



**OPALGA honors its own, civil-union advocates at gala
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Oak Park Area Lesbian and Gay Association (OPALGA) held its annual awards gala—with the theme "Giving Back"—Nov. 19 at the Nineteenth Century Club.

Approximately 100 people attended the event, and noshed on hors d'oeuvres and cocktails before sitting down to buffet dinners served in martini glasses.

Following the dinner, OPALGA co-chairs Greg Raub and Cheryl Haugh welcomed the guests before distributing awards. A posthumous Oak Park Area Leadership (OPAL) award was given to former OPALGA co-chair Susan Anderson; Anderson's niece, Melissa, accepted the award on her late aunt's behalf. The OPALGA 2009 Task Force was given the second OPAL award of the evening for its work to revive and restructure OPALGA in a time of financial crisis. Oak Park Village Trustee Ray Johnson, who chaired the debt management sub-committee, accepted the honor.

Also, OPALGA recognized key advocates who fought for the successful passage of the state's civil-unions bill. Among the activists recognized were Equality Illinois Executive Director Bernard Cherkasov, Rocco Claps from the Illinois Department of Human Rights, ACLU of Illinois' Mary Dixon, Rick Garcia, Ramon Gardenhire from the AIDS Foundation of Chicago, Caitlin Huxley from the Log Cabin Republicans, state Rep. Camille Lilly, Anthony Martinez from The Civil Rights Agenda, state Rep. Deb Mell and Rosa Yadira Ortiz from Lambda Legal Midwest.

Representatives for state Rep. Sara Feigenholtz and state Sen. Don Harmon accepted the award for them. Those who could not attend but were recognized included state Reps. LaShawn K. Ford, Greg Harris and Angelo Saviano as well as state Sen. Heather Steans, former Illinois State Sen. Carol Ronen, Chris Jessup, Art Johnson, Laura Ricketts, Dave Horwich and Sean Bennett.

For the first time, organizations whose programming and services fulfill the mission of OPALGA will share in the event's monetary proceeds. These organization are the AIDS prevention program at PCC Community Wellness; the Illinois Safe Schools Alliance; the Oak Park chapter of PFLAG; and two programs at the Howard Brown Health Center: Broadway Youth Center and the Lesbian Community Care Project.

Also, the event featured both silent and live auctions, with offerings including airline tickets, a signed copy of Chaz Bono's book, artwork and dinner for two with radio legend Terry Hemmert, among other items.

For more information on OPALGA visit [http:// www.opalga.org](http://www.opalga.org) .