



# OPEN DOORS

The Newsletter of the Northern Illinois PFLAG Chapters

## President's Column

### Do Your Loved-ones See Their Reflection?

"When someone with the authority of a teacher describes the world and you're not in it, there's a moment of disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing." - Adrienne Rich. It is a haunting quote that I have thought about often since attending the recent Illinois PTA leadership conference. The thought of a child struggling with the ability to envision a world in which they belong is a profoundly sad image. Consider how isolating it must be to know one of your core identities is not visibly present in the world around you.

It is commonly recognized that healthy self-esteem is an important part of human growth and development and key to any of us being the best version of ourselves that we can be... Accordingly, we do our best to provide positive recognition and affirmation to our loved-ones. But, sometimes the more difficult part of being affirming is to truly understand the depth of the identities that we are trying to affirm. People are complex. We are like snowflakes. No two are identical. We are a compilation of a multitude of identities. To complicate things more, some of our identities may change over time. My identity as a father did not exist for me in my younger years.

All too often we make assumptions about the identities of others based upon our own views of the world. So, instead of providing affirmation, we can unintentionally be doing just the opposite.

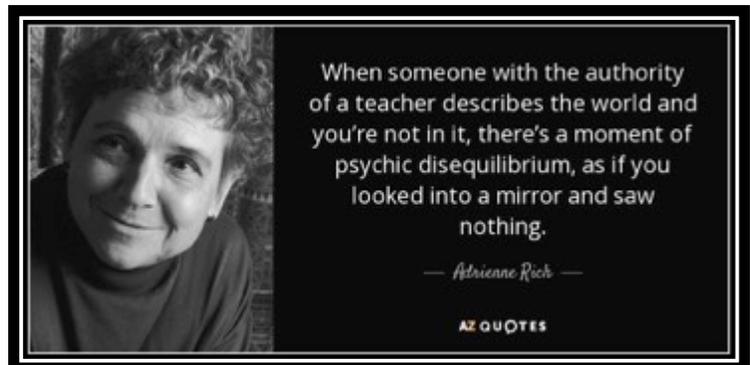
William Shakespeare's *As You Like It* begins with the line: "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players;" - In the world, we are all playing the roles we are cast to play. And our world is full of directors letting us know when we are not properly in character. There are plenty of directors in our lives... Directors in the form of parents and teachers, siblings and classmates, counselors and doctors, even TV programs and magazines... all telling us what we ought to think, how we ought to dress or present, what we should play with and so on. It is well intended, but potentially damaging

An important part of raising healthy children is providing them a view of the world and the future in which they can see themselves succeed and flourish. Some food for thought that I have found useful includes: challenging our assumptions and allowing children to be who they are without judgment; actively listening with the intent to understand; carefully considering the stories we tell and the people we highlight as heroes; selecting a broader array of books or movies to highlight a variety of affirming positive role models...

I am always interested in new ways to help create inclusive and engaging environments at home, at work, in schools and in the community. It only takes just one person to start a cultural change. Let's make a positive difference wherever we go.

In love and solidarity,

*John*



PFLAG is a non-profit, tax-exempt, all volunteer, local community-based organization of parents, relatives and friends of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons. PFLAG is not affiliated with any ethnic, religious, economic or political group.

OPEN DOORS is a publication of the Northern Illinois PFLAG chapters. Articles that appear do not necessarily reflect the opinions of PFLAG, its Board of Directors or members. We reserve the right to edit any submissions. Priority is given to original work by the membership.

**Send submissions, comments and photos to:**

OPEN DOORS Editor  
og4equality@gmail.com

**EDITORIAL BOARD**

**Editor-in-Chief:**

Maureen Goldin

**Newsletter Team:**

Arlene Collins and

Jackie Frett

**Website Guru:** Bonnie Clemens

[www.pflagillinois.org](http://www.pflagillinois.org)  
[www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)

Be sure to like  
PFLAG Council of Northern IL  
on

facebook

## PFLAG remembers John Cepak

*The Cepek's were the first families that I met when I walked in the PFLAG door for the first time. That was important, from that day forward, I learned what it meant to be involved in the PFLAG community and for the fight for equality for LGBTQ communities. John was especially important because he modeled to me what it meant to be engaged in equality. But more importantly, he taught me how to have fun with it. His humor, sarcasm and good nature taught me that this effort was enjoyable and life fulfilling. I incorporate what he says in my work as an ally for LGBTQ communities. I remember when he testified before the Illinois House committee on gay marriage, he said "I am no one special. I am just here to get marriage equality for my son." I use that term "no one special" because it helps me communicate to others that you don't have to have special abilities, special convictions, special values, special speeches to fight for LGBTQ equality. You can be just be you. And we need all sorts of "you's" to demonstrate that LGBTQ equality affects everyone and everyone benefits from equality. John's compliments of me kept my passion going. Getting recognition from John Cepek, especially because of his involvement, experience, and dedication to the LGBTQ Equality effort meant more to me than any other compliment. Getting a compliment from John Cepek is in my opinion similar to getting an award.*

