

Celebrating Cambridge's proud history

by Dana Rudolph
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"Cambridge: It's Always Been a Little Queer" proclaimed the pink-and-purple T-shirts given out by Cambridge Mayor E. Denise Simmons' office at its 18th annual Pride Brunch on June 14. Simmons and her staff welcomed a roomful of guests to the City Council chambers to celebrate the brunch's theme of "One Proud Family" and honor several who have worked to support this vision.

Sue Hyde of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, who has helped organize the brunch for many years, was the event's "Mistress of Ceremonies." She began by recapping the long, proud tradition of LGBT rights in Cambridge, noting that Cambridge was the first city in the U.S. to elect an African-American gay mayor, and the first in the Commonwealth to institute domestic partnership legislation, enact non-discrimination protections on the basis of sexual orientation, and then to amend that law to include gender identity. The city's most visible claim to LGBT fame, though, was as the first jurisdiction in the country to issue legal marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

Cambridge was also the first city in the U.S. to be led by an African-American lesbian mayor, Hyde said, introducing Simmons to much applause. Simmons, a mother and grandmother, reinforced the event's theme by asserting that Cambridge is a great city for raising a family - of any type.

"When I first took office, I got all these phone calls: 'What's it like to be gay in Cambridge?' Please don't let people know," she responded in mock concern. "I get up in the morning and wake the children. Then we have breakfast. ... We drive to a public school. At the end of the day, we come home, and - this is really something unusual - we eat dinner together. Being gay is just a part of who we are and it doesn't really make me - us - all that different."

Simmons added to Hyde's list of the city's accomplishments: it has an LGBT commission, and has had an openly gay principal at its high school, and will soon have an LGBT town meeting. It was the first city in the U.S. to have a family liaison to the LGBT community, Melody Brazo. Simmons also noted the elected officials, LGBT and straight, who support the rights of all citizens. Indeed, many members of the City Council were in attendance or made a point to send regrets. Other notable attendees included state Sen. Anthony Gallucio (D-Cambridge), Rep. Alice Wolf (D-Cambridge), a former mayor of Cambridge herself, and School Committee members Marc McGovern, Alfred Fantini, and Nancy Tauber.

Arthur Lipkin, another long-time Cambridge activist, then took the stage. Lipkin is a member of the Massachusetts Commission on GLBT Youth and a former English teacher at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School (CRLS), where he was the state's first openly gay public-school teacher. Every year since 1995, he and his partner Robert Ellsworth have given the Rose Lipkin Award to the graduating senior from CRLS "who has done the most to advance the cause of justice and dignity for GLBT young people at the high school." This year, three students were equal contenders, so Lipkin and Ellsworth chose to honor them all.

Elizabeth Eastwood, the first honoree, has been a long-time member of Project 10 East (P 10), the school's gay-straight alliance. "Elizabeth has unique strengths in dealing with homophobia and name calling and always respectfully offers her experience and advice to newer students," Lipkin said.

The "bilingual, multicultural" Maya Ridders DeBorst, Lipkin said, "has helped Project 10 be more aware of the world and cultural issues, and brings a sense of serenity and maturity to our group. Maya was a leader in P 10 and in the STARS [Students Advocating Respect] program," among other accomplishments.

Valerie Bryant, the last awardee, was another P 10 leader. "She has a generosity of spirit that transcends her age," said Lipkin. "Valerie has an amazing amount of courage in confronting homophobia in her peers. She never lets any level of name-calling go by without using it as a teachable moment."

The brunch showed there are many ways for members of the LGBT community to make an impact. The event's honored guest was not a political activist, but author and illustrator Sarah Brannen, whose children's book *Uncle Bobby's Wedding* was inspired by images of the first married same-sex couples leaving Cambridge City Hall. The book tells the story of Chloe, a young guinea pig who is afraid her beloved uncle won't have time for her anymore after he marries his boyfriend. Uncle Bobby reassures Chloe that she will always be a special part of his life, and that she is gaining an uncle, not losing one (see "Mombian," March 20). Hyde observed that the far right has already targeted the book, but she said Brannen should know her fans would defend her wonderful and validating work.

The event's keynote speaker, Jennifer Chrisler, executive director of the Family Equality Council (FEC), also noted Cambridge's special place in the LGBT-rights movement, asking, "Where else would the LGBT community stand up and rally for marriage at midnight, on a Sunday - which is a school night for those of us who are parents - but in Cambridge?" Despite much progress, though, she said, "there's still a question before us today: where do we go next, who have we left behind, and how do we walk the road to the future together?"

Part of the answer, she said, is to keep telling stories of our families. She related her experience of being at a playgroup with her sons when the Goodridge marriage decision was announced. An evangelical Christian mom in the group told her with sincerity that she was happy for Chrisler and her family. Chrisler observed, "I changed a heart and a mind at that moment by virtue of being who I was in the world, being with my children in the world. ... Imagine if we could have tens of millions of moments like that, all across the country. Then we'd know the real power that this community, that our family has to change the world."

Chrisler said she found agreement from a surprising source, Pope John Paul II, who said, "As the family goes, so goes the nation, and so goes the whole world in which we live."

"It would be an amazing day when we could see the spirit that's embodied here in Massachusetts and in California displaying itself all over the world," said Chrisler. She added that while marriage equality is an important part of this, it is not enough. The community must work "to support and legitimize the many diverse ways that families come together to support one another."

It is a daunting task, she acknowledged, but asserted "I do believe it is the power of one voice, one story, one person, one proud family that will change the face of this civil-rights movement, and I know that here in Cambridge, here in Massachusetts, here in our community, as diverse as it is, we do that work every single day."

The brunch ended with the presentation of three Community Recognition Awards. The first went to Joanne Shapiro, training coordinator of the Cambridge Police Academy, who planned and directed LGBT-awareness training sessions for Cambridge police in 2007 and 2008. The next

was for Richard M. Juang, one of the founders of the Interfaith Coalition for Transgender Equality (ICTE), which has built clergy and congregational support for a bill to include gender identity and expression in the state's non-discrimination and hate crimes laws, House Bill 1722. The final honoree was Libby Bouvier, one of the founders of the History Project in 1980 and the only original member still active. Hyde noted her perseverance, vision, and grit in keeping the Project going and gaining it national recognition. Bouvier was also an original leader of the Women's Center on Pleasant Street in Cambridge, and has walked in the AIDS Walk every year since 1986.

In her own remarks, Bouvier expounded on Chrisler's words about the impact of personal stories. "We all have a stake in preserving this history, and a responsibility to document our own lives and the lives of the people we love and of our communities," she said. "More than that, we have to share these stories of our community struggles and triumphs with others: with educators, with students and young people, with researchers, with our friends and loved ones."