



OPEN DOORS

The Newsletter of the Northern Illinois PFLAG Chapters

President's Column

"Happy Pride!"

– A warm greeting and proclamation of solidarity!

June is Pride month and there is no shortage of events in Chicagoland. But, at the top of my list as a PFLAG favorite is the Chicago Pride Parade. Pride is an affirming, energizing and heartwarming experience for me each year. This year, the Parade is on Sunday, June 25th. Mark your calendar and plan to join us.

Pride offers an excellent opportunity to meet and bond with friends, family, your local PFLAG chapter and other PFLAG families from throughout Northern Illinois. Consider meeting up to create posters to carry or decorate shirts to wear.

If you ever wanted to know what it feels like to be a rock star, I imagine this is as close to the real thing as I am ever going to experience. If you are so inclined, you can give hugs and high-fives. You can help carry the PFLAG banner, or march and carry a poster or wave. You can ride the trolley and wave like royalty. Be sure to check the weather forecast and bring sunscreen and maybe a hat or umbrella. Just be prepared to have fun and enjoy the day.

While Pride is a day of celebration, it is also an amazing day of solidarity and visibility for the LGBT community and allies. So, let's have a strong showing and a fabulous day! I hope to see you there. Pride month has lots to offer... consider some of these:

♥ Chicago [Equality Rally](#) at Andersonville Midsommarfest June 11- 11:00 am

The Chicago LGBTQ community & allies gather in solidarity with the Equality March for Unity and Pride. Speakers and musical performances promote visibility, unity, and pride. RSVP online.

♥ Chicago [Pride Fest](#) June 17-18- 11am – 10 pm

Entertainers perform to crowds filled with PRIDE as we celebrate our LGBTQ history.

♥ [Pier Pride](#) Celebration at Navy Pier June 24- 12:00 – 5:00pm
Join your PFLAG family as we host a PFLAG information table at this year's Pier Pride Celebration.

♥ Chicago [Pride Parade](#) June 25- stay tuned for details.
Don't miss out on the Pride experience!
Check with your chapter leader for specifics.

Wishing you a healthy, happy Pride month!



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.

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www.pflag.org

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Oak Park Chapter Loses One of its Beloved Members

Our dear friend and former member, Velna Kolodziej, died on May 20. The following is from her obituary:

Velna Jane Kolodziej (nee Lewis) was born on May 14, 1932, to Jackson and Helen (Hunt) Lewis in Chicago. She passed away on Saturday, May 20, 2017 at the age of 85. She was raised in Norwood Park, Illinois and graduated Taft High School in 1950. She attended Northern Illinois University where she attained a teaching degree.

She was an elementary school teacher in Arlington Heights, Illinois until her marriage to George Kolodziej in 1968. She continued working as a library aid and computer teacher in Oak Park, Illinois and River Forest, Illinois while raising four sons: Gary Mertens, Paul Mertens, Matthew Kolodziej and David Kolodziej. Velna moved with George to Grinnell, Iowa to a welcoming community at the Mayflower in the summer of 2014. She was involved in the Third Unitarian Church in the Austin neighborhood of Chicago, PFLAG (a gay and lesbian parents and friends support group) and numerous activities at the Mayflower in Grinnell. She is survived by her four sons and their children, Rita Mertens, Jane Mertens, Ellis Mertens, George E. Kolodziej, Molly Kolodziej, Sophie Kolodziej, and Avalon Von Mertens.

Memorial Services in Grinnell and Chicago are being arranged.

We in Oak Park PFLAG will always remember Velna (and George) for their unwavering support for all LGBT people, especially their son Matthew. Velna was a prolific baker for our annual bake sales, and we really have had a hard time picking up the slack with her move to Iowa. Velna and Sylvia Menninga conducted a workshop on LGBT issues for two summers for in-service school employees.



