



# Equality News

Equality Florida is building a state of equal rights for all Floridians inclusive of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

## "Pride Is Back" Rally Draws 5,000 to Downtown Tampa

**O**n Sunday June 26th, Equality Florida hosted an estimated 5,000 supporters, gay and straight alike, for a rally and march. The demonstrators demanded the repeal of a new Hillsborough County policy that bans county agencies from participating in any events that portray gay people in a positive light.

"This policy was intended to be an insult to all gay people. They hoped to silence a minority, make us invisible and afraid, but their plan backfired," said Nadine Smith, Equality Florida's Executive Director, who addressed the overflowing crowd. "Instead, it has provoked outrage from every corner of the community. Gay and straight, artists and business leaders, parents and young people, community leaders and ordinary citizens are standing up to this message of bigotry."

Since the policy's passage, dozens of community leaders and groups have spoken out against discrimination and in support of diversity, including the Tampa Chamber of Commerce, Mayor Pam Iorio, the NAACP's Hillsborough and St. Petersburg chapters and the Florida Library Association.

More than 9,000 emails have been sent through Equality Florida's Web site. Additionally, of the emails sent directly from the County website, 1801 people have email to oppose the ban and only 123 have emailed in support.

Equality Florida has had ongoing state and national media coverage since this policy passed, including coverage in the New York Times. Smith appeared as a guest on MSNBC's Connected Coast-to-Coast and on conservative Michael Medved's nationally syndicated radio show. Financial Times, the international reknowned business publication, sent a reporter to cover the ban

### Inside:

Letter from the Chair  
EQFL Staff Update  
Legislative Update  
Jon Stryker Gift  
Monthly MeetUp's  
Transsexual Father's Rights  
Possible Tampa Murders



*Pride*  
IS BACK!



in their upcoming issue. For a comprehensive list of coverage and upcoming events, visit [www.eqfl.org](http://www.eqfl.org) and click on the "Banned in Hillsborough" link. Commissioner Ronda Storms introduced the ban which passed 5-1, with one anti-gay commissioner out of the room. The commission went even further and voted 6-1 to prevent the new policy from being repealed except by a super majority vote of the commission following a public hearing.

Commissioner Kathy Castor was the only one to speak out against the measure. "Government should not be in the business of promoting discrimination," said Castor before casting the only vote in opposition.

If you would like to let the Hillsborough Board of County Commissioners know where you stand on discrimination, go to [www.EQFL.org](http://www.EQFL.org) and click on the "Banned in Hillsborough" link.



5,000 March to the County Administration Building

# Letter from the Chair

## 2005 Shaping Up To Be Our Busiest Year Ever

The year began with the far-right launching an attack on our relationships through a campaign to amend the Florida Constitution. If passed, the measure would not only bar equal access to marriage, it would block civil unions and threaten to repeal domestic partnership policies across the state. Because of your support, Equality Florida was able to invest \$40,000 in a first-ever statewide poll on voter attitudes regarding their LGBT neighbors. The results, detailed in this newsletter, are already helping shape our strategy.

We're currently spearheading a coalition of local, state and national organizations and together we will be launching a campaign next month to defend our families and ourselves. Between now and the November 2006 elections, those who support this amendment will demonize us and play politics with our lives. In every corner of our state, we will need to stand together as never before. Get involved by starting a local Equality Florida meeting in your community or join an existing one today.

Equality Florida has also been instrumental in assisting communities across Florida facing challenges from local government. We were plaintiffs, along with St. Augustine Pride Committee, in a successful suit to end St. Augustine's discriminatory refusal to allow gay pride flags to be flown from the historic Bridge of Lions.

In Miami Beach, we are part of a coalition working to pass the most inclusive equal benefits policy in the country. In Broward County, we've convened local leaders to respond to vicious anti-gay comments by members of the school systems Diversity Committee who say the "We Are Family" video sends subliminal pro-gay messages to students.



Perhaps our biggest local challenge has come from Hillsborough County. Equality Florida is leading the community's response to the county commission's ban prohibiting county agencies from acknowledging any event that portrays gay people in a positive light. This issue has garnered national media attention and rejuvenated the activist spirit in the Tampa Bay area. Some 5,000 people came out to Equality Florida's "Pride is Back" rally and hundreds more have become members and active volunteers.

