



The 2024 POZ Icons

Honoring those who have made lasting contributions in the HIV community

November 11, 2024 By Jennifer Morton

According to Merriam-Webster, an icon is “a person or thing widely admired especially for having great influence or significance in a particular sphere.” An icon transcends fame or recognition; an icon is set apart not just by achievements but also by an ability to inspire and connect with people on a profound level.

Icons use their platforms to effect change, inspire others and foster community. Icons shape our narratives about ourselves and one another and are integral to our shared cultural tapestry. They remind us of the power of influence and the potential within each of us to make a meaningful impact.

Icons are often polarizing. They can stir controversy, challenge norms or ignite passion. They spark conversations around social justice and advocate for change. Their courage in confronting difficult issues enhances their status as icons.

To commemorate 30 years of serving the HIV and AIDS community, POZ is launching POZ Icons, an annual tribute to individuals, both living and deceased, who have made lasting contributions to the HIV community.

This year, we’re thrilled to recognize Hydeia Broadbent, Cecilia Chung, Dennis deLeon, Sean Strub and Phill Wilson as the 2024 POZ Icons. Their legacies continue to influence generations, reminding us of the struggles and triumphs that shape our collective history. We are grateful for all they’ve done to fight HIV and AIDS.

Hydeia Broadbent | Jacob Kepler

Hydeia Broadbent

A courageous advocate and a messenger of hope

By Andy Feds

Born with HIV, Hydeia Broadbent began publicly sharing her story and speaking about HIV at age 6. In 1992, she appeared on a Nickelodeon special about HIV with basketball star Magic Johnson. She later appeared as a guest on The Oprah Winfrey Show, The Maury Povich Show, Good Morning America and many other national programs. In 1996, Hydeia addressed the Republican National Convention and read a poem she wrote, the last line of which was: "I am the future, and I have AIDS."

As a fellow person born with HIV, I followed her career my entire life. Hydeia was a hero to many, many people. She educated people about HIV through her work with the Magic Johnson

Foundation, the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation and other AIDS organizations.

I was fortunate to be friends with Hydeia and stood by her side until the end of her historic life. I learned so much from this woman, and I wanted to be sure that she knew how much she meant to me and the world. When I moved to Las Vegas in 2017, I met Hydeia in person, and we became friends very quickly. She allowed me to pick her brain about advocacy, humanitarianism and life in general. She went from being a hero to a friend to a big sister. I spent the last few months of her life at her bedside, providing the same supportive friendship that she gave me in the hope that she would make a quick recovery and get back to influencing others.

Hydeia's story and legacy have helped many people living with HIV learn a single word: hope. Fearlessly battling HIV- and AIDS-related stigma, Hydeia opened the door for many people living with the virus and helped them understand that they can live a long, healthy and happy life. Although physically, Hydeia left us earlier this year, there's no doubt in my mind that her name will carry weight for a very long time!

Andy Feds is a stand-up comedian and global HIV and AIDS advocate.

KEY DATES

1984 – Hydeia Broadbent is born.

1987– Hydeia's adoptive parents learn that she is living with HIV.

1992 – Hydeia appears on the Nickelodeon television special A Conversation with Magic.

1996 – Hydeia addresses the Republican National Convention with activist Mary Fisher.

1997 – Hydeia receives the Pedro Zamora Memorial Award for Youth Advocacy from AIDS Action.

1999 — Mariah Carey presents Hydeia with an Essence Award for her activism.

2002 — Hydeia and her mother publish their memoir, You Get Past the Tears: A Memoir of Love and Survival.

2008 — Hydeia is named one of Ebony's "150 Most Influential African Americans." She makes the list again in 2011.

2012 — Hydeia appears in the CDC campaign "Let's Stop HIV Together."

2014 — Hydeia appears on a Where Are They Now? special on the Oprah Winfrey Network.

2024 — Hydeia dies at age 39.

Cecilia Chung

A trailblazing advocate for equality and dignity

By Shelby Chestnut

Cecilia Chung is a true legend. Not only is she a tireless advocate and trailblazer for transgender rights, but she is also a beacon of hope and transformation for countless individuals within the LGBTQ+ community and beyond—particularly for those living with HIV.

