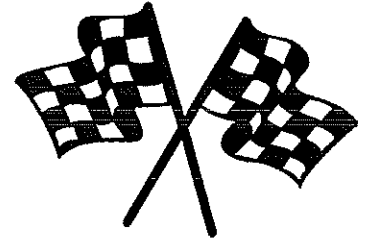


Equality AZ revs its engines

Strategic plan promises to be proactive

By Luis Garcia



When Nick Ray was hired as the new executive director of Equality Arizona he promised the LGBT community in Arizona that not only would the organization develop fresh ways to unite the entire state in the fight to advance LGBT equality but that EQAZ was dedicated in crafting a proactive agenda in the new legislative session—and with the help of the EQAZ board the political advocacy organization has been doing just that.

According to Ray, EQAZ is in a strategic planning process that will bring new groups in order to expand their efforts across the state.

"We are continuing to ensure that EQAZ serves the entire state," says Ray. "We (EQAZ) have begun to expand our efforts by partnering with other organizations where there are overlapping interests because we know that equal rights will not be won by LGBT people alone."

Ray told 'N Touch that they have been working with straight allies before the start of the 2012 legislative session on crafting bills that will create safer schools and end workplace discrimination for all LGBT people. Ray also said that EQAZ will not

just be lobbying at the state legislature but will take the fight locally at the school district level where impact efforts might be more achievable.

"EQAZ will examine municipal policies in things like non-discrimination, domestic partner benefits, partner registry, etc.," said Ray. "We are committed to being so for the long haul. It's time we collaborate with local activists in their efforts bringing expertise, experience, resources, and connections to bear on their efforts."

According to Ray, a main priority will be reaching out to the community in different ways giving people of all socioeconomic backgrounds an opportunity to participate.

"We cannot and will not build the organization on the backs of or for the benefit of any small or privileged minority. We are building a new Equality Arizona for 2012 and beyond, not recreating the organization that existed previously."

Ray stressed the need for community involvement that is why EQAZ happenings will have a facelift.

"Special events are often fancy galas that exclude a lot of people because of cost or a perception that

they are not fun or are too political, too fancy etc. We are going to diversify the ways people can engage, support and learn about our work whether it is through things like community-specific receptions, the GayPrix event, house parties, and summer pool parties," said Ray.

The next big event, the GayPrix, will give the community the opportunity one of the most memorable and entertaining events of the year, according to Ray. The March 11 event will be EQAZ 1st Annual Gay Go-Cart Championship. This "out-of-the box event" will be held at Octane Raceway, the largest indoor kart-racing venue in the country. The Gay Prix will consist of kart racing on two 1/4 mile indoor tracks, pit crew challenge, a climbing wall, arcade games, and billiards.

"We do need the community to invest in our work so we can achieve our potential as a statewide entity and in turn we can help local activists and groups throughout the state effect change in their own areas," said Ray.

Equality Arizona has also just announced a new board leadership for both their C3 Educational Foundation and the C4 Advocacy Fund. Rebecca Winger has been elected to serve as President of Equality Arizona. She will also co-chair the Equality Arizona Advocacy Fund with EQAZ board member, Lawrence Robinson.

"We recognize and thank the for-

mer board chair, Tom Mann, for his dedication and service. Having led Equality Arizona through two very tough but productive years. Tom embraced the leadership of Equality Arizona at perhaps the hardest time in the organization's history. It speaks volumes to Tom's commitment that he helped push through significant changes, including refocusing efforts to enhance community communication," stated Winger.

"As a community, together, we have been able to make dramatic changes over the last 20 years in areas such as non-discrimination and domestic partner recognition. The current political landscape makes any battle for LGBT equality prolonged and difficult, but not hopeless. The mission of Equality Arizona is still as important today as when it was founded 20 years ago. When all people in Arizona have the same rights and privileges regardless of sexual or affectual orientation, then we can rest. But sadly that day has not yet come.

"2012 will be a year to fight for every student to feel safe within his/her school. No child should be bullied


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Feb. 7: Fundraiser and Legislative for Representative Chad Campbell, Bliss ReBAR, 901 N 4th St, Phoenix, 5:30-7 p.m.

March 11: Gay Prix - 1st Annual Arizona Gay Go-Carting Championships, Octane Raceway, 317 S. 48th St., Phoenix.

\$40 per team member. Limited seating, RSVP online.

For more visit equalityarizona.org.




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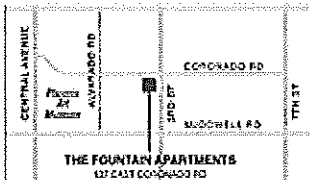
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Equality Arizona...

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under any circumstance. I remember being teased and bullied in late grade school and high school... comments, names, cursing with adults doing nothing to intervene. And what I experienced was nowhere near the level of cruelty I hear reported today. We must get this legislation passed, no matter how long it takes," Winger told 'N Touch.

Winger says the campaigns of Greg Stanton and Daniel Valenzuela showed that grassroots messaging can be greatly successful in elections.

"It is so important for us to recognize those individuals who are supportive and strong for our LGBT community and do everything we can to get them elected. Sometimes it's not glamorous and exciting, but identifying candidates who support us and how they are showing it is one of the core reasons for Equality Arizona."

Ray also mentioned that EQAZ has intensely reached out to northern and southern Arizona.

"We are the only organization working statewide on behalf of the LGBT community," said Ray. "But we need volunteers, committee members, qualified board members, and donors of all levels in order to achieve our objectives in 2012 and beyond. We can serve as a convener in-state and a connection with other LGBT organizations around the country that might be able to help local communities advance rights."

Shelter...

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Kinsman followed up on the event and expressed her sincere thanks to Benjamin Moore Paints and to the painting team; Ray Wisniewski (owner of Wise Choice Painting), members of Ray's family, 14 members of Arizona Women in Tune, a Service Member of 944 ASTS at Luke Air Force Base, eleven friends and cohorts, and to three Sorority Houses at UA: Delta Delta Delta, Phi Beta Chi and Pi Beta Phi. She celebrated with the team and said, "Through this single project, each of you has made a positive impact in the lives of many, many people you will never even meet." She concluded the celebration of giving by acknowledging "the amazing staff and all the regular volunteers that make Emergel such an incredible place of safety, peace, growth and healing."

When asked how she felt about the results, a shelter participant shared, "Now this feels like a neighborhood!"

(Important Note: through the entire process the safety and anonymity of the shelter and its participants were always held with the utmost importance. Particular details are still closely guarded and each volunteer signed a confidentiality agreement and pledged to maintain strict compliance.)

To learn more about Kinsman Art Works call 602-799-6462 or go to kinsmanartworks.com

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