military counselor, her discharge was upgraded to Honorable.

Jeri began her GLBT activism while living in Philadelphia in 1970 and moved back to San Diego in 1975 where she has lived since. She helped organize San Diego's first gay Pride march and worked Pride for 30 years. Jeri was also the first female Executive Director of The Center (then called The Gay Center) and was also Assistant Editor and Editor of the Gay and Lesbian Times (Uptown Publications). In 1976 she held a seat on the statewide committee against Prop 6 (the Briggs Initiative), and also worked on the 1987 March on Washington. Jeri was one of six openly lesbian delegates from California at the 1977 International Women's Conference in Houston. She has also served as President of the



Judy "the Beauty" Forman

San Diego Democratic Club for four terms, has been an openly lesbian delegate to three National Democratic Conventions, and in 1994 served as Co-Chair of the LGBT Caucus of the California Democratic Party.

Jeri plans to continue to be an activist as long as she is able to add something to the struggle and hopes to encourage young people to keep the fires burning. Jeri is currently on the board of the San Diego Democratic Club and serves on the Balboa Park Committee. Jeri currently works for TRS Consultants as an editor, writer and visual analyst.

Judy “the Beauty” Forman, owner of The Big Kitchen, civil rights activist and philanthropist

After growing up on a small farm in upstate New York, and fulfilling a 10-year career as a social worker in Detroit, Judy “The Beauty” Forman moved to San Diego in 1978. She bought The Big Kitchen whose menu was created by many of her staff and friends. Additionally, many of the local artists, musicians and actors that lived in the area, including Whoop Goldberg, offered their services in exchange for meals.

A civil rights activist to the core, Judy has spent the last four decades fighting for rights across the board, including in the GLBT community. The Big Kitchen was very close to The Center’s original building and Judy worked hand-in-hand with numerous gay rights activists including Gary Reese and Albert Bell. The Big Kitchen also became a hub for the inception of many GLBT organizations, including Lambda Archives.

Judy was involved in Pride since the beginning, and led the parade twice, once as its Grand Marshall and once as a Friend of the Community. She also was on the forefront of adding The Art of Pride to the festival and founding the San Diego’s Finest Freedom Band, now the Hillcrest Wind Ensemble. She has also offered space, support and fundraisers for numerous GLBT organizations including the Frontrunners, the Women’s Chorus and the Gay Youth Alliance. And during the months when gay marriage was legalized, she married many GLBT couples at her restaurant. The self appointed “Mayor of Golden Hill” also helped organize the Golden Hill Community Development Corporation and was named Woman of the Year in 2005 for the 76th Assembly District.



Cheryl Houk

Cheryl Houk, former executive director of Stepping Stone and HIV/AIDS activist

Cheryl Houk served as the Executive Director of Stepping Stone of San Diego, Inc. (one of five GLBT specific recovery homes in California) for 17 years from 1989 to 2006. During that time she increased the agency’s annual funding from \$125,000 to \$2 million per year, increased the staffing from 3 to 27, added five new programs and two transitional living housing programs, raised \$2.6 million in a capital building campaign, oversaw the construction and completion of the new \$2.6 million state-of-the-art residential facility, and wrote several successful County proposals and foundation grant applications. The new residential facility completed in 2000 became a model facility in the State of California and won several awards for its design.

Ms. Houk also spearheaded the first efforts to successfully bring in





Mel Merrill

HIV/AIDS funding to Stepping Stone, which enabled the agency to provide improved services to GLBT people needing recovery from alcohol and drugs. She served on a number of committees, some of which include the HIV/AIDS Planning Council, the Joint HIV/AIDS Housing Committee, the Methamphetamine Strike Force, and the State of California Alcohol and Drug Programs LGBT Constituent Committee. Ms. Houk now resides in Palm Springs with her long-time partner of 25 years, Patty, and two small dogs, Addison and Sadie.

Mel Merrill, political activist for gay rights and philanthropist

Mel Merrill came to San Diego in 1960 out of graduate school and went to work for General Atomics designing nuclear reactors for utilities, research facilities and outer space. In 1979 he sought and (after a government hearing) received a Secret level security clearance as an openly gay man. He retired in 1986.

Having coming out around 1970, he first encountered the GLBT community in the men's rap groups at the Center's original site on B St. He became a long term supporter and donor to the Center and is proud to have his name on two rooms in their facilities. In 1980 he joined with 6 other community members to form a real estate partnership to buy the building that became the Center's second site on 30th St.

Most of his political activism has been based in the San Diego Democratic Club, which he joined in 1977. He served on the Board for many years and was involved in the pioneering campaigns for City Council of openly gay candidates Al Best (1979) and Neil Good (1987). The Club then worked on getting district elections, and redrawing the boundaries of District 3 to provide a district our community could win with Chris Kehoe in 1993.

He has also served on the Boards of USDEC (United San Diego Elections Committee) a bipartisan LGBT PAC, the SAGA ski club, and ran the phone hotline for the San Diego AIDS project. He continues to volunteer and donate to political campaigns, the Victory Fund and the Servicemen's Legal Defense Network. He currently volunteers at the San Diego Human Dignity Foundation where he chairs the Grants Committee.



Big Mike Phillips

Big Mike Phillips, bartender, GLBT activist and philanthropist

Big Mike was born in Germany, and after being adopted, moved to the US at age 5. Big Mike came to San Diego in 1989 to stay with his best friend, Tino, who was diagnosed with AIDS. Tino passed away only 3 months later, but made Big Mike promise to stay in San Diego for at least one year. Over 20 years later, Big Mike's still here.