*Together with Char Cepek, I had a vision about how to move forward in becoming an ally to LGBTQ communities. Much of my career work and research in developing programs and research on how heterosexuals can become allies to LGBTQ communities started with the Cepek's and my conversations with them at PFLAG meetings. It can be fairly said that the Cepek's were a cornerstone to my career in LGBTQ issues.*

*I will miss John and his leadership. I will miss the dynamic pairing of John and Char Cepek. LGBTQ equality lost a major leader. He will be hard to replace. My thoughts are with the Cepek family.*

*Peter Ji, Ph.D.*

*I don't remember when I first met John, but it's been a long time. I always remember what a great sense of humor he had. Both he and Char were youth advisors for Prism, a youth drop in center sponsored by the Oak Park Area Lesbian and Gay Association. They attended our Oak Park PFLAG meetings sometimes, and I recall they were at one of our potlucks. I had brought a tray of sushi with lots and lots of ginger. Not many people wanted any ginger, except John. I recall John loved it and ate it all! He was a good president for PFLAG National, and initiated the Straight for Equality program*

*Nancy Johnson*  
Oak Park PFLAG

*My first introduction to John was in July of 2001 when he & Char attended our first Oak Park PFLAG meeting. He talked to us about what PFLAG is & how it works. They were active members of the Hinsdale chapter at the time & were very supportive of our fledgling chapter in the following months. I got to know him much better over the years when we were both members of the Northern Illinois Council. He was always full of good ideas & good humor, a natural arbitrator & conciliator which skills were often needed in the Council at that time. I was proud & pleased to see him made national president at a later date.*

*Sylvia*

*The Cepeks were at the first Hinsdale PFLAG meeting I attended. I was so impressed how interested he was in hearing my story. He listened intently and encouraged me to keep coming and keep talking. It meant so much to me to have him there. The other memory that I have of John is how he passionately encouraged everyone of us to become allies and advocates for our children, and for that matter, all individuals that are part of the LGBTQ community. John didn't just "talk the talk" he "walked the walk" day in and day out. He used to say that we must not sit idly by; we must get out there and make a difference. John Cepek is a man who made an immense difference in my life and the lives of so many of us. His passing has left me deeply saddened, but grateful that I had a chance to know him even a little bit.*

*Peggy Howarth*  
Hinsdale Chapter

# what's happening

## in Our Chapters?

### HINSDALE CHAPTER

By Barb Medley

At our April meeting, we were pleased to meet Brian Johnson, CEO of Equality Illinois, who spoke about the issues in which the organization is presently engaged. Currently in Illinois, major LGBTQ concerns include: Education – Students are not being treated equally in K-12 schools. LGBTQ history has been erased from History education. Health care – Access is a problem, especially in rural areas. People drive several hours to Howard Brown for care. Justice – Equality Illinois is finalizing a new strategic plan, which will include adding a community advisory group, starting a grant program to help educational groups across the state, increasing general outreach, and launching an ambitious legislative agenda.

Brian talked about what we can do – Respond to “action alerts” by contacting our legislative representatives; get on Equality Illinois’ list-serv; and knock on doors to raise awareness and solicit support. He recommended the podcast “Making Gay History,” hosted by Eric Marcus. It is a series of rare interviews with LGBTQ champions, heroes and witnesses to history.

Brian was very engaging and is a wonderful storyteller. He grew up in a conservative family with a father in the military, but has been accepted unconditionally. He talked about how we’re all feeling right now in this current political climate and broke it down to something beautiful and yet very simple - When you’re confronted with the opportunity to choose between love and rigid beliefs, choose love.

Our May speaker will be Michael Bauer, who will talk about “LGBT Activism from the Age of AIDS to the Age of Trump – How to Cope and How to Persevere.” He has been active in the Jewish, LGBT and women’s communities through a variety of political and charitable organizations and activities at federal, state and local levels.



