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ROBIN'S ROAR

**LIFE-LONG ACTIVIST EARNS
'CHAMPIONS OF EQUALITY'
AWARD**

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SAVE'S CHAMPIONS OF EQUALITY GALA

VIRTUAL CEREMONY SALUTES HEROES FRIDAY

► Denise Royal

Awards ceremonies are still important — even during the coronavirus crisis. Most of us still need some inspiration. You can find some during SAVE's 2020 Champions of Equality virtual gala. It's happening this Friday, Aug. 28, at 7 p.m.

"The evening is a combination of two things," said Orlando Gonzales, SAVE Executive Director. "Number one is a lot of inspiration. And the second is a line of personal reflection about why public service matters and why voting matters. Those personal reflections are really what makes the night so special because we hear from people like volunteers and the elected officials who give us so much of themselves to make things happen."

The evening celebrates politicians, civic and community leaders, scientists, thought leaders, and others who stand and support equality for LGBT people. More on the honorees in a moment.

This year, because of the coronavirus, the gala is virtual, making it easier for more people to experience it. First, this won't be just a Friday night Zoom call. This event is filled with incredible entertainment like Grammy and Latin Grammy winner Robbie Elias performing his new single. There are also auction items available for bidding.

The event is free. But you must register to attend. You can find more information at www.bit.ly/2EBDHP2 (case-sensitive).

The 2020 Champion Honorees are State Representative Nicholas Duran and State Senator Jason Pizzo.

"The reason why we chose Representative Duran and Senator Pizzo is because they have taken up work that was started by Senator Rene Garcia," Gonzales said. "They are carrying forward in pushing legislation that decriminalizes the HIV/AIDS status of an individual. Right now, there are many laws in which somebody who's HIV positive can easily be prosecuted for their status because of issues related to consent. This includes situations where a person who doesn't know their status and may infect someone who still held to criminal-level charges even when they don't know. It's also important to lift the stigma from the disease, the condition, and the virus."

**THE EVENING
CELEBRATES
POLITICIANS, CIVIC
AND COMMUNITY
LEADERS,
SCIENTISTS,
THOUGHT LEADERS,
AND OTHERS
WHO STAND AND
SUPPORT EQUALITY
FOR LGBT PEOPLE.**

The Equality Legacy Awards will go to familiar faces this year who always support the LGBT community. The honorees are four Miami-Dade Commissioners — Audrey Edmonson, Barbara Jordan, Dennis Moss, and Xavier Suarez.

"They are retiring and leaving the board of county commission now because of term limits," Gonzales said. "Some of these folks, you know, we can always count on them whenever there was a huge LGBT issue that came up, we knew we could count on their votes. They were engaged with us. But the reality is that because their hearts and their minds were inclined to justice, they always checked with us to make sure that the issues that we were advocating for were ones that they fully understood."

The Hall of Champions Award goes to scientists — Dr. Susanne Doblecki-Lewis, Dr. Besiki Luka Kutateladze, Dr. Steven A. Safren, Dr. Mario Stevenson, Dr. José Szapocznik.

Dr. Doblecki-Lewis, Dr. Stephenson, and Dr. Szapocznik are infectious disease experts, honored for their work with HIV.

Dr. Kutateladze is a research scientist looking at the way hate crimes are reported. "His work is going to transform the way that hate crimes are seen," Gonzales said.

Dr. Safren is examining the role of mental health when there's an HIV infection and diagnosis. "This work is critically important," Gonzales said.

The Community Hero Awards go to Robin Bodiford and Jorge Mursuli. In the 1990s, in Broward and Miami-Dade Counties respectfully, Bodiford and Mursuli created the movement that brought the first version of the Human Rights Ordinance. "The recent Supreme Court ruling determining the sexual orientation and gender identity are protected under the Civil Rights Act demonstrates that what these two individuals did in the 1990s was way ahead of their time." *SFGN*



Commissioner Dennis Moss Commissioner Xavier Suarez Representative Nick Duran Senator Jason Pizzo



Dr. Steven Safren



Dr. Besiki Luka Kutateladze



Dr. Mario Stevenson



Dr. José Szapocznik



Dr. Susanne Doblecki-Lewis



Robin L. Bodiford



Jorge Mursuli



Commissioner Audrey Edmonson



Commissioner Barbara Jordan

The announced recipients of the 2020 Champions of Equality. Photos via SAVE, Facebook.

