

GLSEN of Fort Lauderdale Changes Leadership

Broward County Teacher Takes the Position of Co-Chair

By Michael James

The Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network of Greater Fort Lauderdale announced recently at its monthly meeting that Michael J. Record has assumed the position of co-chair. Record fills the position vacated by Ray Rideout, who had been the co-chair for the past four years.

GLSEN is the largest organization of students, teachers, parents and community members working to end bias against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in America's schools.

Although Rideout is stepping down he will remain on GLSEN's Leadership Board. Record joins De Palazzo, who retains her co-chair position.

"I hope to develop a reputation as an advocate for safe schools," said Record. "Every student—every single one—deserves a safe, welcoming school free of harassment, discrimination, name calling and bullying."



Michael J. Record

Record continued, "As a Fort Lauderdale native and graduate of Broward County Public Schools, I have a particular interest in working to make our schools safer."

Record is a teacher with Broward County Public Schools (BCPS), and brings to GLSEN the experience of having served as a trainer of direct action organizing for activists from around the county. BCPS is the fifth largest school district in the country, with close to 250,000 students.

Founded as a volunteer group in Boston in 1990, GLSEN led the fight that made Massachusetts one of the first states to ban anti-gay discrimination in its public schools in 1993. GLSEN went national in 1994 and has since become one of the nation's leading voices for equality and safety in the educational system. The Organization currently has 85 chapters in 35 states. The Fort Lauderdale chapter was founded in 1997.

Rideout said, "I am amazed at the incredible accomplishments of our GLSEN chapter in its short four-year history. This is the right time to step down as co-chair and allow new leaders to continue the good work. I have a very strong commitment to our youth and plan to continue my work as a youth advocate."

Record expressed the importance of promoting the perseverance of human relations, respect and understanding over prejudice, hatred and ignorance.

Rideout, reflecting on the work the organization has done over the past four years, said, "I am very excited about the opportunities and challenges facing our chapter as I turn over the leadership reigns... GLSEN will continue to provide leadership and inspiration so that one day, all students in the Broward County schools will be valued and respected, regardless of their sexual orientation."

Attendance in school is mandatory until a certain age within the State of Florida, regardless of descent, financial status or physical disability. Record said, "I believe that if you're going to require every child to attend school, then that school should be a safe and welcoming place."

Speaking of the verbal and physical abuse that gays and lesbians may face in all areas of the community, Rideout stresses the important of tolerance and education. He said, "We at GLSEN know that narrow-minded bigotry and hateful prejudice, whether coming from terrorists waging a holy war from outside the United States or from religious extremists within our own borders, ultimately cannot prevail."

The organization has stated that more volunteers are needed. Record said, "What greater gift could you give yourself than the opportunity to look back in five years and see that you helped create lasting improvements in our community's schools?"

The Fort Lauderdale chapter of GLSEN holds monthly meetings the last Tuesday of every month, except July and December. Their next meeting will be October 30 at the Floridian Restaurant, 1410 East Las Olas Blvd. Social time will begin at 6:30 and the meeting will begin at 7:30.

For information about making a donation or becoming a member, write to GLSEN Greater Fort Lauderdale, PO Box 7264, Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33338-7264.

Chris Donahue contributed to this story.

Hemlock Society Offers Moral Support

'Self-Deliverance is Available if I Should Need It'

By Paul Harris

"Dying is personal...and it is profound. For many, the thought of an ignoble end steeped in decay is abhorrent. A quiet, proud death, bodily integrity intact, is a matter of extreme consequence." -Justice William Brennan, Cruzan Decision, 1990

There are many types of activists who are interested in widely different causes. Rupert, a sixty-six year old gay retired travel agent believes that we should have the right to die with dignity - if necessary by taking our own lives.

An extremely fit man who is in the gym or swimming three or four times a week, his belief came about during his two years volunteering for Fort Lauderdale's Center One back in the mid-1980s. He was team leader of a volunteer group that visited Broward General and Imperial Point at the height of the AIDS crisis. In the two days that he volunteered every week he saw the reality of people dying long painful deaths from AIDS.

He told me "It was a depressing job that I didn't look forward to very much. I knew I was going to see some very sick people. They were the worst of the plague years before the wonder drugs. I was going to a funeral a month, sometimes more. I only lasted two years because I burned out."

During this time he met a 27 year-old man we shall call Joe. Joe had decided that he had had enough. He had been saying the



Justice William Brennan

same thing for six weeks. In all he had been hospitalized a total of 27 times. "I don't want to go through it again... Please, please help me," Joe told some of the visiting group.

