

Stonewall awards announced

National prizes go to four community activists

by Jann Gilbert



Rick Osborne



Barbara Smith

PHOTO BY TEE A. CORINNE



Franklin "Frank" Kameny



Miriam Ben-Shalom

PHOTO BY PAT A. ROBINSON

The 1994 Stonewall Awards, given in April, honor four activists, each a pioneer in lesbian and gay rights who found a need in the community and filled it. One of the honorees has been a gay and lesbian civil rights activist since even before the Stonewall Riots.

The four recipients are Miriam Ben-Shalom, of Milwaukee, Wisc.; Franklin "Frank" Kameny, of Washington, D.C.; Rick Osborne, of San Diego, Calif.; and Barbara Smith, of Albany, N.Y. Each receives a cash award of \$25,000. The Stonewall Award is given in recognition of outstanding service to the gay and lesbian community.

Award-winner Frank Kameny, 68, began his professional life with a degree in astronomy from Harvard in 1957. He was ousted from the U.S. Army Map Service, after only a few months, when it was learned he was gay. He was the first to fight such a dismissal and has been fighting injustice ever since. During his career, Kameny helped found the first militant gay rights organization, the Mattachine Society; became a leading national authority on security clearances for gays and lesbians; initiated the fight to lift the ban on gays in the armed forces in 1962; and began a 30-year campaign to repeal a Washington, D.C., sodomy law in 1963, which ended successfully when he wrote the text of the repeal law, which was enacted in September of last year. One of the plaques found on a wall in Kameny's home is a Mayoral Proclamation from the District of Columbia stating that April 9, 1981, was "Franklin E. Kameny Day" in Washington, D.C.

Miriam Ben-Shalom, 45, now a high school English teacher, was discharged from the U.S. Army in 1976, following her disclosure that she is a lesbian. She is one of the first women to have

become a drill sergeant. Like Kameny, she fought her discharge. She won reinstatement 11 years later but was not allowed to re-enlist. At that time, she launched a second court challenge, which she won. The case was eventually lost on appeal. Ben-Shalom has been a speaker on behalf of gay men and lesbians in the military, has lobbied in Congress for civil rights, and has counseled thousands of gay men and lesbians in the military services. Currently, she is a lifetime board member of the Gay People's Union in Wisconsin, one of the oldest queer organizations in the U.S.; vice-president of Pridefest, Inc., a two-day pride festival; and a member of the Stonewall 25 Armed Forces Veterans Coalition.

Rick Osborne, 43, moved to Southern California in 1990 in search of better health care for his lover, who had AIDS. He turned a painful experience into a cathartic one, with the opening of an unusual coffee house called David's Place. David's Place was intended to be a social center for people with HIV and AIDS. It has since become a community center, with free art classes and a volunteer crew that makes flower arrangements for hospitalized people with AIDS. It is a non-profit business, whose revenues support HIV-

positive people and whose staff is largely made up of people with HIV or AIDS. The coffee house serves as a site for commitment ceremonies for gay and lesbian couples and memorials for people who have died of AIDS, and as a meeting place for queer activists and AIDS-related organizations. With coursework for a Ph.D. in English completed, and a career as a college administrator on hold, Osborne devotes most of his time to the coffee house. He also writes poetry.

Barbara Smith, 47, a feminist writer and activist, initiated black women's studies at the college level 20 years ago and was a political organizer for black lesbian feminists in Boston, Mass. She co-founded, and is currently publisher of, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, the only U.S. publisher specifically for women of color. Smith established a number of firsts as an educator. She was the first African American on the Modern Language Association Commission on the Status of Women, in 1974. With two co-editors, she published a landmark collection of African American women's writing in 1982, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black*

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Women's Studies. That work was followed in 1983 by *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*. Smith is now at work with several co-editors, including Gloria Steinem, on *The Reader's Companion to U.S. Women's History*, and is writing the first book-length black lesbian and gay history.

The Stonewall Awards were established in 1990. They are named for the riot that took place June 27, 1969, when the defiance of the gay and lesbian patrons of the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village against police that raided the bar sparked weeklong demonstrations. The event is generally recognized as the turning point that led to the formation of a national gay and lesbian rights movement.

The Stonewall Awards are given out by the Anderson Prize Foundation, established and endowed by the late Paul A. Anderson. Anderson, a Chicago futures trader, died of AIDS-related complications in 1992. His companion of 13 years, Allen A. Schuh, a Chicago attorney, is current president of the foundation. Award candidates are first nominated anonymously. A committee of foundation directors and previous winners then selects award recipients representing diverse geographic areas of the United States. Winners are selected regardless of sexual orientation, race, ethnic origin, age or gender.

Past recipients of the Stonewall Award and their associations at the time they won are: Amy Ashworth, director of N.Y. Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays; Howard Cruse, gay and underground cartoonist; Suzanne Pharr, community action strategist who worked to defeat anti-gay legislation in Oregon; and Urvashi Vaid, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.