On the fundraising front, we've received two truly notable gifts. For the second year in a row, Jon Stryker has once again become our largest single donor with a gift of \$175,000 including a \$50,000 matching gift to encourage more supporters to join our leadership donor circle, the Florida Council. We are extremely grateful to Jim Peebles, a longtime activist, supporter, and surviving partner to Scott Opler, for helping fulfill a multi-year pledge of \$300,000 with the final installment of \$150,000. Thanks to all of you, we have doubled the number of supporters who became sustaining members with a convenient monthly gift.

Lastly, I want to give a special mention to the Key West Reception Committee for setting a very high bar for our regional receptions. Not only did the committee raise nearly \$45,000, but they have already begun work on next year's event and have organized a major event called "Pride in Exile" to support and fund Hillsborough County's efforts.

This is an amazing time in the history of our march toward equality! None of this progress is possible without your help. I urge you to take this opportunity to bring your gift to a level that reflects the breadth of your commitment to this work. Help us show the country that "PRIDE IS BACK" in the state of Florida! In Pride,

Equality Florida Board  
Co-Chair & Florida  
Council Member

## Florida 3 Year-old Victim of Gay Bashing

It is with great sadness and outrage that we read another headline alleging that a child has been harmed, this time killed because of an irrational fear that he might be gay.

A Tampa father has been convicted of beating his three-year-old son to death because he was afraid the child might be gay. According to testimony, the father believed he could convert his son by beating him to "toughen him up." During the trial, the toddler's mother testified that her 21 year-old husband, Ronnie Paris Jr., thought the boy was a "sissy," might be gay and needed to learn how to box.

"This incident is heartbreaking and absolutely horrific," said Nadine Smith, Executive Director of Equality Florida. "We have heard too many stories of parents telling their children, 'I would prefer you were dead than gay.' Bigotry, ignorance and fear create this madness when left unchecked." Sometimes the injuries are not lethal or even physical. We must also stand up to the psychological abuse inflicted.

Some well-meaning parents, following advice from religious extremists, force their children to attend conversion therapy ministries, that has been discredited by all major medical associations, including the AMA and American Psychiatric Association.

## EQFL Staff Update

### Please welcome Joseph Saunders to Equality Florida as our Central Florida Field Coordinator.

Joe is a recent graduate of the University of Central Florida where he received a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. He has a strong commitment to LGBT activism as represented by his many endeavors, including: founding the Florida Collegiate Pride Coalition, chairing Orlando's National Coming Out Day 2004 and coordinating "Kids Come First," a public education campaign on Florida's anti-gay adoption ban. We are proud and excited to have Joe as a member of the Equality Florida staff!



## Equality Florida Welcomes Oldest Member

Dorris Small, a Tampa Bay resident, recently joined Equality Florida after witnessing Equality Florida respond to Hillsborough's anti-gay ban.

"I wanted to send a contribution to Equality Florida because I believe in what they're fighting for," said Dorris Small, who at 98 becomes Equality Florida's oldest member. "I saw Nadine Smith on the television and I thought she did such a wonderful job explaining why all of us have to fight discrimination whenever we see it."



## 2005 Florida Council

### The Governors' Club (\$10,000 +)

Jon Stryker  
Scott Opler Foundation  
Robert Sanderson & Dyce Craig  
Mickey Macintyre & Scollay Petry  
Human Rights Campaign

### Florida Cabinet (\$5,000+)

Doug Mayberry & Michael Philip  
National Gay & Lesbian Task Force  
Robert Schwartz & Rob Hancock  
Dan Skahen & Wayne Smith  
Nadine Smith  
Andrew Tobias & Charles Nolan

### Florida Senate (\$2,500+)

Jon Allen & Martin Kay  
Heather Carruthers  
William Condon & George Beaupre  
Vicki Gordon & Rick Pinckney  
Jamie Griffin & John Crossley