Velna also was our keeper of the email list and sent out all the emails of announcements and other information. She was the person who suggested we bring the photographic exhibit, Love Makes a Family, to Oak Park, and chaired our committee to make it so! She also brought her infant grandson (George) to many of those meetings. She and George were often hosts for our Fifth Sunday Potlucks, and when we got rained out at the park once, they opened their house at a moment's notice for the potluck!

We're stunned at her death, which follows so closely on the death of her husband, George last year. She will be missed dearly.





HINSDALE CHAPTER

By Barb Medley

At our May meeting, we were privileged to meet our guest speaker, Michael Bauer, whose presentation was entitled, "LGBT Activism from the Age of AIDS to the Age of Trump – How to Cope and How to Persevere." Mike

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. He was accompanied by his husband and long-time partner, Roger Simon.

Mike's presentation was so interesting, because he intertwined LGBT history with his personal life experiences.

He started with the beginning of the AIDS crisis in 1982. Chicago's first AIDS clinic was opened by two doctors in



1985. Mike got involved in politics when he supported one of these founding physicians, Dr. Ron Sable, run for alderman. He lost in a close vote. In 1992, an openly gay acquaintance of Mike's ran for judge. They recognized the need to raise a lot of money, and with support from the gay community, he won the election. By working with local politicians like Dr. Sable and the aforementioned judge, Mike became involved in politics. He talked about LGBT politics through his career and his positive interactions with politicians such as Sen. Durbin and Rep. Jan Schakowsky. They fervently support the LGBT community.

Mike talked about the ups and downs in LGBT rights through the years, including the first lawsuit filed advocating the rights for gay couples to marry (in Hawaii), the disappointment in President Clinton and passage of the Defense of Marriage Act, 31 states passing referenda that marriage was between a man and a woman between 2004 to 2006, Prop 8 in California, the fall of DOMA and the federal right for same-sex marriage. Through his narration of LGBT history, he encouraged us with his opinion that the election of Donald Trump and the current attempted roll-backs in

LGBT rights are merely a "bump in the road." He feels it is important that LGBT young people know this history and realize the importance of being involved politically. We must let our voices be heard!

Our June speaker is Dr. Deb Wilke from Compassionate Counseling who treats clients with issues about sexual orientation and gender identity.

Deerfield CHAPTER

By Janet Svatos/Sue Ginsburg

We were honored to have Jaqueline Boyd come to speak to us at our May meeting. Jacqueline is the founder of THE CARE PLAN, an advocacy organization that is committed to the successful navigation of your health and aging challenges. THE CARE PLAN provides assessment, management and planning tools for seniors to make sure their health care wishes are respected. Jacqueline also provides education on long term care planning. She has been a long-time advocate of the LGBTQ community and spoke to LGBTQ issues. So much of our medical community is not aware of the differences between the LGBTQ communities; they are not culturally competent to deal with our community's issues. Statistics show that if one lives in an area where it's not safe to be gay, it takes 12 years off that person's life span!

It did not take us long to realize that our children will be facing these issues and it was a great idea to help THEM to plan ahead, as all LGBTQ people should!

Jacqueline talked about "families of choice." These are friends who take the place of family, as many in our community are kicked out of their real families (families of origin); or because many LGBTQ individuals don't get married or have children, it is the families of choice who will eventually provide the support when needed. For situations where LGBTQ persons may find themselves dealing with discriminatory health care personnel, Boyd suggested planning ahead and bringing one's own advocate. Jacqueline has spent 10 years working with over 1000 clients.

Boyd reminded us that health care providers are not trained to scare for HIV patients. Long-term survivors of HIV literally have no one trained to care for them. Boyd suggests that we find affirming providers. If surgery is needed, make a success template, know what to expect and know what the outcomes should be. Make sure your surgeon has "cultural competency", as many are not trained for our community. The most important³

information is PLAN FOR THE FUTURE. This was a lesson well taken and understood by our membership!

