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## Honoring Success: Outlaw Dinner Celebrates Three in Gay Community

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# Student Events

## Honoring Success

*Outlaw dinner celebrates three in gay community*



James A. Ver Steeg,  
executive director of the  
Pride Center of Western New York



Heath E. Miller '07,  
Outlaw president



Students from the undergraduate Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Alliance (LGBTQA)

Three people prominent in Western New York's gay and lesbian community were honored on the evening of Wednesday, April 27, as Outlaw – the Law School's student association for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people – celebrated its ninth annual recognition dinner at the Hyatt Regency Buffalo.

The honorees were **Barbra A. Kavanaugh '83**, confidential law clerk to New York State Supreme Court Justice John F. O'Donnell; **John H. Morgan**, executive director of the Men of Color Health Awareness Project; and **James A. Ver Steeg**, executive director of the Pride Center of Western New York.

Under the leadership of law student Heath Miller '07, Outlaw was revitalized this year. Previously part of the Progressive Law Society, it is now an indepen-

dent organization. In his remarks, Miller expressed his hope for an alliance among the groups throughout the University that support gay and lesbian students, including the undergraduate Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Alliance and a graduate student group similar to Outlaw in the Medical School.

In accepting their awards, two honorees used the occasion to detail the work of their areas of work.

Morgan said the Men of Color

Health Awareness Project, or MOCHA, "started as a cubicle in Rochester" and has grown in eight years to become the largest organization of its kind outside of New York City. The program, with an annual budget of more than \$1 million, provides services and support to people of color in the Rochester and Buffalo areas.

Morgan spoke of the barriers he and his colleagues had to overcome in getting the project going, such as existing AIDS and other organizations asserting that an effort specifically targeting people of color would be redundant to their work. But MOCHA, Morgan said, is "for people of color, by people of color," and thus is more effective in its demographic niche.

He reminded the law students in attendance, "You are advocates for the legal system. You are advocates for



Progressive Law Society (PLS) executive board (left to right): Rachel A. Vankoughnet '06, President, Sean P. Kelly '06 and Vice President, Sarah L. Couch '06, Secretary. The PLS awarded its annual Activist Gavel Award to Heath E. Miller '07 for his leadership with Outlaw.

John H. Morgan, executive director of the Men of Color Health Awareness (MOCHA) Project.

consumers. Never forget that is who you are."

**V**er Steeg, who worked previously for 10 years as director of public affairs for the local chapter of the American Automobile Association, said the Pride Center has been open for a year and a half. The Pride Center, funded through the New York State Department of Health, is an educational outreach to the LGBT community with special emphasis on substance abuse prevention. A recent program, for example, targeted the street drug crystal meth.

He spoke more broadly about the question of what makes LGBT people – who represent both sexes and all races and sexual orientations – a cohesive community. "We define the ties

that bind us through unfortunate adversity," he said. "The one thing that compels this community to cohesion is the fact that LGBT persons are considered second-class citizens."

To combat that, he urged those in attendance to network as gay lawyers, to build the relationships that will "make sure people understand your fundamental humanity."

The third honoree, Kavanaugh, was kept from the dinner by a schedule conflict. She has a long career in neighborhood legal services and poverty law, and served for three years on the Buffalo Common Council. Kavanaugh also ran the state attorney general's office in Buffalo for three years. She and her partner of 20 years, Lynn Edelman, were the first same-sex couple in Erie County to jointly adopt children.

*"You are advocates for the legal system. You are advocates for consumers. Never forget that is who you are."*