

WINDY CITY MEDIA GROUP

Chicago Gay Men's Chorus marks 30 years

by Kate Sosin, *Windy City Times*

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Photo by Kate Sosin

For the last three decades, Chicago Gay Men's Chorus (CGMC) has been the soundtrack for countless milestones in the city's LGBT community. On Oct. 15, the group marked its own milestone—30 years in existence.

The anniversary celebration, held at Center on Halsted, reflected on the group's connection to Chicago LGBT history—from the AIDS crisis to the present. And it looked toward the organization's future as it continues to grow and attract younger members.

The evening opened with a reception outside the Center's Hoover-Leppen Theatre followed by comments from community leaders and performances from choir members.

Vital Bridges co-founder Lori Cannon remembered the comfort that CGMC offered at the start of the AIDS crisis.

"The Chicago Gay Men's Chorus was like a beacon of hope in the gathering darkness," Cannon said. "Even as AIDS began to claim countless members of CGMC—a devastation to your own lives—without fail, show after show, year after year, you have always come forward and always made sure there was a block of tickets available for us to give our clients, our volunteers, and people who, more often than not, are both volunteers and clients."

State Rep. Sara Feigenholtz recalled the comfort that CGMC provided to her friend after he lost his wife, and the comfort the chorus provided her after that same friend recently passed away.

Sidetrack bar co-owner Art Johnston recalled a cold Valentine's Day in 1989 when the chorus arrived at Ald. Kathy Osterman's house to cheer her because she was ill and the way Osterman included the chorus in city events thereafter.

"I realized that this is what community members do for each other," said Johnston.

Ald. James Cappleman discussed the progress made by LGBT Chicagoans and the way CGMC helped the community grieve and celebrate along the way.

"CGMC gave a voice to our experiences," Cappleman said.

Ald. Tom Tunney read a resolution from Mayor Rahm Emanuel honoring CGMC's 30 anniversary.

The chorus also previewed songs from its upcoming concerts with two small-group performances.

Ben Hladilek, president of the CGMC board, announced the hiring of CGMC's first full-time executive director. Kent Bartram, a longtime supporter of CGMC, has been hired for the 2012-2013 season.

"It's amazing to think about everything that's changed in the last 30 years," said Hladilek. "It's also amazing to think about the chorus and how much the chorus has changed."

CGMC ended the evening with a Champaign toast.