June is our Ohadi Scholarship awards presentation. Cynthia Drey, past member of Deerfield, will fly in from Texas to award the scholarship winners. Cynthia gives the scholarship each year in memory of her son, John Paul. This will be a celebration, so bring your children if you'd like. We will NOT be having our regular meeting, but rather cake and celebration!

The Pride Parade is June 25. More information will be given at our June meeting. If you wish to volunteer to help on this committee, let me know.

McHenry CHAPTER

By Toni Weaver

The focus of PFLAG McHenry's May meeting was on the concerns and issues faced by parents who have transgender or gender non-conforming children. Seven members of PFLAG McHenry/McHenry PTI sat on a panel and responded to questions about their needs, their initial interface with PFLAG, what helped them the most when they first came to a meeting, and how they grew into their acceptance and understanding of their children. For those of us with gay, lesbian, or bisexual children and for LGB people themselves, the meeting provided insight into an entirely different set of questions.

While there is much that we share (fear of harm to our children, the realization that their lives are going to be very different from what we envisioned, society's lack of acceptance, churches' lack of acceptance, discrimination), there are distinct differences as well: the pain of a child choosing a name different from the one parents labored so hard over, the request to put away baby pictures and family photo albums that show the person in the wrong body, the legalities of changing names on a variety of documents, i.e. school records, birth certificates, driver's licenses, passports, the decisions regarding hormone therapy and gender-affirming surgery, the finality of these decisions, bathroom/locker room usage for school age children, use of the chosen name and pronoun...

This meeting was incredibly well received by both "old timers" and first timers alike. People left the meeting saying "WOW!" – let's have more of these.

The June meeting will begin on a somber note since we'll

be marking the first anniversary of the Pulse Nightclub massacre.

PTI Chicago CHAPTER

By Arlene Collins

The PTI chapter meeting did not have a guest speaker at our May gathering. Our meeting was small but it allowed us the opportunity to welcome a new member with lots of questions and the chance to interact for a longer duration of time.

Topics were varied but one issue that our trans kids face today is "should we live our lives stealth or come out to all or some. Transition is a long process and different for everyone. Making the decision to come out to family and friends is difficult enough but when our kids have the option of living a stealth life (their true self) or coming out to all it is not an easy one; that decision can only be made by one person. Please go to the following link for information on "The Ethics of Living Stealth".

https://www.reddit.com/r/lgbt/comments/aycjk/the_et_hics_of_living_in_stealth/

At our next meeting, June 8th at Center on Halsted, Chicago, we will welcome Michael Ziri, a veteran in legislative affairs and a former Springfield elected official, and is the Director of Public Policy at Equality Illinois.

I hope you all join us for an informative meeting on legislation affecting our children.

Three Generations of PFLAG Supporters

- Carole Abrams, her daughter, Diana and granddaughter, Zoe -



In Memory of John Cepek (1948-2017)

On Friday, May 12, the family and friends of John gathered on the campus of UIC, his "home" for the 32 years of his professional career, to celebrate his life and share their grief at the sudden, untimely, and accidental death of one of the staunchest allies the LGBT community could ever want. In spoken tribute and video presentation, John's passion for justice, his deep devotion to Char and their two sons and daughter-in-love, his zest for life, his humor, his wit, his charm were remembered and relived, bringing smiles to every face despite the tears.

John and Char were among the original members of the Hinsdale PFLAG chapter. They were instrumental in starting the PFLAG Council of Northern Illinois. John became involved with PFLAG at the national level, serving as both vice-president and then as president of PFLAG's Board of Directors, succeeding Sam Thoron. In 2006 Equality Illinois presented John and Char the Freedom Award in recognition of their service to the LGBT community and their allies. They were movers and shakers in Chicago's gay community and won the respect and admiration of many of the LGBT leaders, witnessed by the presence of so many of them at the memorial service.