One of the group happened to be a member of the Hemlock Society, founded in 1980 by Derek Humphrey. Following the directions in Humphrey's book Final Exit, Rupert and his fellow volunteer and Joe treated the latter's passing more as a cause of celebration than grief. "It worked in textbook fashion," Rupert told me. They used the drug Seconal exactly as directed. The two volunteers went back the following morning after Joe had passed and called the hospice nurse who was serving him. It was Rupert's

first example of "self deliverance." He went on to help two other gay men in their thirties with AIDS through their passage.

Soon after he joined the Hemlock Society, the oldest and largest right-to-die organization in the U.S. The Society's emblem is a sprig of hemlock, the herb Socrates is supposed to have taken to end his life, with the words "Good Life" and "Good Death" next to it.

Since joining he has attended two training sessions in San Diego and Minneapolis of "Caring Friends" - the members of the society who offer support to fellow members facing terminal illness. Rupert is quick and clear to state the Hemlock Society's positions. Hemlock Society members only offer support to fellow society members seeking self-deliverance.

The society exists to help those living with terminal illness. Under no circumstances do they see suicide as the answer to those suffering from mental, emotional or depressive problems. Anyone who is depressed is urged to seek professional help. Suicide, after all, is a permanent solution to what may only be a temporary problem!

In spite of the jokes that Rupert sometimes suffers at the hands of his friends, Hemlock Society members do not go around Kevorkian-style switching people off. A short video Rupert showed me had Humphrey talking directly to camera about the dos and don'ts. The legal situation is very precise. It

is not a crime to commit suicide, nor to attempt to commit suicide. In this country it is a crime to assist someone to commit suicide. (The exception being Oregon where under very strict conditions it is possible to assist someone).

Having said that, it is not a crime to be present when someone is committing suicide and to offer moral support, so long as you are not assisting in the act nor knowingly supplying the means to do so. The group's materials provide more precise information, as laws vary from place to place.

The video was very clear to show the dangers of a "botched job" and how the act of self-deliverance should be carried out so nothing goes wrong. The latest suggested method from the society takes as little as four to five minutes and uses helium. The days of sitting in garages with tubes leading from the exhaust into the car are over. For one thing, because of the lessening of carbons in gasoline, there is no guarantee that you would be successful. One result of such a botched job could be severe brain damage.

For Rupert, his membership in the Hemlock Society is akin to an insurance policy guaranteeing that he will not suffer the indignity of a long, painful and unpleasant death. "It's just a wonderful feeling knowing that self-deliverance is available if I should need it," he explained.

The Hemlock Society can be found on the web at www.hemlock.org or by calling toll free at 800.247.7421. The local chapter of the organization has about 100 members and can be contacted by email at HEMFLA@aol.com or at 800.849.0349.

PWAC Selects New Chairperson as President Resigns

The People with AIDS Coalition of Broward County (PWAC) met Wednesday night to elect Nick Trivisono to chair its board of directors. Outgoing chairperson Lynn Selzer regretted that his relocation to Jacksonville precluded him from completing his term, but expressed confidence in Trivisono, a veteran AIDS activist, founder of ACT-UP Greater Fort Lauderdale, and a member of the Ryan White Regional Health Services Planning Council.

Following the unexpected resignation of the organization's president, Tamara "Samantha" Krulya, the coalition's directors also opened nominations for her replacement. The coalition has already notified its members

that it will convene a special meeting to elect the new president. The meeting will begin at 6 PM on Wednesday October 24th at the PWAC's newly redecorated drop-in center, located across from Poverello at 2302 N.E. 7th Avenue in Wilton Manors. An open house will follow the meeting; food and beverage will be served.

At its joint meeting with the membership, the directors voted to forego their authority to select a temporary president to serve until the annual meeting, choosing instead to seek a vote of confidence from the membership. "Given the scope of the leadership transition we're now attempting, the directors agreed the membership needs to meet," said Trivisono.

"We are taking extra care to personally notify every member for whom we have current contact information and to otherwise publicize the meeting as widely as possible."

The directors also agreed to the broadest possible interpretation of membership for the purpose of voting rights, permitting individuals affected by HIV to register as voting members until 3 PM on Monday October 22nd, and exempting current members from annual renewal requirements.

These measures represent only the beginning of what will be an ongoing campaign to expand the coalition's membership base according to Greg Scott, the membership project coordinator. "We may not always be

able to successfully represent every AIDS-stricken community in Broward county, but we should never stop trying to make our collective voice as loud and diverse as possible," said Scott.

Scott, a long-term AIDS survivor and experienced community leader, is so far the only declared nominee for the coalition's presidency. Nominations remain open, however, and will be accepted from the floor before votes are cast on October 24th.

For more information about the special election, the open house, and other upcoming PWAC events, please phone 954.565.9119, visit the coalition online at pwa.org, or stop by the drop-in center between noon and 3PM.