



## Philly Does Pride Real Big

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04/24/2008

Now in its 16th year, Philadelphia's Equality Forum - a week-long series of 63 separate events, including 34 panel discussions, 14 parties, 14 other special events, including a staging of "Hairspray" at the Academy of Music, and a gala dinner at the National Constitution Center - has become one of the world's largest and meatiest commemorations of LGBT Pride.

The 2008 Equality Forum takes place April 28 to May 4 in venues across Center City Philadelphia, with many streetscapes festooned with special banners.

As in past years, the Forum will feature leaders of the LGBT community drawn from across the nation to discuss politics, the law, the military, business, religion, race, and history as well as issues facing specific communities such as transgendered Americans and queer youth. And once again, a specific international theme overlays the Forum - this year, Gays and Lesbians in the Muslim World.

The panel on the Muslim World will be hosted by Gay City News' own Michael Luongo, whose extensive reporting on the Middle East published in this newspaper over the past six years has included stories based on his travels to both Afghanistan and, last year, Iraq. Luongo's November 22-29, 2007 cover story "Our Man in Baghdad" has been named a finalist for the Reporting Award to be announced by the New York chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists on May 15.

Luongo will be joined on the panel by El-Farouk Khaki, secretary-general and co-founder of the Canadian Muslim Union; Arsham Parsi, a founding member of the Iranian Queer Organization; John Scagliotti, executive producer at PBS' "In the Life" and director of "Dangerous Living: Coming Out in the Developing World;" and Parvez Sharma, director of "A Jihad for Love."

**This year's Racial Issues Panel focuses on the Latino/a community and will be led by moderator Javier Morgado, supervising producer of NBC's "Today Show." Morgado will be joined by Georgie Aguirre-Sacasa of the Human Rights Campaign, Pedro J. Rivera of the Greater Philadelphia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and Russell Roybal of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.**

A National Transgender Panel will be moderated by Jayden Sampson, an African-American transman who serves on the board of Philadelphia's Attic Youth Center, and will include Charlene Arcila, a trans consultant for the city's AIDS Activities Coordinating Office, Joe Ippolito, a therapist at the Mazzoni Center, and Andy Marra, the Asian-Pacific Islander media strategist at the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation.

Reverend Irene Monroe, a Harvard Divinity doctoral candidate, will moderate the 11th Annual National Religious Colloquy, with panelists Dr. Michael J. Adey, a field organizer for More Light Presbyterians, Rabbi Denise Eger, a leader in West Hollywood's Kol Ami Reform Synagogue, Reverend Michael Schuenemeyer, the health and wholeness advocacy executive at the United Church of Christ's Wider Church Ministries, and Dr. Leonard Swidler, a Temple University religion professor.

The year's youth panel will be moderated by Christian Fuscarino, from the Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network, and will feature Joshua Gonzalez, a student at Newark's University High School for the Humanities, Geoff Mino, a senior at the Solebury School in New Hope, Pennsylvania, Alauna Safarpour, a student at Princeton High School in New Jersey, and Jesse Saltzman, an eighth-grader from Princeton's John Witherspoon Middle School.

In addition to "Hairspray," other performance and cultural activities include a staging of "Hedwig and the Angry Inch," a screening of "A Jihad for Love," an interfaith service at Christ Church Philadelphia, and a couples blessing and Mass hosted by Dignity. Judy Shepard, who lost her son Matthew in a brutal anti-gay murder in Wyoming a decade ago, will appear in a conversation at the National Constitution Center.

Parties ranging from brunches to cocktail parties to late night club events will be held throughout the week, including some focusing on men, women, and youth.

The highlight of the week comes Saturday evening, May 3 at the International Equality Dinner, held at the National Constitution Center. This year's honoree will be New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson. For anyone suspicious that such a high-profile supporter of Barack Obama is being feted, it is worth noting that the dinner's honorary chair is Pennsylvania Governor Edward Rendell, about the closest friend Senator Hillary Clinton has this week. Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter, another Clintonite, will host the Forum's opening night kickoff party on April 28.

Malcolm Lazin, Equality Forum's executive director, has long argued that Philadelphia is a fitting place for a Gay Pride commemoration of this magnitude. It was outside of Independence Hall on July 4, 1965 that the nation witnessed the first public demonstration on behalf of homosexual civil rights. Identical events took place there on each of the subsequent Independence Days, until 1969, when the events in Greenwich Village a week before set the nation on course for transforming the pioneering work done in Philadelphia into a mass movement.

*Most of the events during Equality Forum, aside from the dinner, some parties, and some performances, are free of charge. Visit [EqualityForum.com](http://EqualityForum.com) for full details.*