### Florida House (\$1,000+)

William Adams Jr & David Alt  
Charles Allen  
John Alvarado & Blair Gordon  
Frederick Bertron & Tim Creagan  
Mabry Binnicker  
Campbell Cawood  
Ross Claiborne  
Community Foundation of the Florida Keys  
Tracy Copes & Tabitha Deas  
David Correia & James DeCampra  
C. Chad Cronin  
Carla Curtis & Scott Barry  
Philip Dearborn  
Keith Dempster & James Olson  
Michael Dively  
Tom Dyer  
Robert Graham & Paul Fasana  
Hilda Hidalgo  
H. Scott Huizenga  
George Kessinger  
Dr. George Kling  
Harry Kraut  
John Labus  
Thomas Lavender & Debbi Rothstein  
Thom Leffler  
Brian McNaught & Ray Struble  
Richard Milstein & Eric Hankin  
Bradley Newman  
John Padget & Jacob Gelt Dekker  
Patricia Padilla  
Bill Peters & Warren Davidson  
Dana Philp  
Stratton Pollitzer & Christopher Boykin  
Rick Pulsinelli and Johnny Oye  
Wendy Reiner  
Martha Robinson  
John Ross  
Frank Romano & Joe Liszka  
Philip Sheldon  
Howard Simon  
John L. & Mary M. Tracy Foundation  
Charles Urstadt & Kevin Noonan  
Rose Walton and Marge Sherwin  
Susan Webster  
Brian Winfield & Kim Byrd

# Fundraising Spotlight:

## Jon Stryker Funds Work With \$175,000 Gift \$50,000 Challenge to Encourage New Donors

For the second year in a row, Jon Stryker has once again become our largest single donor with a gift of **\$175,000** including a **\$50,000** matching gift to encourage more supporters to join our leadership donor circle, the Florida Council.

Every gift from new member to the Florida Council will be matched up to **\$50,000**. That includes current members who increase their giving level.

The gift to Equality Florida Action Network, allows the money to fund our more direct political work.

Jon's commitment to Florida's future and his belief in our work are both humbling and gratifying, said Amy Mandel,

Equality Florida's Co-Chair. "We're confident that our members will step up and meet Jon's challenge."

## Opler Foundation Fullfills Multi-year Pledge

The Scott Opler Foundation has contributed **\$150,000** to Equality Florida, representing the balance of a **\$300,000** multi-year pledge of support. The lump-sum gift is intended to help build organizational infrastructure over the next three years.

The grant was made in the memory of Scott Opler, who created the foundation prior to his death from AIDS in 1993 at age 36. Scott was a Ph.D. candidate in Italian Renaissance architectural history at Harvard University when he died.

"We thank you and Equality Florida Human Rights Education Project for providing us with this opportunity to honor Scott and fulfill his wishes for his foundation with our support of your extremely important work," said Jim Peebles, Director and Treasurer of the foundation and Scott's surviving life-partner.

## Statewide Poll Shows Support Growing for Non-Discrimination Protections Opinions on Gay Relationships Shifting as Marriage Battle Looms

Working with a coalition of local and national partners, Equality Florida commissioned the first statewide poll to measure voter attitudes on a host of issues important to the LGBT Community.

The poll results offer clear and strong evidence of a desire to see laws that ban anti-gay discrimination in employment and public accommodations. The poll also revealed tremendous support for inclusive laws addressing school violence and bullying. Even on the hot-button issue of adoption, a majority of Floridians oppose a blanket ban that disqualifies potential gay applicants, preferring instead laws based solely on the best interests of the child.

"This poll clearly demonstrates that support for full equality grows the more people understand the real harm that is done when the laws fail to protect everyone equally," said Nadine Smith, Executive Director of Equality Florida.

According to a poll summary, attitudes about gay relationships are very complex and shifting. Consistent with national polls, the majority in our survey support a constitutional amendment banning gays from marriage.

However, a majority also supports some form of legal recognition of same-sex relationships ranging from civil unions to domestic partnership to full marriage rights. Support for the constitutional ban dips somewhat when voters realize the proposed measure also blocks civil unions and could threaten existing domestic partnership policies.

"Support among younger people is strong and while older Floridians are not ready to recognize full marriage equality, they are also rejecting a message that dehumanizes gay people and our families," Smith said.

Equality Florida is currently working with dozens of coalition partners in preparation for the Fall launch of a statewide campaign to oppose the proposed amendment. Watch for upcoming Action Alerts and visit [www.EQFL.org](http://www.EQFL.org) for up-to-date information.