Big Mike's first bartending job was at The Brass Rail, and for over two decades he has been serving drinks and helping to organize San Diego's GLBT community. He has Co-Founded numerous organizations including the Rob Benzon Foundation, Developing In





Sandra Ramirez

Gardening (DIG) for people with HIV and AIDS living in Africa, Tavern Guild of San Diego and Grocery Hearts for Mama's Kitchen. He also helped found the GSDBA Scholarship fund for GLBT Students. Big Mike has also been using his birthday as a fundraiser since 2000 and has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for many charities.

Big Mike has been the President of the Board of the Imperial Court de San Diego since 2007. He has also been a member of US Congressman Bob Filner's LGBT Advisory Board, past Mayor Dick Murphy's LGBT Advisory Board, and was co-organizer for the "Get Out the Vote" campaign for the GLBT community. Big Mike has been the recipient of numerous Nicky Awards from 1996 – 2005 and in 2005 was the Grand Marshall for the San Diego LGBT Pride Parade.

An avid photographer, Big Mike's photos have appeared in numerous local newspapers, magazines and books and he also maintains a weekly blog at Urban Mo's. Big Mike is currently a bartender at Jimmy Carter's Mexican Café.

Sandra Ramirez, Latina transgender activist

Sandra Ramirez, a native of Acapulco, has been in the United States for the past 14 years. As a male to female transgender, Sandra works tirelessly with the Latino transgender community in San Diego. She has worked closely with the former Binational AIDS Advocacy in San Diego, The Center's Latino Services Program, Bienestar and Christie's Place. Sandra has been awarded the Champion of Pride Award for her work with the Latino transgender community, and she has also been honored with the 2003 Angel Award from Christie's Place, and the 2005 Transgender Day of Empowerment Award.

Sandra works hard to educate our transgender community so that they know they are not alone. She has gathered and shared information about transgender legal rights, immigration and naturalization issues, safety, health care, HIV prevention and support, psychology, self esteem and more. She has facilitated a weekly transgender discussion group for the past six years, which is now part of The Center's Latino Services, and has been very instrumental in bringing education to the group.



Sharon Parker,

President's Award: Sharon Parker, Former Lambda Archives board president

Sharon first volunteered with Lambda Archives in 1991 and has served on the Board as both Secretary and Volunteer Coordinator, followed by ten years of service as President. After stepping down as President she stayed on the board in an advisory capacity for several more years. Today she remains a volunteer and advisor, as well as a resource on the history of the Archives itself! Over the years she has done outreach to college and community groups, created displays, assisted media – both GLBT and mainstream – with historical information, and conducted research.





The Gomez Family

In the 1980's, Sharon began her volunteerism in San Diego's LGBT community as a phone volunteer at The Center. She soon began volunteering extensively with San Diego AIDS Project, becoming an employee at AIDS Foundation San Diego until it closed in 1997. Sharon is a long-term volunteer with Pride, and was an 11-year volunteer with AIDS Walk San Diego. She was founding Co-President of the San Diego chapter of GLAAD, and also was secretary and Co-President for five years of

QUALCOMM Lambda Pride employee GLBT group.

She has also been involved as a volunteer for Activists in Drag fundraisers, Blood Sisters, Diversionary Theatre, Gay and Lesbian Times Editorial Board, Hillcrest Wind Ensemble, Labrys Productions, Names Project Memorial Quilt, Paradigm Women's Bookstore, San Diego Lesbian Press, San Diego Women's Chorus, Shirrtails Productions, Wall of Fame Committee, and the Women's History Museum. Among the many awards she has been honored to receive are: Brad Truax Award for AIDS service, Nicky Award for Community Service, United Way LGBT Leadership Award, San Diego Pride Community Service Award, and It Needed to Be Done honoree of Women's History Month from the Women's History Museum.

Youth Trailblazing Award: the Gomez family, transgender youth and his parents

Isaac Nicholas Gomez was born in San Diego, California. He is currently a sophomore in high school and has ambitious dreams to attend Columbia University in the City of New York. Besides his studies, Isaac usually spends his time playing soccer or with his family. His mother, Monica Nunez-Cham, and father , Arturo Gomez, arrived in San Diego 17 years ago with their children Alan and Montse. Originally from Guadalajara, Jalisco (the second largest city in Mexico) the Gomez family has kept the traditions of the Mexican culture along with new American influences.

Parents Monica and Arturo have emphasized the importance of family when raising their three children and have been able to keep a very intimate and personal connection with their extended family as well. Monica herself was the 7th child of ten, four of whom live in San Diego. Every Sunday all four sisters residing in San Diego have a reunion filled with delicious Mexican food followed by the infamous gossip at the dinner table.

Always being supported by his family, Isaac decided to become an activist as a transgender teen, spreading awareness and sharing his story. In addition to the full support of his parents, Isaac also has the support of his classmates in school, and that of the school itself.

Comments

Toni for Assembly? says:

Here's an editorial from GLT publisher Michael Portantino from 8/24/06.

<http://www.gaylesbiantimes.com/?id=8014&issue=974>

Feb 19, 2010 8:03 AM

Thanks says:

Thanks for pulling that one out of mothballs, and now she expects to get another pass and run for the assembly. Everyone, look at this editorial and refresh your memories.

Feb 20, 2010 1:54 PM

This story is now closed for comments. Commenting is available only on stories in the [current week's issue](#).

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