

GLBT Historical Society Celebrates Silver Anniversary

By Dennis McMillan

Published: November 4, 2010

The list of honored guests at the Oct. 28 gala for the GLBT Historical Society's 25th anniversary was impressive if not inspirational. Twenty-five outstanding LGBT citizens were present to represent the 25 years of the Historical Society.



Honored guests gathered to be photographed and celebrated. Photo by Rink.

Attending (in alphabetical order) were Roberta Achtenberg: pioneering attorney affiliated with the Lesbian Rights Project and the Bay Area Lawyers for Individual Freedom, cofounder of the National Center for Lesbian Rights, former SF Supervisor, and first openly GLBT person confirmed by the U.S. Senate to a senior federal position; Tom Ammiano: California Assemblyman, former San Francisco supervisor, pioneering openly gay educator, first openly gay member of the SF School Board, and a leader of the No on 6 (Prop 6 was against gay teachers) campaign; Ruth Brinker: founder of Project Open Hand; Harry Britt: former supervisor, author of SF domestic partners legislation, colleague of Harvey Milk, cofounder of the Harvey Milk LGBT Democratic Club, and a leader of the No on 6 campaign; Willie L. Brown: former mayor, former Speaker-California State Assembly, led efforts to pass the Consenting Adults Bill, and sponsored legislation to end sexual orientation-based discrimination and to obtain first state funding to fight HIV/AIDS; Cecilia Chung: chair of the SF Human Rights Commission and transgender community leader; Billy Curtis: director of UC Berkeley's Gender Equity Resource Center; Sean Dorsey: dancer, choreographer, and founder and director of Fresh Meat Productions - a transgender and queer organization for performance and media arts; Sally Miller Gearhart: feminist author and educator, member of the Council on Religion and the Homosexual, spokesperson for the No on 6 Campaign, and a colleague of Harvey Milk; Jewelle Gomez: author and activist, member of the SF Library Commission, and coauthor of the Combahee River Statement; Alice Hoagland: activist mother of Mark Bingham, the gay athlete and businessman who helped bring down Flight 93 in the 9/11 attacks; James C. Hormel and Michael P. Nguyen: activists and philanthropists (Hormel was the first openly GLBT person to become a U.S. ambassador); Cleve Jones: founder of the NAMES Project, cofounder of the SF AIDS Foundation, and a leader of the Harvey Milk for Supervisor and No on 6 campaigns; Audrey Joseph: legendary GLBT event promoter, including International Mr. Leather, record producer, and owner of Club Universe and other clubs; David R. Kessler: helped lead efforts to overturn the American Psychiatric Association's definition of homosexuality as a mental illness, and cofounder and first president of the Bay Area Physicians for Human Rights; Gerard Koskovich: founding member of the GLBT Historical Society and 25-year volunteer there, Queer Nation, and Bad Cop! No Donuts! activist, and GLBT public historian; Hoover Lee: pioneering member of the Association of Lesbian and Gay Asians and Gay Asian Pacific Alliance, recipient of Cable Car Award, Living Treasure (APDC), and Unsung Hero (Nat'l OCA) awards; Phyllis Lyon: cofounder of the Daughters of Bilitis, the first lesbian organization in the United States, and many other organizations, she and her late partner Del Martin were the first legally married same-sex couple in California; Ruth Mahaney: activist and pioneering GLBT educator, member of the Modern Times Bookstore Collective, and early leader of the GLBT Historical Society; Laura Rifkin: leading activist on disabled rights and for the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, cofounder in 1985 of the Wry Crips Theater Group, and current director of Fabled ASP: A Storytelling Project; Maggi Rubenstein: pioneering bisexual activist and therapist, cofounder of the San Francisco Bisexual Center, and early HIV/AIDS activist; Rick Stokes: founding president of Golden Gate Business Association, president of Council on Religion and the Homosexual; José Sarria: community leader and activist since the 1950s, founder of the Imperial Court System, America's first openly gay candidate for public office, and first Empress of the United States (retired); and Howard Wallace: union activist, leader of the Coors boycott, founder of many GLBT labor organizations, colleague of Harvey Milk, and a leader of the No on 6 campaign.

The gala's silent auction was unique in that many of the items up for bid were of historical value. These included framed pieces such as a signed postcard from Jose Sarria's run for SF board of supervisors (1961); a Daughters of Bilitis 1975 business card signed by Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon; a 1945 photograph of George Camparra in comic drag; and a postcard from Bulldog Baths (opened 1979 and closed in 1984) with two 1981 Gay Freedom Day commemorative tokens. There were framed posters galore, including a "No on 6"; an original "Harvey Milk for Assembly"; Fourth Annual Castro Street Fair, which was founded by Harvey Milk in 1974; Christopher Street Gay Liberation Day in New York City, June 27, 1971 mass march up 6th Avenue; and back to the old tea-dance days, a poster, "Circus 1," from the I-Beam in the Haight, a gay nightclub that opened in 1977 and closed in 1994.

The title of the gala was "Unmasked," and most everyone wore a personalized colorful mask to the event, or picked up one of the complimentary masks at the door. There was even an opportunity to have a mask painted on one's face. On two large video screens, slides of past events over the last 25 years were continuously shown.

Supervisor Bevan Dufty helped the Society get a space in the Castro for a new museum that will open in November. Walgreens is giving this site for the next five years. For almost eight years as a supervisor, Dufty's passion has been about creating a world class museum of LGBT history. "Because people come to San Francisco around the world, they want to know about Harvey Milk, Sylvester, Phyllis Lyon & Del Martin, The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, and so much of our history," he said. "Some other cities have lost their gay identity, so it is very important that a museum be situated in the Castro in order to be an anchor and have a sustainable community."

Assemblyman Tom Ammiano said he would like to see a permanent museum for LGBT history established one day, and that he is working with Sacramento on such a project.

"With a staff of only four, we are a very small organization," said GLBT Historical Society Executive Director Paul Boneberg. "But we succeed because we have over 100 volunteers that make this organization work - from the museum professionals to the architects donating their time to the fundraisers, and all the volunteers who helped staff our exhibit last year, seven days a week." He called the volunteers "the lifeblood that make the organization function."

Boneberg said of the 25 honorees: "They say 'yes' when the community asks. They said 'yes' as individuals; 'yes' to organizations; to be candidates; founding and leading organizations; and helping to create the queer community that we live in today." He then asked all 25 honorees to gather together for one, big group photo.