

Gay Leaders From Across the Country Converge in Philadelphia for National Memorial Ceremony Honoring Gay Rights Pioneer Barbara Gittings

April 27, 2007

Speakers at the memorial will include directors of national LGBT organizations including Joe Somonese, Executive Director of the Human Rights Campaign; **Matt Foreman, Executive Director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force**, Kevin Jennings, GLSEN National Director as well as gay pioneers Frank Kameny and Reverend Elder Troy Perry. Philadelphia Gay News Publisher Mark Segal and radio host Debra D'Alessandro will lead the program which will include an opening welcome from Philadelphia Mayor John F. Street.

Pioneering gay rights activist Barbara Gittings will be remembered at a ceremony celebrating her life on Saturday, April 28th at the National Constitution Center, Kirby Auditorium, on Independence Mall in Philadelphia at 2:00 p.m. Ms. Gittings died of breast cancer on February 18, 2007 at the age of 74. She is survived by her life partner, Kay Tobin Lahusen and her sister Eleanor Gittings Taylor.

Gittings was born in Vienna in 1932, the daughter of an American diplomat, and spent much of her youth in Wilmington, Delaware. She entered Northwestern University in 1949 to study drama but withdrew, consumed with independently searching for materials about homosexuality. She scoured libraries in Chicago but found little that was helpful or relevant.

Gittings founded the New York Chapter of the early lesbian organization Daughters of Bilitis in 1958 and became the national editor of the organization's magazine *The Ladder* from 1963 to 1966. Working with Frank Kameny of Washington, Gittings helped organize the National Reminder July 4th Demonstrations for equal rights for homosexuals in front of Independence Hall from 1965-69, among the earliest of such protests. She also participated in the efforts that resulted in American Psychiatric Association declaring that homosexuality was not an illness in 1973 and was recently give an award by the association for her leadership in changing psychiatry. From 1971 to 1986, Gittings headed the American Library Association's Gay and Lesbian Task Force and in recognition of her work she was recently awarded a prestigious life-time membership by the association.

Of her achievements, Gittings said she was most proud of her editorial leadership of DOB's magazine, "*The Ladder*," and her work with both the American Library Association and the American Psychiatric Association to promote the portrayal of gays as healthy individuals.