MARCHING TO HER OWN DRUMMER

BODIFORD ONCE WANTED TO BE GLORIA ALLRED

► Damon Scott

Robin Bodiford recalls many mentors and heroes that impacted her life — one that's been a tapestry of activism in politics and LGBT rights.

She's being recognized as a hero herself.

On Aug. 28, Bodiford joins a lineup of honorees at SAVE's 2020 "Champions of Equality" virtual gala at 7 p.m.

Miami-based SAVE (Safeguarding American Values for Everyone) has been hosting the event since 2005. This year it's a virtual affair due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The nonprofit is involved in a variety of political advocacy work, community outreach and candidate endorsements — all in support of the LGBT community across South Florida. For Bodiford it's a fitting mission, as much of her life mirrors such work.

Along with Jorge Mursuli — who helped lead the fight to pass a gay rights ordinance through the Miami-Dade County Commission — she will be recognized in the "Community Heroes" category at the event.

EARLY ACTIVIST SPARK

Bodiford's parents were Southerners and Democrats. Her father was a carpenter and her mother was a nurse. They were regular working-class people, she said, and also voracious readers.

"I used to go with my father when he'd pay his union dues," Bodiford remembers. "He'd tell me stories about how men were beaten up and even killed for being union organizers. It was instilled in me to be involved and be a righteous citizen."

In her younger years in Miami and before she came out as a lesbian, Bodiford was interested in politics and LGBT advocacy.

"I knew I was gay when I was 11, but there was no way to be gay then [in the early 1960s]," she said. "I didn't know any gay people, didn't have any of that fortune like if you lived in New York City. Miami was kind of a backwater."

When Bodiford was 15 she read a news brief in the paper — a report that some women had been arrested for dancing

in a venue. It had such an effect on her that she cut it out and carried it in her wallet for years.

"I remember when I was 16 in 1968 and I wanted to go to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago," Bodiford said. "My father was worried and begged me not to go, and I didn't. But he was so proud when I told him I was sending my allowance to the

"I WAS A HIPPIE. I DEMONSTRATED AGAINST VIETNAM; WORE THE BLACK ARMBAND; READ THE NAMES OF THE DEAD BOYS FROM VIETNAM."

- Robin Bodiford
ATTORNEY

Robin Bodiford. Photo courtesy of Robin Bodiford.

Chicago Eight.”

The Chicago Eight included Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin and others — charged by the government with conspiracy and inciting a riot, all related to anti-Vietnam War and countercultural protests that took place at the convention.

“I was a hippie. I demonstrated against Vietnam; wore the black armband; read the names of the dead boys from Vietnam,” she said.

In the summer of 1972, Bodiford would come out at 21 at a gay Democratic fundraiser on Miami Beach. George McGovern was running against Richard Nixon for the presidency. She remembers the girl at the kissing booth.

“She liked the way I kissed,” Bodiford said. “She sang and played the guitar and later owned the famous musical club in Greenwich [Village] called Eighty-Eights. She was taken under the wing of this guy who was part of the first effort to battle Anita Bryant.”

Gay activists like Bodiford know Anita Bryant well. Bryant campaigned against the (then)

Dade County gay rights ordinance and gained a national following.

It was around this time that Bodiford would meet gay activists Bob Kunst and Melody Morehead — who’d become her first girlfriend. Morehead was known in part for debating Bryant on a local Miami TV news station.

CALIFORNIA DREAMING

Bodiford took her drive and desire to go back to school (she’d gone to Barry University

in Miami Shores) to California in the mid-1970s.

She’d end up gaining 20 years of education, work and activist experience before moving back to South Florida. She’d also go through the painful death of her younger brother.

Between stints in the Bay Area and in Southern California, Bodiford was a volunteer abortion counselor and provided rape and suicide crisis services for women as the director of a women’s center — places where “radical lesbians go to talk about things,” she said.

“THERE WAS NO WAY AFTER MY BROTHER DIED OF AIDS THAT I WAS GOING TO BE QUIET.”

**- Robin Bodiford
ATTORNEY**

Reproductive rights were an issue very close to her — she’d had an abortion the same year the Roe v. Wade decision came down from the U.S. Supreme Court in 1973.

