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15th Annual Black-Tie GayBINGO Called for Saturday, April 5

PHILADELPHIA – March 5, 2014 – A little bit of glam, a lot of fabulous, and a whirlwind of fun await guests at the **15th Annual Black-Tie GayBINGO presented by PECO**, where all the funds raised go to HIV/AIDS services right here in the Greater Philadelphia region. **Black-Tie GayBINGO**, one of

Philadelphia's most creative and off-beat annual events, will take place at 6:30 pm on Saturday, April 5, 2014, at the elegant Crystal Tea Room. Enjoy cocktails and a silent auction, six bingo games, and entertainment from the Bingo Verifying Divas (BVDs), who dress in glamorous drag to entertain the crowd and ensure everyone has laughs and a great time while raising funds for HIV and AIDS. At this year's event, AIDS Fund will award the "**Favorite Straight Person of the Year**" to **Ronda Goldfein, Executive Director for the AIDS Law Project of Pennsylvania**. In addition, the **Founders'**



Photo by Jeff Holder for AIDS Fund

Award will be presented to Al Vernacchio, M.S.Ed., Sexuality Educator and English Teacher at Friends' Central School, and the Ferrara Family Volunteer Award will be presented to Kevin and Keisha Diggs.

Each year, AIDS Fund recognizes someone who has made a significant contribution to the HIV/AIDS and/or the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender communities with our "Favorite Straight Person of the Year" Award. **The 2014 Favorite Straight Person of the Year, Ronda B. Goldfein, Esq.**, is the executive director of the AIDS Law Project of Pennsylvania organization. She joined the law firm in 1992, and has led it since 2000. A nationally recognized advocate for people living with HIV/AIDS, she is listed among the top 100 HIV/AIDS activists in the United States by *POZ magazine* and website. Goldfein has been named "Policymaker of the Year" by the Penn Center for



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AIDS Research, a joint project of the University of Pennsylvania, the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and the Wistar Institute. She was voted a "Super Lawyer" by *Law & Politics* and *Philadelphia Magazine*. In 2010, Goldfein was appointed by Mayor Michael Nutter to Philadelphia's Police Advisory Commission, the official civilian oversight agency for the city's police department. She is a member of the board of directors of the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania and of the ACLU's Philadelphia chapter. A graduate of the University of Miami, she lives in Center City Philadelphia and holds a J.D. from the Shepard Broad Law Center of Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, and is admitted to practice law in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York.

Goldfein says, "The AIDS Law Project is so appreciative of everything that AIDS Fund does for us, and their general operating support allows us to keep our doors open and focus on our priorities of fighting for our clients. This support says that they believe we are doing important work and doing it right. I'm honored to receive the Favorite Straight Person Award because it shows what it means to be a member of a community that takes care of one another, regardless of whether or not we get a personal benefit. And there is no greater honor than to follow in the footsteps of the late great Judith Eden and the dynamic Ed Rendell, both of whom were incredibly supportive and instrumental in shaping policy and program development at the AIDS Law Project."

Past recipients of the "Favorite Straight Person of the Year" are former Pennsylvania Governor Edward G. Rendell, former Philadelphia Mayor John F. Street, former Councilman Angel Ortiz, radio and television personality Bret Hamilton, community leaders John Cella and Judith Eden, activist Anna Forbes, longtime AIDS Walk Philly supporters Andrea Finkelstein Losben and Patricia Lavelle, former executive director of the Family Planning Council Dorothy Mann, The Reverend Marlene "Mike" Haines formerly of the Church of Saint Luke and The Epiphany, media personality Lorraine Ballard Morrill, and, in 2013, former State Representative Babette Josephs.

The **Founders' Award** is being presented to **Al Vernacchio**. The Founders' Award recognizes a person or a group of people who come together and fight HIV/AIDS in a unique way. The Award is given in honor and memory of the founders of AIDS Fund and AIDS Walk Philly. Al Vernacchio teaches at Friends' Central School in Wynnewood, PA. He is the Upper School Sexuality Educator and a member of the English department. In his role as Sexuality Educator, Vernacchio teaches classes to 9th and 12th graders, organizes special programs and assemblies (such as the annual observance of World AIDS Day, working with AIDS Fund to bring their HIV/AIDS Timeline and AIDS Memorial Quilt to campus), and provides education for parents in healthy adolescent sexual development. Vernacchio is also the faculty advisor for the upper school's Gay-Straight Alliance.



A Human Sexuality educator and consultant for over 20 years, Vernacchio has taught graduate level courses in Human Sexuality and HIV/AIDS, facilitates sexuality-themed workshops, and speaks on a wide variety of sexuality topics throughout the country. Vernacchio's work has been featured in the *New York Times Magazine* cover story "Teaching Good Sex," published in November 2011. Vernacchio has given two TED Talks, both available online. He is the author of the forthcoming book *For Goodness Sex: Changing the Way We Talk to Young People About Sexuality, Values, and Health* to be published by Harper-Collins in September, 2014.