The poll was conducted by Lake, Snell, Perry, Mermin/Decision Research. Findings are based on 1,200 completed interviews with a random sample of likely 2006 general election voters in Florida. Interviews were conducted (in English and Spanish) from May 21-28, 2005. Sampling error is +/- 2.8%.



Equality Florida is building a state of equal rights for all Floridians inclusive of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

# Legislative Spotlight:

## Lawmakers Block Safe Schools Bill

A bill that would have made Florida schools safer for students and provided training for teachers to address the epidemic of bullying and violence was defeated. The bill died when Committee Chair and outspoken opponent Rep. Ralph Arza forced a vote while a key legislator was away presenting legislation elsewhere.

"There are those who oppose this bill because it protects all students, including those who are bullied because they are gay," said Stratton Pollitzer, South Florida Director.

The bill is backed by a group of over 90 local, state, and national organizations, including the PTA, People for the American Way, NAACP, Florida Women's Consortium, The Children's Trust, Florida Education Association, Florida Association of School Psychologists, AFL-CIO- Florida and NOW. The coalition remains committed to ensuring that every school in Florida is a safe learning environment.



## Bills to Repeal Adoption Ban Force Legislative Debate

Three bills aimed at repealing or limiting the impact of Florida's anti-gay adoption ban were introduced this legislative session but none was heard in committee. The bills allowed lawmakers to raise the issue and served as a rallying cry for coalition groups working to do away with the ban. Senator Mandy Dawson introduced a bill that would have simply eliminated the nearly 30 year old ban, making "the best interest of the child" the only criteria for determining adoptions.

Representative Sheri McInvale introduced a bill in the House that would have allowed gay foster parents to adopt a child in their care under certain circumstances, at the discretion of a family law judge. Senator Nan Rich, introduced a companion bill in the Senate.

Privately, moderate Republicans and Democrats agree that the ban serves only to insult gay people and is NOT in the best interest of the thousands of Florida children locked in the foster care system.

**To join the effort to repeal the ban, email [adoption@eqfl.org](mailto:adoption@eqfl.org).**

*Left: FL Students attend the 2005 Safe Schools Lobby Day*

## Father Retains Parental Rights Historic Victory for Transgender Equality

On June 10, 2005, a historic settlement agreement was reached between Michael Kantaras and his former wife, Linda Kantaras, both residents of Holiday. Michael, a female-to-male transsexual father, has been fighting in court for almost seven years to retain his parental rights to the former couple's two children, Matthew and Irina. As part of the final settlement agreement, Michael will retain all of his parental rights and responsibilities and will continue to share legal custody of the children.

Michael's former wife knew he was transgender when they married, but when Michael filed for divorce, she attacked the validity of their marriage and Michael's status as both a man and a legal parent to the couple's two children.

In February 2003, Circuit Court judge Gerard O'Brien issued a groundbreaking ruling declaring that Michael was legally male, the marriage was legally valid and therefore Michael was a legal

parent. Furthermore, the ruling stated that Michael was the better, more fit parent and should be awarded primary residential custody of the children. In July 2004, the Court of Appeal's reversed Judge O'Brien's order, voiding the former couple's marriage. The appeals court sent the case back to the trial court to determine Michael's parental rights and custody of the two children.

After hearing about the case, television celebrity Dr. Phil, who had been focusing on child custody issues all year, invited the couple to be on his show and encouraged them to mediate the case for the sake of the children. After two all-day mediation sessions, the parties reached a settlement.

"Today, love, patience, and persistence, combined with a visionary judge and a little help from Dr. Phil has led to this historic settlement agreement," said Karen Doering, staff attorney for NCLR and in-house legal counsel to Equality Florida.

# Equality Florida Launches Statewide "MeetUp for Equality" Program

**T**his summer, Equality Florida has launched the MeetUp for Equality program in eight cities across Florida. MeetUps are monthly meetings that provide local residents with an opportunity to get involved in the fight for equality.

