In Every Color: Outlaw Dinner Celebrates A Rainbow of Possibilities

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In every color

OUTLaw Dinner celebrates a rainbow of possibilities

The beauty and meaning of the rainbow was everywhere—from a rainbow flag behind the dais, to the votive candles on the tables, to a length of ribbon cleverly woven into the evening’s program—at the 10th annual OUTLaw Dinner.

Held May 3 in the Buffalo/Niagara Marriott, the dinner was a gathering for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender law students, and their heterosexual allies, and a time to celebrate the diversity that the rainbow has come to represent.

Incoming OUTLaw President Alex Kansten gave a brief history of how the rainbow was adopted as a symbol, saying, “For as long as there has been a gay community, it has come in Technicolor.” The first rainbow flag was created in 1978, she said, and it had eight colors. But the pink created production problems, so the familiar seven-color rainbow flag—in red, orange, yellow, blue, green, indigo and violet—came to be the standard.

Kansten also called for greater inclusiveness, saying that the movement should do more to welcome transgender people and persons of color. “We not only celebrate how far we have come, but how far we have to travel to realize the full potential of this flag,” she said.

Linda Marsh ’78, of the Buffalo law firm Ziller, Marsh & Lang, spoke in introduction to the night’s honoree, Marvin L. Henchbarger, executive director of Gay & Lesbian Youth Services of Western New York. Marsh, whose older son is gay, is president of GLYS.

The organization is, she said, “a place of personal growth, of advocacy, of all kinds of wonderful projects. It is just a wonderful place.”

She then spoke about some of the young people who have been an integral part of Gay and Lesbian Youth Services—for example, the young woman who came dressed entirely in black clothes, hair hanging over one eye, piercings all over, and an attitude to match. “As we got to know her and the layers peeled away, she turned out to be a pretty terrific person. Just today I saw her left eye for the first time!”

At Niagara Falls High School, she said, a gay-straight alliance group has formed despite the county’s generally conservative bent. “These young people are remarkable,” she said. “Some of them are not even out at home. In the face of the things they deal with, they do very well.”

And indeed, she said, people in Western New York have in general become more accepting over the years. She remembered that in 1986 when GLYS needed new office space, it was hard to come by, while the program finally landed at the YWCA, there were indignant letters to the editor and even bomb threats. By contrast, she said, GLYS moved again last year—and the group had people calling with offers of space.

For the lawyers and future lawyers in attendance, Henchbarger noted that “legal services have not caught up” to this broad change in attitudes. In such areas as same-sex marriage and spousal rights, she said, “you have the power to change that.”

Outgoing OUTLaw President Heath Miller ’07 recognized fellow student Jason Joaquin Almonte ’07 for writing a grant application to Sub Board I that won a $750 programming grant for the dinner. He also thanked UB Law School Dean Nils Olsen, who was present, for a Dean’s Grant in support. The UB Law Alumni Association and the Student Bar Association also contributed financially to the event.

Graduating senior Jessica M. Keltz ’06 was presented the Lavender Gavel Award for her work with OUTLaw.

Linda J. Marsh ’78 and Marvin L. Henchbarger, executive director of Gay & Lesbian Youth Services of Western New York
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Henchbarger began by saying that observers tend to focus on the problems faced by gay and lesbian young people—such issues as alcohol and drug abuse, and high dropout rates. “But our young people are fine,” she said. “They are absolutely fine. There is nothing wrong with our young people. The problem is with our society that cannot accept anyone different.”

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