### Deerfield CHAPTER

By Janet Svatos/Sue Ginsburg

We were so fortunate to welcome Carolyn Wahlskog, MSW, LSW, to our meeting this month. She was a wealth of information and we wished we had more time to hear of all the amazing programs that she oversees at Youth Outlook and 360 Youth Services. Youth Outlook is the only non-profit in the western suburbs solely dedicated to working with LGBTQ youth. Their programming includes drop-in centers, youth leadership opportunities, “Transcend” offers a safe space for transgender and gender expansive youth ages 14-20, HIV prevention programs, parenting groups, and community education! If that wasn’t enough work for one person, Carolyn also works at 360 Youth Services, also in the western suburbs, which provides transitional housing for LGBTQ youth, substance abuse prevention, mentoring, and tutoring. The name change process and support is available through Transformative Justice Law Project. They will be launching the North Suburban Community Network, whose focus is to promote inclusivity in the north suburbs. Carolyn provided us with opportunities to volunteer as well. My favorite part was the bag of children’s books that Carolyn brought for us to see! You can contact Carolyn at [carolyn.wahlskog@youth-outlook.org](mailto:carolyn.wahlskog@youth-outlook.org)

<http://youth-outlook.org/>

I was in contact with Vicki Martin, who is the leader of Girl Scout Troop #41322 in Bannockburn. Her 8th grade girls wanted to respond to the crisis of homelessness, especially for LGBTQ youth. Vicki contacted PFLAG to get an idea of where their efforts could best be used. I connected them with Night Ministry and the girls proceeded to plan several fund raising activities to raise money in order to purchase a duffel bag and fill it with non-perishable food, warm socks and toiletries. They filled 50 bags!!!! PFLAG Deerfield would like to recognize and commend these thoughtful and caring young women in their desire to help those in the most need! Congratulations!!! (Vicki Martin is also the founder of [throwlikeagirl.com](http://throwlikeagirl.com).)

## McHenry CHAPTER

By Cate Becker

We welcomed five new people to our April meeting. We had two new parents, one parent with a young adult, and one new adult. After our usual introductions and announcements we gave new people a chance to break off into smaller groups to talk in a more personal setting with an experienced PFLAG member.

The rest of the group watched the video "Out in the Silence: Love, Hate and a Quest for Change in Small Town America," a documentary film by Joe Wilson & Dean Hamer.

Although "Out in the Silence" was released in 2009, some of us had never seen it. It tells the story of Joe, whose wedding announcement causes a controversy in his former hometown's newspaper. A mother who lives in the town with her gay son writes to Joe for advice. Her son left the local high school because of the bullying he experienced there. Joe goes back to his small hometown with his husband to find out what's going on. He mentors the young man while he is there and forms a friendship with a conservative minister. I thought the story was very moving and well worth watching.



## Oak Park CHAPTER

By Nancy Johnson

Our speaker this month was Mike Ziri, Director of Public Policy for Equality Illinois. (see attached photo) There are several items that need our support now:

1. End the Panic Defense. SB1761 would prohibit defense attorneys use of "I did it because I was so horrified by that LGBTQ person!"
2. Modernize State Vital Records. HB 1785 allows changing one's gender marker on a birth certificate with a "medical treatment" letter rather than requiring surgery.
3. LGBTQ Public Service Bill. SB 1670 allows individuals to self-identify as LGBTQ when they apply for a (non-elective) seat on a State board or commission. This will give a way to see if diversity on a board or commission includes LGBTQ diversity.

And those we should oppose now:

1. SB 64. Would allow discrimination against same-sex couples and single parents.
2. HB 664. A bathroom bill prohibiting transgender and gender non-conforming students from using the school facility that matches their gender identity.



If you haven't had Mike speak to your chapter yet, here's how to contact him: Mike Ziri at [mziri@equi.org](mailto:mziri@equi.org).

For our May meeting, our speaker will be a representative from Dignity Chicago, which is an organization of LGBT Catholics.

There will be no meeting in June, as that is Pride Day!

In July, we have invited Owen Daniel-McCarter, from the Illinois Safe Schools Alliance to speak.

June 4 - Day in Our Village

June 24 - Helping OPALGA with their Donut Days

June 25 - Pride Day

July 4 - Parade

July 22 - Bake Sale at the Farmers Market

On April 18, I attended a panel discussion in Berwyn at The Children's School

(<http://www.thechildrensschool.info/>), which is an independent K-8 grade school. I took some of our PFLAG fliers to give out. They recently approved a set of Gender

Diversity Guidelines, and wanted to give the parents, and community a chance to learn more about supporting gender diverse students. The panelists were:

Allison Boutet (She/Her/Hers), principal of Heritage Middle School in Berwyn South School District 100 in Berwyn, Illinois. Her school has had diversity guidelines for several years.