Those of us who have been involved with PFLAG for many years had the privilege of working with John and Char, participating in the NI Council, and certainly appreciated their wisdom and insight. However, the real beneficiaries were the members of PFLAG Hinsdale, people whose lives were changed by their encounter with John and Char, parents who found hope and acceptance through their words. Several of them have lovingly shared their memories so that the rest of us could catch a glimpse into the phenomenal outreach of both of them:

Jackie Frett:

Yes, John and Char were among my first contacts with PFLAG. Joan Parrott-Sheffer brought me into the group and introduced us to John and Char who were to become our mentors.

This meeting changed my life forever.

When I walked into PFLAG for the first time, everyone was laughing. I thought, "What do they have to laugh about; they all have gay kids". Well of course John was there, and if John was in the room, there was always laughter - serious conversation but always with his quick wit. Right after entering the meeting for the first time, Joan took me to a smaller room with John and Char. I remember asking, "Who do you tell?" John turned to Char and said, "Do I give her the PFLAG answer?" Char nodded and John said, "You tell everyone!" He explained that it was secrecy that was killing our children. Everyone knew someone gay whether they realized it or not. He said that once people could see gay people, they would no longer be able to discriminate because they were people they knew, respected or even loved.

Dan and I took that advice to heart. If you know us, you know we have a gay son whom we love. Every family member, every co-worker, the electrician, the plumber, every neighbor - everyone knows because John told me to tell everyone, and we do. I like to think we are changing the world one person at a time. We owe a great debt of gratitude to the Cepek's, and we are doing our best to pay it forward

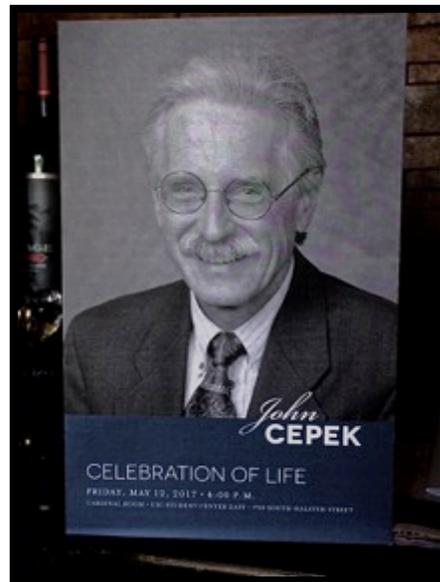
Susan Rusk:

Well, after my son came out, I thought I was 'fine' with his being gay and not too long afterward, I came out (about him) at work. I was happy for him and his first boyfriend. Eventually, they had a commitment ceremony and then had a daughter. We had traveled before together for triathlon competitions, but then they decided to go on an 'R Family' cruise and invited me. We left out of San Diego and were heading to Mexico. There were lots of functions on board, of course, and one of them posted was for a PFLAG meeting. I decided to just peek in to see what it was like, and there was John, holding court to a very large group, and all were laughing and having a great time. I began to realize what I was missing - a lot of fun AND being a more effective ally! Of course, I loved Char and loved the fact that they were members of the Hinsdale chapter. It's been on my calendar ever since; all because John was someone who pulled you in to see the beauty and fun of working together for our kids. What a learning experience it's been!

Carole Weidhuner:

All I can say is that John made a point to tie LGBT into any conversation with anyone and everyone with whom he came in contact, whether here or in his world-wide travels. He would break the unwritten rule of not talking in the elevator to plant a seed in the minds of those he had never met to move equality forward.

John and Char were there in the small room at our very first PFLAG meeting in Hinsdale, and they shared the story of Jeanne Manford's 1972 march asking parents of gays to support their children; giving due credit to PFLAG's founder. John lived and breathed Jeanne's hope for the world and then some. We are so blessed, honored, and thrilled to have known this man who made such a difference.



Bonnie Garneau:

After my daughter came out, I flailed around internally for quite a while. I loved my daughter but was so ignorant of the facts that I did not know how to talk about what I was feeling. My daughter came home one day, stuck a note on the bulletin board next to the phone and announced, "You need this!" It was information about the local PFLAG chapter.