Those willing to be leaders in the fight are invited to contact Equality Florida about starting new monthly MeetUps in their local communities. Everyone is invited to join one of the eight currently scheduled MeetUps occurring in:

**North Florida** - Panama City, Pensacola, Gainesville & Tallahassee

**Central Florida** – Brandon, Orlando, St. Petersburg and Tampa

**South Florida** – Broward, Dade and West Palm Beach

As a grassroots statewide organization committed to equality and fairness, we need thousands of people from every corner of the state working together to achieve our goals, said Stratton Pollitzer, Assistant Director who oversees the organization's Field Program.



## MeetUp groups will support statewide efforts on issues we all care about:

- Repealing Florida's anti-gay, anti-family adoption ban
- Recognition and protection for our families through domestic partnership and equal marriage rights
- Safe Schools for ALL students
- Laws banning workplace discrimination
- Supporting local efforts to fight discrimination and ensure fairness

## Equality Florida MeetUp groups will create their own action plan, while Equality Florida staff will provide tools, training and support!

### Typical actions MeetUp might participate in:

- Gather Petitions
- Identify Supportive Voters
- Meet with Politicians
- Hold Fundraising Events
- Host Media Events and Town Hall meetings

To join an Equality Florida MeetUp in your community, click the MeetUp link on our website at [www.eqfl.org](http://www.eqfl.org). If you'd like to start one, send an email to [meetup@eqfl.org](mailto:meetup@eqfl.org) or call 813-870-3735.

## Spotlight On Broward: The Issue Is Bigger Than Big Bird

**A**t first glance it may seem absurd. The Broward County Diversity Committee has rejected the We Are Family video because Barney, Big Bird, Kermit and Sponge Bob are sending a subliminal pro-gay message. Many people are no doubt wondering "Is this a joke?" and at first it may sound like an absurd and regrettable, but ultimately isolated and forgettable, incident.

But listen a little more closely to the outrageous anti-gay attacks behind this decision, then ask yourself what you would do if they were talking about your family, about your children. Right-wing radio host Steve Kane, who also sits on the Diversity Committee, says he doesn't want children with same-sex parents talking about their families at school, calling that the "foot in the door."

As a gay dad, it's my family Kane is talking about, my daughter he says shouldn't talk about her family, my son he wants to fill with shame.

Kane calls gay groups that support and provide critical

resources, like anti-bullying programs and suicide prevention hotlines "devious, devious people".

That's where the far right's true agenda reveals itself - to remove every resource for gay students and to ignore the reality that gay students exist and that some children grow up in households headed by gay parents. They would rather throw out the very notion of diversity rather than extend that respect to families they deem unacceptable.

At times like this it is not just the comments of anti-gay zealots but also the silence of everyone who supports diversity that matters. That silence sends a message that teachers should avoid discussing gay families, that gay families and students are unwelcome, and that homophobes can bully our school officials. That silence casts doubt on a decision-making process in which the toxic bigotry that surrounds it is left unchallenged.

*A version of this editorial by Stratton Pollitzer appeared in the Sun-Sentinel. Broward School Board members have since denounced the anti-gay comments at a meeting.*

# Suspects Implicated in Murders of Two Tampa Gay Men

## Possibly linked to 15 additional cases, maybe more

According to Tampa police, Jason Galehouse and Michael Wacholtz - who disappeared within 24 hours of each other in December 2003 - were murdered by a pair of serial killers/rapists with as many as 15 victims in Tampa, Fort Lauderdale and Chicago.

In January 2004, Jason's mother contacted Equality Florida to help finding her son. Within days, we held a town hall meeting to build a bridge between the LGBT community, Tampa Police and the friends and family of the victims. We also educated police on the importance of talking with an LGBT victim's partner and friends as the primary source of information rather than the next-of-kin, who can often be estranged or uninformed.

Tampa Police Chief Stephen Hogue asked the community for any information that could help solve these cases. We immediately set up an adjacent room where the law enforcement could interview community members. Police tell us that the town hall meeting led two victims to come forward and described their horrific sexual assaults, providing investigators with valuable clues.

Jason Galehouse's friends and family organized a community wide search and kept the police investigation focused on finding Jason.

In subsequent weeks, other courageous young gay men came forward to report their sexual assault, rape and torture. They described very similar experiences and a very similar assailant. Some told police they knew their attacker by name.