Nat Duran (They/Them/Theirs), Youth Engagement Manager for the Illinois Safe Schools Alliance.

Bonn Wade, LCSW (They/Them/Theirs), a clinical consultant, trainer, and psychotherapist practicing out of Beverly Therapists on Chicago's far south side.

The panel was quite interesting, especially Allison's recounting of the support give one of the 8th graders at her school was entering a different school for high school. People asked all sorts of questions. One issue was brought up by a social worker who said that the theory of gender identity development taught to her in school was all out of date! And she wondered if new texts were keeping up with the new understandings of gender identity.

I was gratified to see approximately 40-50 people in the audience, and everyone seemed interested in the discussion. To see community members, social workers and parents all united to learn better how to raise and nurture gender-nonconforming children reminds me that there are GOOD THINGS going on the world! And we can be part of those good things.

So PFLAGers, pat yourself on the back, we're still some of the best good guys around!



## Downers Grove CHAPTER

By Gloria

Our April meeting featured one of our own members, Eli, who shared his own heartfelt story. Eli is a transgender male, and he was brave and courageous in opening up his life story for the group. Thank you Eli! Our next meeting will be Wednesday, May 10 at 7 p.m., First Congregational UCC, 1047 Curtiss St. in Downers Grove.

## Tinley Park CHAPTER

By Deborah Medina

PFLAG Tinley Park continues to welcome new faces each month along with our regular attendees. We were fortunate to participate in the Discover Tinley expo in April, a yearly event that showcases Tinley Park businesses, churches, non-profit organizations, community groups, etc. We met some wonderful people and hope to see them at future meetings. One of our members, Donna Matul will be giving "Kisses from Mom" at the PFLAG annual event in May. Our June meeting will feature guest speaker, Cordaro Dont'e Santiago. He is the author of *I will never be #1 in His Life: The Story of Dating Downlow Men (Volume 1)*. The book is based on Cordaro's own experiences: "I have been through SO much in my life, and these events shaped who I am today. I know there are young boys, teenagers, young men - out there who have been, and are going through some of the same things I have been through." Everyone is welcome to join us on Sunday, June 11 at 2 pm to hear Mr. Santiago and share in light refreshments.



## PTI Chicago CHAPTER

By Arlene Collins

On April 13, Diane Chen, Ph.D. and her associate Afiya Sajwani, were welcomed to our meeting. Diane is a Medical Psychologist, Division of Adolescent Medicine at Ann & Robert Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago. Diane spoke briefly about the 2 research studies that she is leading at Lurie Children's related to transgender youth, as well as the larger study of medical interventions for trans youth that Lurie's clinic is involved in. PTI members and their children, as well as other transgender, trans\*, non-binary, gender fluid or genderqueer adolescents are invited to participate if they are interested. Please contact Diane Chen, Ph.D, at [DiChen@luriechildrens.org](mailto:DiChen@luriechildrens.org).

Diane then spoke about depression and suicidal ideation in transgender/gender diverse youth. After sharing with us the signs/symptoms that parents should look for that may suggest the need for further intervention, she opened it up for questions and comments and much discussion. I would like to thank Diane Chen and all the staff at Lurie for their work towards helping our kids with

resources and a space for them to meet other kids.

The remainder of the meeting was open to our members to share concerns and discuss issues and events in their lives concerning their children. We also talked about Pride



### CELEBRATION OF THE LIFE OF JOHN CEPAK

Friday, May 12  
4PM

UIC Student Center – Cardinal Room  
750 S. Halsted, Chicago, IL  
(Parking is available across the street)

John's life will be celebrated in this gathering of family and friends. John had a great love for UIC from which he retired after over 30 years there, and he had a great love for PFLAG, having served as PFLAG's National President and a member of the Northern Illinois Council. John and his wife, Char belonged to the Hinsdale chapter of PFLAG. Rev. Thom Parrot-Sheffer, a Hinsdale member, will be performing the clergy portion of the memorial.

Past PFLAG Executive Director, Jody Huckaby, and current Interim Executive Director, Beth Kohm, will be there. We're hoping for a good showing from our local chapters. **We've got to stand together to honor a family who did so much for PFLAG and for the cause of equality and justice for our LGBT loved ones.**

For the purposes of setting up the room and ordering food and beverages, **we're asking for an RSVP.** Please e-mail me ([twweaver@earthlink.net](mailto:twweaver@earthlink.net)) if you're coming, and I'll pass it along to the folks at UIC who are doing all of the legwork for this.