Bodiford earned a master’s degree in social welfare with a specialization in administration, community organizing and planning at the University of California, Berkeley.

She’d meet many LGBT activists and pioneers while in the Golden State — including Robin Tyler, who later with her partner Diane Olson would

become the first lesbian plaintiffs to file what became the successful lawsuit that helped bring marriage equality to the state.

Bodiford would also meet Tyler’s friend — attorney Gloria Allred — who represented them.

While in law school at the University of Southern California Bodiford became the student liaison of the Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles. As such, Bodiford was assigned Allred as her mentor. They’d go to court, lunches and dinners together.

“To me she was the superstar of feminist

lawyers,” she said. “She marched in gay Pride parades. She fought for gay rights. In Florida we had nothing, we couldn’t even sit on the same side of the booth. In California we had Gloria Allred.”

After Bodiford eventually moved back to South Florida, her goal was to be the “Gloria Allred of Broward County.”

AIDS ACTIVISM

Bodiford was also very involved in HIV/AIDS activism. Her younger gay brother, Peter, died of complications from the drug AZT.

He died in 1991, when Bodiford was 34 and he was just 29.

“He had active, full-blown AIDS,” she said. “The Gulf War was on. We had a president that never mentioned the word AIDS.”

She’d go on to work in crisis services support for those living with the disease.

Peter’s death had a big impact, Bodiford said. The two came out only two weeks apart from each other. She said her brother was her alter ego — only from the same parents.

“There was no way after my brother died of AIDS that I was going to be quiet,” Bodiford said. “I was in California in the ‘70s and ‘80s, the time of Harvey Milk, Robin Tyler, Gloria Allred — the time of gay rights fomenting in California. I was an on the edge, an observer, participant, cheering, clapping and crying.”

BROWARD CALLS

Back in South Florida after all the California highs and lows, Bodiford would strengthen the Broward County Human Rights Ordinance in 1996.

She worked on the Broward County Human Rights Ordinance of 2001 and was part of the Americans for Equality political action committee.

Bodiford served on the executive committee of the Broward County Democratic Party and on the board of The Pride Center at Equality Park.

There were many other titles and positions — including her heavy involvement with the Dolphin Democrats.

“When we got gay rights in Broward County, no one would know we worked an entire year before we actually had that go forth before the commission,” Bodiford said. “We even had to get the gay community onboard with gay rights.”

Bodiford said she worked closely with (now) Fort Lauderdale Mayor Dean Trantalis to educate the commissioners on the



Robin Bodiford (left) with Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz. Photo courtesy of Robin Bodiford.

importance of gay rights.

“I can’t tell you how many times I met with him in the morning,” she said. “We’d be meeting with commissioners to help them understand why we needed a law that says you can’t fire someone for being gay, or exclude gays from buying a condo together as a couple, or discriminate in housing, employment and places of public accommodation. You can’t break up our bars or raid the clubs, chasing and arresting.”

Bodiford began her private practice in 1994 in Fort Lauderdale. She specializes in wills and trusts, powers of attorney, health care surrogates, living wills, probate, trust administration, prenuptial and domestic partner agreements, Chapter 7 bankruptcy and residential real estate — many areas that can affect the LGBT population disproportionately.

AWARDS NIGHT

Bodiford has won too many awards to list in a single story. But her next one, as one of SAVE’s “Community Heroes,” won’t be lost on her, she said.

Another award that she treasures is when she received the Dolphin Democrats “Legacy Award” in 2017.

“The thrill of that was they said that [Florida Representative] Debbie Wasserman Schultz was attending and honoring the LGBTQ pioneers,” Bodiford said. “I said, ‘Well, I’ll do it if she introduces me.’ She did introduce me and I’ve met her many times over the years. Back in the day when she was running for her first elected position, she took me out for lunch. When people were running for office, especially the women, they’d take me out to lunch because I was trotting around town to all the gay groups.” *SFGN*



Robin Bodiford has lived much of her life in support of LGBTQ rights. Photo courtesy of Robin Bodiford.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON SAVE’S VIRTUAL GALA, GO TO SAVE.LGBT. TO CONTACT BODIFORD, GO TO LAWROBIN.COM.