



Miami Recognition Dinner Honors Local Activist and Leader Joan Schaeffer

by Aiyana Baida/EDGE Contributor
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When Anita Bryant initiated a campaign in 1977 against gay rights, it made Joan Schaeffer a believer - in the opposite viewpoint.

Bryant, a singer who was a second runner-up in the 1959 Miss America Pageant, used her celebrity and her affiliation with the conservative Southern Baptist Convention to campaign against gay equality.

Schaeffer, then 25 and a graduate of Florida State University, immersed herself in grass-root activism.

"Not because I was gay but because I was a human being, and she was trying to use religious beliefs to justify hating," Schaeffer said of Bryant.

Schaeffer, who is gay, got involved in political nonprofit organizations such as SAVE (Safeguarding American Values for Everyone) Dade Action PAC, Health Crisis Network and Miami Behavioral Health Center.

Since then she has continued her involvement in several non profit organizations, strivings to promote community awareness on issues important to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender community.

"I think that's the most important thing someone can do," Schaeffer said. "Support different organizations that exist."

Schaeffer's ardent commitment and activism will be highlighted at the 12th annual Miami Recognition Dinner sponsored by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. The event takes place Oct. 18 at the InterContinental Hotel in downtown Miami.

Also being recognized are Ilene Chaiken, creator and producer of the Showtime TV drama series, L Word, and Keith Boykin, journalist and former advisor to President Bill Clinton.

Schaeffer is the backbone of the community, said Michael Bath, special events manger for Task Force.

"She is always present at the events that serve the community; anywhere from social activism, to her temple, to youth services at Prideline," Bath said.

During the '80s Schaeffer worked to connect religious leaders of all denominations to the LGBT community. The process allowed her to form a network based on faith and committed followers.

"Religious leaders became educated to the existence of LGBT's in the community and the need for their support," said Schaeffer, 56, a Miami resident and a member of Temple Israel of Greater

Miami, was one of the founding members of Ru'ach, the gay and lesbian Havurah community.

The group works with clergy and congregants to raise awareness. Earlier this year, Schaeffer became vice president of Religious Affairs at the temple, where her many responsibilities include overseeing events and services for the temple's 400 families.

"It's long overdue," said Jerry Chasen of Schaeffer's award. A 2007 honoree and recipient of the Eddy McIntyre Community Service Award, Chasen was recognized for helping to work out a plan between the Dade Community Foundation and the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force**.

As a result, the annual Winter Party and Miami Recognition Dinner were saved. The Winter Party, a festival that takes place at several venues on Miami Beach, is a fundraiser for LGBT organizations in the Miami-Dade area. It also benefits the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Task Force members and the foundation have been working all year to prepare for this year's gala and its expected 700 guests, Bath said.

"It is a labor of love. A lot of hours and planning go into it," said Cathy Pareto, a volunteer for this year's dinner and member of the GLBT Community Project Funds Advisory Board, which works through the Dade Community Foundation to distribute the funds raised by the event.

The Task Force raised approximately \$180,000 from last year's dinner and the 20 08 Winter Party combined, Bath said. "The more money raised, the more money goes back into the community," he said.

The Task Force gives two-thirds of the profits to the Dade Community Foundation, which distributes funds to at least 15 different nonprofit organizations that support the LGBT community, Bath said.

Writer, performer and comedian Bruce Vilanch will serve as host of the evening. Vilanch has appeared on VH1's Celebrity Fit Club, and in Hairspray, the Musical. He also has contributed to and written various Broadway productions.

The other two honorees, Chaiken and Boykin, will fly in from Los Angeles and New York respectively. Boykin, a New York Times best selling author, is founder and president of National Black Justice Coalition, the editor of The Daily Voice newspaper and host of BET television show, My Two Cents.

Chaiken will be honored for her work in bringing lesbianism to mainstream America.

The evening includes a silent auction featuring items that range from travel packages to Europe and designer items to tickets to the Food and Wine Festival. Bids start off at 50 percent off face value.

"The idea of the silent auction is to augment the revenue, and the attendees get to go home with a bargain," said Liebe Gadinsky, a volunteer and board member with Dade Community Foundation.

What: 12th annual Miami Recognition Dinner

Where: InterContinental Hotel, 100 Chopin Plaza, Miami

When: Reception starts at 6 p.m., dinner and ceremony at 8 p.m., dance and after party at 10 p.m. Oct. 18

Tickets: \$200 for general admission; \$300 for VIP admission, which includes access to VIP area with private DJ and drink area, preferential seating, meet and greet with honorees and special

guests and take-home gift bags. Both admission prices include open bar and seated dinner.

For more information, call Special Events Manager Michael Bath at 305-571-1924.