



Changing Creating Change

National conference celebrates record numbers, big updates

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DETROIT - Heading into its 20th national conference, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force is shaking things up. A new name, a new time of year and a new line of workshops for seasoned activists top the list of changes at this year's conference.

Creating Change, the conference and series of workshops on LGBT equality, comes to the Motor City's Renaissance Center Feb. 6 -10. The Task Force reported record numbers of pre-registrations, leaving organizers to question if this year will break any records. On average, the week long event draws about 2,000 attendants.

"That's a big number for a conference in the heartland," said NGLTF Executive Director Matt Foreman. "We have a fantastic host committee in Detroit that has really been pushing the conference in Michigan and the surrounding states."

The conference landed in Detroit in part because of a Triangle Foundation capacity building grant from the Task Force. The two-year study, said Triangle Foundation Interim Executive Director Kate Runyon, spotlighted Detroit as a vital and important place to host the conference.

To pave the way for the conference, a host committee was mobilized last year. Its co-chairs Carrie Copeland, Curtis Lipscomb, Gabe Javier and Kate Runyon each oversaw the formation of three subcommittees, ranging from the "Old and Restless" to local promotions. Through the subcommittees, said Runyon, nearly 100 people with a variety of interests and skills were able to assist in the conferences planning.

Underscoring the powerful nature of the conference, the planning for Creating Change has already sparked change in the Motor City.

"Since we started meeting last spring, I have already seen change in our community. It has provided a great space for us to meet with each other in a proactive instead of reactive space," said Runyon. "There has been a deep and genuine hospitality that has run through this whole process. Creating Change in Michigan and Detroit isn't just for Feb. 6 - 10, it's for Feb. 11 and beyond."

Keeping with its name, Creating Change has a fresh approach this year. The most visible change is timing. Traditionally held in the fall, NGLTF moved the conference this year to place it strategically in front of the presidential election.

"We were always looking back on the election, and as a community we never had time to do any planning," explained Foreman. "This way, we will have time to figure out our priorities. There is a lot of energy because of the upcoming election."

Another new aspect of the conference is the addition of the Task Force Academy for Leadership and Action. Geared toward seasoned activists and community leaders, the new set of workshops will provide more in-depth training than has been traditionally offered at the conference. The new

line of workshops will be led by Task Force staff and experts from other national organizations like GLAAD.

"We are making sure that people at different skill levels have courses tailored to them," said Foreman. "The Academy for Leadership and Action is a select group of programs that we have intensely focused on to make sure they are the best training that you can get anywhere."

Changes in the conference's programming will include a more selective approach to workshop proposals that should enhance all levels of training offered.

"We only accepted one out of every three proposals this year. We had to make some hard decisions, but we are working to make this intensely rewarding for everyone who attends," said Foreman. "We are really focusing on making sure anyone coming to the conference leaves with enhanced skills. We are making sure that people at different skill levels have courses tailored to them."

The Triangle Foundation, reported Runyon, had three proposals accepted, including Intimate Partner Violence, Rapid Response and the First Nation's Caucus.

A staple of the weeklong event has always been the powerful Plenary Sessions. This year's powerhouse line up of speakers include; Mistress of Ceremonies Kate Clinton, NAACP Chairman Julian Bond, Bishop Gene Robinson and Matt Foreman on the State of the Movement.

Outside of the classroom, the city will be alive with the annual Winter Blast over the weekend, which includes ice skating, snowshoeing and an unforgettable 200 ft. snow slide.

"The Renaissance Center alone will be great, but we have the DIA and the People Mover," said Runyon. "There is so much that Detroit has to offer to our visitors."

On the social side, S.P.I.C.E. will host a reception and its regular Friday Nite Group Discussion at 8:30 p.m. on Feb. 8. Plus, those who don't attend Creating Change can still enjoy the Awareness Ball: Night of a Thousand Stars, at 11 p.m. on the same day. The ball is a fundraiser for the House of Infinity in the style of the movie "Paris is Burning."

"It will give a voice to the real flavor and history of the Detroit LGBT community," said Runyon. Detroit will also be showcased on Friday during the session entitled Metro Detroit LGBTQ History, which will feature three leading experts in the city's LGBT history: Marlon Bailey, Tim Retzloff and Roey Thorpe.

To register for Creating Change, or for more information, visit www.thetaskforce.org.