

PFLAG Palm Springs / Desert Communities

THE BANNER OF THE DESERT

The Newsletter of PFLAG Palm Springs/Desert Communities Chapter
Our twenty-second year. November 2017, Volume 22, No. 11

PFLAG Meeting
Sunday, December 17th, 2:30 pm
Cathedral City Library, Community Room
Info: 760-202-4430 – info@PSpflag.org

Dan Smith will facilitate the meeting and the discussion topic is:

This seems to be the time of gifts.

What gifts have you received from Palm Springs PFLAG over the years?

Are they gifts that you can pass on to others?"

Volunteer to provide refreshments for future meetings: email info@PSpflag.org)

A Message From The Editor - Mike Balasa

A major outreach of the Palm Springs/Desert Communities PFLAG is our information table. Whenever there is an event in the area where we can be a presence, our table is there. We have a signup sheet for people to receive our newsletter and notices, booklets and pamphlets and meeting information for our chapter. Most frequently we appear at LGBTQI festivals and events. This past month we were at the Transgender Day of Remembrance ceremony. The other event was the first annual Pride Festival in Desert Hot Springs. We agreed to share a table with another group to keep costs low.

I wasn't expecting the Desert Hot Springs event to be of much consequence. After all, the LGBTQI community in Desert Hot Springs hasn't been that noticeable over the years. I was surprised to discover; however, that there were dozens of cars parked near the event and a shuttle bus to bring people from a parking lot. People were streaming into the event all day. On the festival grounds at the Cabot's Pueblo Museum there were food vendors, support group tables from all over Coachella Valley and a large tent for music performances. Many of the visitors were families with children.

The PFLAG information table was kept busy passing out the "PFLAG Loves Me" stickers and answering questions. We put several people on our mailing list. Carol and I were there along with Dan Smith, Sly Zelnys, and Christine Hammond. Thanks to Peter East for helping with the set up.

The Transgender Day of Remembrance was a solemn affair. Thomi Clinton, Executive Director of the Transgender Community Coalition, gave the opening comments and local dignitaries gave brief remarks. Then members of the Transgender community read the names of individuals

murdered over the past year. At the end of the event, a sculpture commemorating transgender victims of violence, was unveiled. It will be displayed in Palm Springs at a location yet to be decided.

BREAKTHROUGH SURGERY FOR MALE TO FEMALE TRANSITION

Dr. Jess Ting, Director of Surgery at the Center for Transgender Medicine and Surgery at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City, developed the means of creating a fully functioning vagina. The breakthrough surgery was work accomplished by surgeons in India who developed a means of reconstructing vaginas in women with rare disorders that cause organs to develop abnormally or not at all. They discovered that they could harvest tissue from the peritoneum, a bag of loose tissue that encircles the insides of the abdomen and contains the intestines. The peritoneum has the ability to regenerate naturally after just a few days. With this amazing tissue, it is possible to reconstruct a vagina that functions like a vagina, it feels and secretes in the same way as a normal vagina.

Dr. Ting's vagina construction is now a most sought-after surgery. He has performed 22 operations in the past six months. The waiting list continues to grow. Mount Sinai, in response to the high demand, has launched the country's first medical fellowship dedicated explicitly to transgender surgery. Dr. Ting will train one fellow each year.

The unfortunate situation is the current political climate, where the Affordable Health Care Act might be changed to remove the requirement that states must cover transgender care through their Medicaid programs. Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price, has a long record of being virulently anti LGBTQI, as a Congressman from Georgia. He was critical of the 2015 Supreme Court ruling on same-sex marriage, voted for a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage and voted against the Hate Crime Prevention Act. Patients that live in left-leaning states that have passed their own protection for trans health care, like New York and California, will have a better chance of retaining access.

LEGAL COMPLICATIONS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CASES

Several cases will be looked at by the Supreme Court involving religious freedom claims. Usually the cases involve a baker, photographer or caterer refusing services for a same-sex wedding. The most frequently cited case is the Colorado baker who refused to sell a cake to a gay couple for their wedding. The Colorado Civil Rights Commission found the baker guilty of violating the state's public accommodations law.

The baker, Jack Phillips, is appealing the case. He claims that he has the First Amendment right to refuse to support same-sex marriage. He believes that baking a cake sends the message that he supports freedom to marry laws. To support his position, he offered to sell the two men any other baked item such as a birthday cake or cookies.