Within a month of Equality Florida's town hall meeting, police sought a search warrant against Steve Lorenzo. We, along with Jason's mother and best friend, met with State Attorney Mark Ober when it appeared that some backroom politics might have been hampering the investigation.

A year later, Lorenzo now sits in jail without bond and has been charged with 7 counts of drug-assisted crimes of violence.

According to federal investigators, Lorenzo's accomplice, Scott Schweickert, has implicated himself and Lorenzo in the murders of Jason and Michael. As of this writing, Schweickert is also in jail without bond and murder charges are pending.

We know of at least six additional gay men who have disappeared from Tampa and Ft. Lauderdale, where Lorenzo also owns property. Two additional murders in Chicago, Schweickert's hometown, are being reinvestigated as a result of these revelations.

Now that arrests have been made we need those with information to come forward. Some who have been reluctant to talk to police have contacted Brian Winfield, our communication's director and our point person for police, the families and the community.

**If you have any information, you can go directly to the police or contact Brian at (727) 490-0959.**

## Equality News

Published Quarterly in 2005

### Brian Winfield - Editor

Phone: (727) 490-0959

Fax: (727) 490-0965

E-mail: [brian@eqfl.org](mailto:brian@eqfl.org)

Graphic Design by Tracy Copes  
[tracy@daftgeneration.com](mailto:tracy@daftgeneration.com)

### EQFL Staff

**Nadine Smith** - Executive Director

**Stratton Pollitzer** - Assistant Director

**Brian Winfield** - Communications Director

**Vonn New** - Central Florida Director

**David Costa** - Operations Manager

**Terry DeCarlo** - South FL Administrator

**Joe Saunders** - Central Florida Field Coordinator

### EQFL Board of Directors

Amy Mandel - Board Chair

De Palazzo - Member

Bill Peters - Member

Nadine Smith - Ex-officio

Visit [www.EQFL.org](http://www.EQFL.org) regularly to get up-to-date information on issues important to you.

### Headquarters:

3150 5th Ave. North

Suite 325

St. Petersburg, FL 33713

### South Florida Office

3510 Biscayne Blvd.

Suite 202

Miami, FL 33137

## Time to Renew

Your financial support of our work is key to achieving equality in Florida. Memberships start at just \$35 - Individual and \$50 - Family.

Please renew your annual membership today. Log onto [www.EQFL.org](http://www.EQFL.org) and use your credit card to securely donate online!

To contribute by phone call toll-free 1-877-877-7550

(813) 870-3735

Or mail your donation to:

P.O. Box 13184

St. Petersburg, FL 33733



**Equality  
Florida**

Equality Florida Human Rights Education Project Inc.  
P.O. Box 13184  
St. Petersburg, FL 33629  
DATED MATERIAL-PLEASE DO NOT DELAY

Non-Profit  
US Postage  
PAID  
Tampa, FL  
Permit 1520

Equality  
is  
Closer  
than you think

## Pride Flags Fly in St. Augustine

**E**quality Florida and St. Augustine Pride Committee (SAPC), represented by the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR), won a temporary order allowing rainbow flags to fly from the historic Bridge of Lions for St. Augustine's Pride. The order was requested as part of a lawsuit demanding a permanent end to the city's discrimination against SAPC and local LGBT families.

"Today's decision brings an end to three years of censorship and discrimination," said Reverend Ruth Jensen, Co-Chair of SAPC. "The city thought we would just quietly go away. But with the help of Equality Florida and NCLR, we have triumphed and will finally be able to see our flags fly over the beautiful Bridge of Lions."

SAPC filed the initial application in 2003 and was denied a permit even though they met all of the written requirements. City Commissioners later tried to justify their denial, saying there was an unwritten requirement that applicants must have an historical connection to the city.

Some Commissioners expressed concern over "unwritten requirements" and agreed to hold public workshops to get public input on new criteria. The workshops were never held. Months



Photo by Walter Coker

later, the Commission created and approved a new stricter policy without public input or notice. SAPC's application was denied again in 2004 and 2005, even though they consistently met the new requirements. No other non-profit organization's application had ever been denied.

The order, although temporary, came at a critical time. Later this year, a massive five-year reconstruction project will begin on the Bridge of Lions. It is anticipated that no flags will be permitted to fly during that period.