



Legacy Walk launches on Halsted Street

by Carrie Maxwell

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On the 25th anniversary of the start of National Coming Out Day, more than 200 people attended a dedication ceremony and reception for the Legacy Walk, an outdoor museum created by The Legacy project to honor the work of LGBT pioneers. The event took place on a balmy, sunny fall afternoon Oct. 11 on Halsted Street between Belmont and Waveland.

The festivities began with a pre-ceremony reception at Sidetrack bar followed by an outdoor dedication ceremony.

During the ceremony the Chicago Gay Men's Chorus performed lesbian writer Katherine Lee Bates' "America the Beautiful" and Rev. Wayne Bradley gave the invocation. Legacy board chair Ralph Kennedy served as the emcee and vice-chair Laura Angelucci gave the closing remarks.

The ceremony also featured remarks by state Rep. Greg Harris, who spoke on behalf of Gov. Pat Quinn, and Commissioner of the Chicago Department on Human Relations Mona Noriega, who spoke on behalf of Mayor Rahm Emmanuel. Scheduling conflicts prevented both Quinn and Emmanuel from attending the event.

Reading from Quinn's remarks, Kennedy said, "I Pat Quinn, governor of the state of Illinois, do hereby proclaim Oct. 11, 2012 as Legacy Walk day and do hereby encourage all residents of the Land of Lincoln to learn about and honor the significant contributions that GLBT individuals have made throughout the history of the world."

Harris said, "With the dedication of the Legacy Walk we are now joining the legions of folks before us who have contributed to making this one of the greatest cities on the face of this planet."

Prior to reading from Emmanuel's remarks Noriega noted that "without the tenacity, dedication and commitment of Victor Salvo—executive director and founder of the Legacy Project/Walk—this walking museum wouldn't have happened."

Ald. Tom Tunney told the crowd that "history is coming once again to Halsted Street and I'm so glad to be a part of it."

During Salvo's keynote address he acknowledged former 44th Ward Community Liaison Max Bever and 44th Ward Chief of Staff Bennett Lawson for their assistance in navigating the intricacies of city government as well as two volunteers on the project—Brother Michael Oboza and this reporter.

"The notion of a collective tribute to GLBT people who have been overlooked by history or obscured by historians is not new That is where the Legacy Walk comes in. Because it puts that history right on the street where everybody can read it," said Salvo. "Cutting across lines of gender, class, race, sexual orientation, gender identification and nationality, the Legacy Project—and the Legacy Walk—is about all of us—in whatever form we may exist. It is about rescuing unsung GLBT heroes from obscurity, and reuniting others—whose sexuality has been edited away—with the truth about their lives."

Ending his remarks, Salvo spoke about the Legacy Project Education Initiative (LPEI), which will debut next spring. The LPEI—co-sponsored by the Illinois Safe Schools Alliance—will provide gay-straight alliance faculty advisors with educational materials for students and will be made available for free on the Legacy Project Website for all educators to use in their classrooms.

A live reveal of Sgt. Leonard Matlovich's plaque—sponsored by Patrick Bova and James Darby—closed out the dedication ceremony (Matlovich was chosen to represent the 17 other people who were inducted this year). Representatives from the American Veterans for Equal Rights Color Guard took part in the ceremony: Bova, Darby, Jean Albright, Mary Ellen Burns, Brian Donegan, and Ed Wosylus. Susan Jones and Melissa Terrell of the Lakeside Pride Band performed "Taps" during the live reveal.

The other 2012 inductees are: Jane Addams—sponsored by the Heartland Alliance; Alvin Ailey—sponsored by Fifth Third Bank; Reinaldo Arenas—sponsored by Art Johnston and Jose Pena; James Baldwin—sponsored by friends of the late Tim Imse; Dr. Margaret Chung, Harvey Milk, and Rep. Barbara Jordan sponsored by Levi Strauss and Co.; Barbara Gittings—sponsored by the Adler School of Professional Psychology; Keith Haring—sponsored by Paul Highfield, Myron Mix, Elizabeth Liechty, Chris Pritchard, Eddie Seslowsky, Kirin Dolezal, Paul DeSousa and Patrick Torres; Christine Jorgensen—sponsored by the Tawani Foundation; Frida Kahlo—sponsored by the Highfield Group; Dr. Alfred Kinsey—sponsored by the Northalsted Business Alliance; Dra. Antonia Pantoja—sponsored by the Aspira Association; Bayard Rustin—sponsored by Equality Illinois; Alan Turing—sponsored by Salvo and Joseph Coray; the Two Spirit People—sponsored by BMO Harris Bank; and Oscar Wilde—sponsored by retired Judge Tom Chiola.

After the ceremony, guests strolled down Halsted Street to see a number of the plaques before returning to Sidetrack for a post-ceremony reception featuring a performance by award-winning singer-songwriter Matt Alber.

Also in attendance were visiting dignitaries representing a number of the 2012 inductees; all members of the Legacy Project board of directors; a number of the advisory board of academics, researchers and biographers; and all but one of the plaque sponsors.

Along with Harris, Noriega and Tunney, Ald. James Cappleman, U.S. Rep. Mike Quigley and state Rep. Sara Feigenholtz also attended the dedication ceremony.

"The Legacy Walk affords us the ability to look back at the rich heritage of our past, and acknowledging the hard work of the individuals who have been highlighted along Halsted will help prepare us for the journey that still lies ahead for the LGBT community We've come so far, but we still have work to do," said Cappleman.

"Throughout the history of this country, the contributions of LGBT people have been minimized, or worse—outright ignored. The Legacy Project helps restore some of that lost history by telling the stories of individuals who transcended bigotry and made meaningful contributions to our society. The project reminds us what this community has achieved but, just as important, it will also inspire the continuing efforts of future LGBT leaders," said Quigley.

"Chronicling the significant, rich and global contributions of the LGBT community, the Legacy Walk will play an important role in educating the public, disproving stereotypes, fostering compassion, and improving humanity. I couldn't be more proud to have such a unique and significant institution right on Halsted Street for everyone to experience and I look forward to learning more as it grows and evolves each year. I am fortunate to have this in my district," said Feigenholtz.

Johnston, co-owner of Sidetrack, said, "By reclaiming our past in such a public way, the Legacy Walk offers real hope to coming generations of LGBT youth that their futures can be successful, fulfilling and happy. After all, if we do not know where we came from, how can we ever really know where we are going."

Center on Halsted Chief Executive Officer Modesto Tico Valle said, "Our movement has made real advances over the years. We no longer hide behind curtains, but instead celebrate our accomplishments with permanent, visible markers for all to celebrate. The Legacy Project reminds us of where we've come from and where we can go when all work together."

The Legacy Walk is the first-of-its-kind open-air museum honoring notable LGBT people across history and from around the world. Each of the people inducted this year are represented with a bronze plaque that is affixed to the "rainbow pylons" that dot the sidewalks of North Halsted. They feature an image of the inductee and a short biography honoring the individual's

contributions to the world. Information about the sponsor(s) of each inductee is also noted below each of the bronze plaques.

See www.legacyprojectchicago.org for more information.

Note: Carrie Maxwell is also a volunteer with the Legacy Project.