I stalled for a while, but knew I needed information and finally worked up the courage to go to a meeting. I will never forget standing in the doorway of the Hinsdale UU Church, with my chin quivering, so unsure of myself. It didn't take but a minute until this wild haired guy in an aloha shirt marched up to me, took one look, opened his arms and said "Aw, come on in. It's going to be fine." That is how I met John Cepek, and my life certainly changed forever.

Aside from the fact that joining PFLAG introduced me to so many wonderful people, there have been other benefits as well. Those who know me now would probably be surprised to learn I was a very shy, quiet person when I was young. That shy person would never have marched in the Pride Parade or begged money in front of a gay bar in Chicago. (Both activities involve kissing and hugging half of Lakeview. The emotional high from all that love and laughter is incredible.) That shy person would never have lobbied her representative (following him to the men's room and then waiting for him to come back out) or gone door to door with a petition (and almost getting into a fight with a jerk who told me my daughter did not deserve any rights. One does not take on the "mother bear" – thank you, Char, for saving me from that one.) That shy person would never have spent hours checking addresses on petitions against Civil Unions, have spoken to business groups, on the radio, in front of a Senate subcommittee or stood in the rain for 4 hours for Marriage Equality. What has often struck me, however, is that all these things combined have made me a better person. I have become more aware of injustice and more importantly, willing to speak out against it ("have soapbox, will travel"). I think I am more open, loving and accepting of other people and ideas. I am incredibly more aware of the world around me. The final phrase in our opening statement reads, "... it is when we no longer feel the need for PFLAG that PFLAG needs us the most." PFLAG saved my relationship with my daughter, and I try to pay back that gift every day. Thank you John.

All of us, the extended PFLAG family, can only say "Aloha, John" and "Thanks. The world is better because you lived in it for 69 short years. You spent yourself in the service of others, and we are deeply grateful."

Join the #NOH8Worldwide movement in Chicago & add your face to the fight for equal human rights!



WHERE: W Chicago-City Center

172 W. Adams St
Chicago, IL 60603

DATE: Saturday June 17th, 2017

TIME: 2:00pm - 5:00pm

COST:

Single/Solo Photos: **\$40**

Couple/Group Photos: **\$25 per person**

*** COME CAMERA-READY ***

*** WEAR A WHITE SHIRT ***

*** POSE & MAKE A STATEMENT! ***

Photos are first-come, first-served - and we move *fast!*

When is the best time to arrive? Most people tend to arrive before the photo shoot begins, but as long as someone has lined up by the advertised end time for the photo shoot (**5:00pm** for this photo shoot), they should be guaranteed a chance to pose!

Once you arrive, the next steps are easy!

1. Fill-out one numbered model release for each person.
2. Have a NOH8 temporary tattoo applied for your photo.
3. Standby for your number to be called.
4. Process your payment once called.
5. Trade your processed model release for duct tape!

NOH8 Co-Founder Adam Bouska will photograph roughly 5-10 frames per person. One frame will be selected/edited by our team and made available within approximately eight weeks (*timeline subject to change*).

PFLAG Aurora/Fox Valley

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

PFLAG Metro Chicago

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

PFLAG Deerfield

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

PFLAG DuPage

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

PFLAG Tinley Park

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

PFLAG Downers Grove

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

PFLAG Hinsdale

Meetings held 1st 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 3rd Sunday, 2-4 pm
 1045 W River St
 Kankakee, IL
 plagkankakee@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG McHenry

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

PFLAG Oak Park

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

Parents of Transgender (Chicago)

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

Parents of Transgender (McHenry)

Meetings are held the 4th 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 3rd Sunday – 6 p.m.
 Winnetka Presbyterian Church
 1255 Winnetka Rd, Winnetka, IL

PFLAG Rockford

Meetings are held the 1st 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.