Prior to Friends' Central, Vernacchio worked as the Volunteer Coordinator and Trainer at ActionAIDS, Philadelphia's largest AIDS-service organization (1994-1998). Even after his departure, he has continued to be a longtime volunteer, bringing along students for service projects twice a year at both ActionAIDS and AIDS Fund.

"I believe that all education, especially about sexuality and HIV/AIDS, must be taught from a social justice perspective, which demands that people be treated with equity and fairness, and that they are able to live full and meaningful lives. Even today, HIV/AIDS is heavy with discrimination and stigma and ignorance. I don't think I am a responsible teacher unless I convey to my students their responsibility in creating a world where everyone is treated fairly," stated Vernacchio. "I have powerful memories of people I met during my days working at ActionAIDS, and justice also demands that these sweet people never be forgotten. Every time I teach about HIV/AIDS, I hold those clients and volunteers in my head and my heart, and that keeps me connected to them and fuels my work."

The Ferrara Family Volunteer Award will be presented to Kevin and Keisha Diggs. This award recognizes one or more individuals who have made an exceptional commitment of time and energy as an AIDS Fund volunteer. Kevin and Keisha are seventeen year-old twins, children of Terrie Hawkins, a staff person at AIDS Fund since 2000. Terrie, who discovered she was HIV-positive at the same time she discovered she was pregnant with the twins, has made it a priority to get her children involved in the community and be educated about HIV/AIDS to overcome the stigmas related to her disease. When Terrie learned she was HIV positive, she got herself into treatment and her children were born healthy and HIV negative. Kevin and Keisha started attending AIDS Walk Philly and other outreach events with their mom when they were three years old, and have been volunteering at AIDS Walk Philly ever since. Their commitment widened at age 13 when they also started volunteering at monthly GayBINGO events. Kevin is currently a junior at Constitution High School and Keisha is a junior at the

Charter High School for Architecture and Design. In addition to their studies and volunteer work, Kevin participates in his school's Mock Trial competitions, and Keisha loves to draw. They live in Northeast Philadelphia.



This year's Black-Tie GayBINGO presented by PECO will feature dinner, six bingo games, a silent auction, and dancing. Tickets are \$150 per person. The Crystal Tea Room is in the Wanamaker Building, 100 Penn Square East, Philadelphia. For tickets, call 215-731-9255 or visit aidsfundphilly.org. (Direct link: <http://www.aidsfundphilly.org/gaybingo/blacktie.php>.) Black-Tie GayBINGO is presented by PECO and additionally sponsored by National Penn Bank, Tavern Group, Philly AIDS Thrift, William Way Community Center, El Dorado Rum, VU World, and *Philadelphia Weekly*.

In addition to the annual Black-Tie GayBINGO, **AIDS Fund's monthly GayBINGO events** raise vital funds for HIV/AIDS services. This fun event is open to anyone who enjoys campy humor, hosted by drag queens known as the BVDs (Bingo Verifying Divas). Each night of Bingo has its own theme and set of special Bingo games. Cash prizes are awarded for each game. GayBINGO is held once a month on Saturday nights at the Gershman Y at Broad and Pine Streets in Philadelphia. All games begin at 7 pm. **This event has raised over \$2.5 million to date.** The remaining spring schedule is as follows: **March 8 – Carnival GayBINGO!** – *It's a Rio Gay-Janeiro celebration!*: **April 26 – Spring Break GayBINGO!** – *BVD's Gone Wild!*: **May 17 – Zombie Wedding GayBINGO!** – *'til death do us part?:* and **June 16 – I Want To Be Barbie GayBINGO!** – *That bitch has everything!* Reserved seating is \$25 and balcony seating is \$20.

AIDS Fund produces a variety of fundraising and awareness programs throughout the year, including AIDS Walk Philly, AIDS Run Philly, GayBINGO!, Black-Tie GayBINGO!, World AIDS Day, and Workplace Giving Campaigns. The AIDS Fund grant program supports partner organizations in the Philadelphia Region that provide AIDS and HIV-related services, education, and prevention including increasing public awareness of HIV/AIDS issues. AIDS Fund is also the Philadelphia affiliate of The Names Project, curating panels of The AIDS Memorial Quilt for a local audience. **The 28th Annual AIDS Walk Philly will take place on Sunday, October 19, 2014.** Contact AIDS Fund at 215-731-9255 or www.aidsfundphilly.org. Follow AIDS Fund on Facebook and Twitter: www.facebook.com/AIDSWalkPhilly, www.facebook.com/gaybingophilly, and twitter.com/AIDSWalkPhilly.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: High-resolution photos available upon request by emailing cari@reliefcomm.com