

This is history: Cele



By MIKE LEE

THE DC 37 Lesbian and Gay Issues Committee (LAGIC) held its 25th annual Pride celebration with a ribbon cutting at union headquarters on June 1, which also marked a quarter century of LAGIC acting as a force of action in our diverse union.

In 25 years, LAGIC has grown to become a powerful, energetic influence on the union's commitment to developing an effective labor movement, which for decades has been fighting on the frontlines during numerous labor and civil rights struggles in New York City.

DC 37 Executive Director Henry Garrido greeted the audience, praising LAGIC's leadership role and celebrated the contributions of the LGBTQ movement to DC 37. "With the work that you have done over these years, you have helped to serve as a catalyst for change in this union," he said.

Miriam Frank, professor at NYU, who also teaches at the Cornell Union Womens' Studies program at DC 37, was the featured speaker at the event. A long-time activist and author, she recently published "Out in the Union: A Labor History of Queer America" (see the book review on page 8). Celebrants were also treated



TOP LEFT: James Bradley performs at the celebration, marking the beginning of Gay Pride Month. TOP: LAGIC Chair and Local 1930 Pres. Valentin Colon and co-Chair and Executive Vice President Yolanda Pumarejo. ABOVE: NYU Professor and author Miriam Frank speaks at the event.



LAGIC activists gather at the AIDS Quilt on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., during the 1990s.

to a performance by the singer James Bradley.

Valentin Colon, president of New York Public Library Guild Local 1930 and LAGIC Chair, along with SSEU Local 371 Executive Vice President and LAGIC co-Chair Yolanda Pumarejo, closed out the event with their remarks.

The ribbon cutting marked a quarter century from a time when being openly Lesbian or gay meant harassment and discrimination at the workplace, and a lack of rights that other workers took for granted, such as bereavement leave if a partner passed away. Partners also did not receive health coverage and other union benefits.

LAGIC on the march at Gay Pride. This year marks

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Fighting for pride, achieving equality

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Yet, for years afterward, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) members of DC 37 failed to receive the basic protections and rights their straight counterparts received. There was also a general perception among many LGBTQ members that the union would not automatically fight for them. Finally, in 1988, a Local 154 member wrote a letter to the Public Employee Press, demanding the union address the needs of the LGBTQ members, particularly in regards to equality of benefits.

In March 1989, a small group of Lesbian and gay DC 37 members met at the Lesbian and Gay Labor Network headquarters. Attendance was small. Although letters had been sent out to all DC 37 local presidents to pass on to their members about this meeting, only a handful shared this information with their members.

A month later, a letter was sent to then DC 37 Executive Director Stanley Hill, signed by Lesbian and gay

Celebrating LAGIC Pride



the 25th anniversary of the formation of the group.

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members, including several delegates and by two local presidents, to discuss forming a Lesbian and Gay Issues Committee within DC 37. They aimed to fully address the concerns unaddressed by the union, in particular domestic partner benefits and AIDS-related issues. LAGIC also took the unusual step of coming before the Executive Board to call attention to their issues. In March of 1990, the DC 37 Executive Board voted to approve LAGIC as a DC 37 committee.

Retired Assistant Director in the Clerical-Administrative Division and former Local 1549 member Ron Arnero recalls, "I came to work for the union in 1988. After the delegates approved the measure to form the committee, we worked with Political Action on preparing testimony for City Council hearings on a number of issues concerning Lesbian and gay public workers. We were at the forefront of fighting for the city to include benefit equity for domestic partners."

LAGIC went to work organizing Lesbian and gay workers throughout the labor movement. The committee helped sponsor and organize the Pride at Work East Coast Lesbian and Gay Labor Conference at union headquarters in June 1992. It was a pioneer-



ABOVE: former LAGIC Chair Regina Shavers (right), in 2005. AT RIGHT: The late Nathaniel Keitt, former LAGIC co-Chair and L. 1930 member. FAR RIGHT: L. 436 Pres. Judith Arroyo at the 2007 Labor Day march.



ing project that led to a national conference — also held at DC 37 — in 1994, which grew into "Pride at Work" (PAW), a national labor group devoted to LGBTQ issues, recognized by the AFL-CIO in 1997.

The first PAW conference galvanized action on the part of DC 37 to work closely with Lesbian and gay union activists, including pushing for equal benefits and anti-discrimination legislation.

The fight for equality for partnership benefits won its first victories in 1993, when then Mayor David Dinkins signed executive orders to create a domes-



tic partner registry, and granted visitation rights for partners in hospitals and prisons. A year later, DC 37 played a decisive role in the Municipal Labor Council negotiations with the city to extend health benefits to domestic partners.

Since those years, despite many difficulties, LAGIC has led the union in helping change the debate and raise awareness of LGBTQ issues and rights. They have successfully fought battles from recognition to the victory of marriage equality in New York State in 2011, which through last month's Supreme Court decision in Obergefell v. Hodges is now a basic right in all 50 states.



At the event, DC 37 Executive Director Henry Garrido was on hand to celebrate 25 years of LAGIC's activism.