**Please pass this along to your chapter members!**

This is not going to be a mournful gathering; no way would John want that! He was one of the happiest and uplifting individuals I've ever known, dressed in his flamboyant Hawaiian shirts! I have it on good authority that pizza and Czech beer are going to be on the menu...

Volunteers Still Needed!

### PFLAG Gives Away "Kisses

# XoXO

Your participation in PFLAG's annual "Kisses from Mom" event is needed. Each year on Mother's Day, we hand out kisses (both chocolate and real) in exchange for donations to PFLAG. And, this year is no exception!

We will once again be gathering in front of Sidetrack, located at 3349 N Halsted St, Chicago, on Mothers' Day, Sunday, May 14<sup>th</sup>.

**Volunteers are still needed for the 7:00 – 9:00 P.M. shift.**

Please join us by e-mailing Coordinator Marcia Prichason:

[mprichas@gmail.com](mailto:mprichas@gmail.com)

- State how many people will be volunteering in your group
- Give **your** e-mail address and your phone number
- Indicate what Chapter you represent

You will receive a confirmation AND you will have an amazing experience.

It will truly be a magnificent Mother's Day!



**PFLAG Aurora/Fox Valley**

Meetings held 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday – 2 pm  
 New England Congregational Church  
 406 W Galena Blvd, Aurora 60506  
 pflagaurorafoxvalley@pflagillinois.com

**PFLAG Metro Chicago**

Meetings held 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday – 2 pm  
 Center on Halsted (Senior Room)  
 3656 N Halsted, Chicago 60613  
 pflagchicagometro@pflagillinois

**PFLAG Deerfield**

Meetings held 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday – 7:15 pm  
 Congregation BJBE  
 1201 Lake Cook Rd, Deerfield 60015  
 pflagdeerfield@pflagillinois.org

**PFLAG/PTI Sycamore**

Meetings held LAST Tuesday – 7 pm  
 Federated Church of Sycamore  
 612 W State St  
 Sycamore, IL 60178  
 pflagdekalbcounty@pflagillinois.org

**PFLAG DuPage**

Meetings held 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday – 2 pm  
 St Paul Lutheran Church  
 515 S Wheaton Ave, Wheaton 60187  
 pflagdupage@yahoo.com  
 www.pflagdupage.org

**PFLAG Tinley Park**

Meetings held 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday – 2-4 pm  
 Zion Lutheran Church  
 17100 69<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
 Tinley Park, IL 60477

**PFLAG Downers Grove**

Meetings held 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday – 7p.m.  
 First Congregational UCC  
 1047 Curtiss  
 Downers Grove, IL 60515  
 www.pflag.wixsite.com/pflagdg  
 pflagdg@gmail.com

**PFLAG Hinsdale**

Meetings held 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday – 2 pm  
 Unitarian Church Hinsdale  
 11 W Maple, Hinsdale 60521  
 pflaghinsdale@pflagillinois

**PFLAG Joliet**

Contact Maria Prekop  
 maria.prekop@navigant.com

**PFLAG Will, Kankakee, Iroquois**

Meetings held 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday, 2-4 pm  
 1045 W River St  
 Kankakee, IL  
 plagkankakee@pflagillinois.org

**PFLAG McHenry**

Meetings held 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday – 7 pm  
 Tree of Life Unitarian Church  
 5603 W Bull Valley Rd  
 McHenry 60050  
 pflagwoodstockmchenry@pflagillinois.org

**PFLAG Oak Park**

Meetings held 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday – 3 pm  
 First United Church  
 848 Lake St, Oak Park 60304  
 pflagoakpark@pflagillinois.org

**Parents of Transgender (Chicago)**

Meetings are held the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday – 7 pm  
 Center on Halsted  
 3656 N Halsted, Chicago 60613  
 parentsoftransgender@pflagillinois.org

**Parents of Transgender (McHenry)**

Meetings are held the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday – 7 p.m.  
 Tree of Life Unitarian Church  
 5603 W Bull Valley Rd, McHenry 60050  
 flynnmb12@gmail.com

**Parents of Transgender (North Shore)**

Meetings are held the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday – 6 p.m.  
 Winnetka Presbyterian Church  
 1255 Winnetka Rd, Winnetka, IL

**PFLAG Rockford**

Meetings are held the 1<sup>st</sup> Monday – 6:30 pm  
 Rockford Public Library  
 215 N Wyman St, Rockford, IL  
 (use entrance off Mulberry St.)

**Please join us for any chapter meeting.**

If you are not comfortable meeting in a large group,  
 arrangements can be made  
 to meet one-on-one.

Contact any one of our chapters  
 for more information.