To further complicate the issue, another discrimination case involved Colorado baker, Marjorie Silva, who refused to decorate a cake with an anti-same-sex marriage message. The customer wanted a Bible shaped cake with the words, "Homosexuality is a detestable sin" and other anti-gay verses. Silva did offer to bake the Bible shape cake and provide the equipment to write whatever he wanted on the cake, but she would not do it herself. Silva was found by the Civil Right Commission to not be in violation of the law.

What was the difference between the two cases? The difference illustrates an important principle

in how the Supreme Court will rule on the case. A Wayne State University Professor of Philosophy, John Corvino, provides an explanation of the legal fine points. “Jack Phillips objected to selling a cake because the men were gay. Marjorie Silva was willing to sell the cake but not participate in the message. In Jack’s case he never discussed how the cake would be decorated. He believed that by selling a cake, regardless of the message, was a way of advocating for a marriage that he believed was sinful. Even though the cake is just a cake for people eating it, to him it was a message. For Marjorie the cake did carry a message that was contrary to her beliefs. In other words, Jack was refusing to sell to customers, and Marjorie, was willing to sell the cake but not participate in the message.”

If Phillips had agreed to sell the cake but not put a two grooms statue on the cake, he would have won his case. Business owners have freedom to determine what they choose to sell, as long as they never turn away a customer because of who they are; be it a person of color, a different religion, or sexual orientation.

SAFE HOUSE OF THE DESERT

Safe House for youth in crisis provides essential services. The shelter is open for round the clock shelter and crisis counseling. Children ages 11 to 17 can go to the shelter when faced with danger or crisis in their homes. Any child can get on a Sunline Bus and be delivered to the shelter. All McDonald restaurants will connect youth with Safe House. Most of the youth in the shelter are homeless, some are addicted but all need help. The Safe House also provides a transitional living program to help young people transition into self-sustaining adults. Go to www.safehouseofthedesert.org for more information.

IN MEMORY OF RANDY LOWE

Randy Lowe died at the end of November. Randy Lowe was a leading figure in the development and success of the LGBT Community Center of the Desert. He served as Board Chairman for several years. He was first hired by the Center in 2009 to create a counseling program. In just a few months Randy was asked to take charge of the Board and become its chairman. Randy was charged to enlarge the Center’s mission from a senior service center to a place that provides services for all the LGBTQI community.

In 2015, the Center acquired the property where it is currently located: on North Palm Canyon across the street from Denny’s restaurant. The Center owns the entire building. Randy took over the job of overseeing the remodeling of the building to provide space for additional meeting rooms and an expanded counseling center. The counseling center was named the Scott Hines Mental Health Clinic in honor of Hines, a former mayor of Rancho Mirage. Scott’s husband, Kevin Blessing made the donation to make the clinic possible.

The Center has grown over the years to include a food bank serving disabled and elderly people, workshops and educational programs use the meeting space, the mental clinic serves over 80 people a week, the Suicide Bullying Prevention Program, headed by Dr. Jill Gover, has served thousands of 9th graders in Palm Springs Unified School System.

Randy Lowe had a vision and with his dedication and hard work he was instrumental in making it happen. PFLAG member Ted Barnes wrote, “Jim (Jim Reynolds, Ted’s husband) and I were so sad to hear of the death of Randy Lowe. Never has a more dedicated, kind, gentle and generous man walked among us. Jim and I have known him for about 12 years and Jim was legal adviser and board member when Randy was Chair of the Board. Randy saw the Center through their crises and

is responsible for the LGBT Center as it exists today. Many times, he was my go-to man in a crisis... I always knew I could count on him for good advice. I am sure his legacy will live on in the desert LGBT community for generations to come... A fitting memorial to a great humanitarian.” (Editor’s note: The above message from Ted Barnes was lightly edited for clarification of names)

NOT CHARLIE ROSE!

By Bob Warburton

For Thanksgiving Bob Edgerly and I found ourselves up in Hollister, California visiting his daughter Ann’s family, which includes her wife Lynn, Bob’s Great Grand Son, Seth, and our In Laws Delinda and Audrey and doing Thanksgivingy things. Hollister is south of San Jose, usually rainy and cold this time of year, but was warm and beautiful in 2017. Everyone was well and employed except the 12-year-old, who is getting straight As in school. Audrey’s teacher allows she really is quite bright.

All in all, things appear to be going well in the heartland, but in Hollister as well as in the rest of the Country things are not cheery. According to several polls a record number of Americans are distraught over the State of the Union with the percentages averaging at about two thirds. These levels are worse than during the Vietnam War, which I do not remember as good times. A New York Times Poll states 70% report civility is worse since Donald Trump became President. I know I am less civil in a world where a Trump tweet will mean the difference between war and peace in Ukraine.

There is another change going on in the Country and World that is just as disconcerting, but in the long run will turn out for the better. It is terrible to learn that someone you knew from the media and you really liked their work was not a good person. In the past Hollywood gossip writers used to find Communists or homosexuals to complain about. Many good peoples’ lives were ruined this way.

However, the people named today are always male and could come from all walks of lives. They include Bill O’Reilly, Bill Cosby, President Bill Clinton, President, Kevin Spacey, President George Herbert Walker Bush, President Trump, and Charlie Rose. Yes, Charlie Rose. Those of us in the LGBTQIA Community probably are not as surprised by the revelations as the average person of sexual bad doings as we have been the center of the storm for years. Sexual harassment has been par for the course for many of us for all of our lives. Transgender folk report the highest incidents of this in our community according to polling.

Still it is disheartening to wake up each morning to find a new person who you thought was doing a good job was at best bullying people and at worst physically assaulting someone. Matt Lauer had a button to lock his office door from his desk?!?! The information is mind boggling. The worst part of all of this to my way of thinking is that the current President was elected even though he was an admitted attacker. We must all learn from our mistakes.

NEW YORK TIMES FEATURES NEW CITY COUNCIL

Frank Bruni was in town after the City Council race to write an article for the New York Times about the results. Bruni is a Times OpEd columnist, author of several books and Pulitzer Prize nominee. He has worked for the New York Times since 1998. His article appeared in the December 1st edition of the Times. Bruni, who is openly gay, was here because the election resulted in a city

council that was entirely GLBT, and Council Member, Lisa Middleton, has the distinction of being the first transgender person elected to a non-judicial position in the state of California.

Bruni interviewed all the Council Members and Mayor Moon for the article. Bruni found that Palm Springs has a large GLBT community consisting of 20 to 40% of the population. Many of the city employees in key positions, including the city manager, David Ready, are openly gay. The Mayor told Bruni that people in this community see gay people every day as workers, friends, neighbors and family., “You see why having an all gay city council is no big deal. Nobody cares anymore.” Council member, J.R. Roberts said, “As the last bit of confetti is being swept up, some concerns have replaced elation. I really don’t want us to be known as the queer council. I want this to be about the things we accomplish.”

J.R. Roberts said, “I feel a lot of pressure. We are known as a gay community, and we need to project the cleanest, best government”. Several of the council members emphasized the importance of representing all members of the community, and agreed that in this time when the entire country is polarized, it is important to not be defined as separate from all other communities. They didn’t want straight voters feeling that are left behind, and their voices not heard.

Bruni concluded, “As I listened to them, I realized that what they wanted to be is the post-gay government, in which L.G.B.T. people are prominent not because they mirror their constituents, which definitely matters, but because they have valuable skills.”

Time To Join PFLAG? Time To Renew? PFLAG Membership

If you would like to join PFLAG Palm Springs/Desert Communities,
print and mail the form below or join [online](#)

All our expenses go to furthering our mission. Our expenses are for materials that we supply to individuals, schools and supporting organizations; the information phone line, newsletter production, support to local schools’ Gay Straight Alliances; and, many other occasional expenses such as the Pride Parade.

When you join and support the local PFLAG chapter with a membership of \$30 or more, we send your name and a portion of the fees (\$15) to PFLAG National, making you a member of both the National and our local chapter of PFLAG. You will receive all publications and notices.

Members sometimes don’t realize that if you join National PFLAG directly you are not on the membership rolls of the PFLAG Palm Springs/Desert Communities. PFLAG National does not notify us that you joined and they do not share any of the membership fee.

Continued on next page.

PFLAG PALM SPRINGS/DESERT COMMUNITIES MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name: _____

Additional Names: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-Mail: _____

Suggested Membership Donation:

Family \$50: _____ Individual \$30: _____ Other Amount: _____

We appreciate any dollar amount.

Budgetary restraints will not keep anyone from being part of our PFLAG family.

Make check payable to PFLAG and mail to:

PFLAG 611 S. Palm Canyon Drive / 7-262

Palm Springs, CA 92264

Info: 760-202-4430 – info@pspflag.org

Chapter Officers: President: Mike Balasa, Vice-president: Carol Balasa

Secretary: Christine Hammond, Treasurer: Ron Wallen

Directors: Gina Orban, Dan Smith, Sly Zelnys