Her life's work is nothing short of extraordinary. Spanning decades and crossing borders, Cecilia has taken the challenges she has faced and turned them into a driving force for change. From overcoming personal struggles to becoming an international advocate, Cecilia's journey is a testament to resilience, courage and the unwavering pursuit of justice.

Her impact is undeniable. As the first transgender woman and the first Asian American to lead the board of directors of the San Francisco LGBT Pride Celebration, Cecilia shattered ceilings and paved the way for others to follow. Her visionary leadership of the Transgender Law Center, where she played an instrumental role in creating Positively Trans—a national network supporting trans people living with HIV—has had a transformative effect on health care, housing and legal protections for all. Her influence has reached the highest levels of government, as demonstrated by her appointment to President Barack Obama's Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS.

Cecilia's work has changed lives—not just those of trans people or people living with HIV—but also those of everyone fighting for equality and dignity. Her leadership has shaped policies that ensure that people can live with hope, access health care and enjoy the dignity we all deserve. Cecilia is more than a leader; she is a mentor, a visionary and a relentless advocate for the rights and lives of the most marginalized.

Because of her unwavering fight and profound dedication, we are, without question, a better and more compassionate society. We honor the powerful legacy Cecilia continues to build and thank her for inspiring us, leading us and reminding us all that true liberation is within our reach.

Shelby Chestnut is the executive director of the Transgender Law Center.

KEY DATES

1993 — Cecilia Chung is diagnosed with HIV.

1994 — Cecilia joins the San Francisco Transgender Discrimination Task Force.

2002 — Cecilia joins the board of the Asian Pacific Islander Wellness Center.

2004 — Cecilia becomes a founding producer of the Trans March.

2005 — Cecilia becomes the first deputy director of the Transgender Law Center.

2012 — Cecilia is appointed to the San Francisco Health Commission.

2012 — Cecilia is presented with the Levi Strauss and Co. Pioneer Award.

2013 — Cecilia is appointed to the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS by President Barack Obama.

2015 — Cecilia launches Positively Trans, a network to address stigma and inequity.

2017 — Cecilia's life story inspires a character on the ABC miniseries When We Rise.

2020 — Cecilia receives a NAAAP100 Award, which recognizes exemplary leaders in the Asian community.

Dennis deLeon

A passionate leader and an inspiration to others

By Guillermo Chacon

Human rights lawyer, advocate, community leader and role model—these are just a few of the titles for which Dennis deLeon will be remembered. His larger-than-life approach to the world will live on in our minds and hearts forever. Dennis was born in Los Angeles in 1948. He attended Occidental College, where he served as student body president. Shortly after graduating from college, he attended Stanford Law School and began practicing law in 1974. From the start of his career through the 1980s, Dennis built a distinguished legal career in Washington, DC, and California.

In the early '80s, he moved to New York City, where he held appointed positions and was a civic leader. In 1990, when David Dinkins became mayor, Dennis served as director of transition for the new administration. That same year, Mayor Dinkins named him the city's commissioner of human rights. While serving in this role, he announced in an opinion letter published in The New York Times in 1993 that he was living with HIV. His brave announcement was crucial in raising awareness and challenging the social stigma associated with HIV.

In September 1994, Dennis became the second president of the Latino Commission on AIDS. His passionate leadership and advocacy skills helped launch the commission's platform, shaping the commission into the reputable and prominent local, regional and national community-based organization it is today. In 1995, Dennis hired me as a community organizer. From the outset, his dedication to being a voice for the voiceless in our movement and his wish to design a world without AIDS were a source of inspiration. He became a mentor to me, and I was honored when he promoted me to vice president.

We aim to honor the legacy of leaders who paved our way, like Dennis, through our daily actions until together, we end HIV and eradicate all forms of stigma—especially homophobia, transphobia and xenophobia in every family and community.

Guillermo Chacon is the president of the Latino Commission on AIDS.

KEY DATES

1974 — Dennis deLeon earns a law degree from Stanford University.

1982 — New York City Mayor Ed Koch appoints Dennis as senior assistant corporation counsel.

1986 — Dennis is appointed director of the Mayor's Commission on Latino Concerns.

1986 — Dennis tests positive for HIV.

1988 — Dennis is named Manhattan deputy borough president.

1990 — Mayor David Dinkins appoints Dennis as New York City's human rights commissioner, making him the highest-ranking LGBTQ city official at the time.

1990 — Dennis joins the board of Housing Works, which works to end the dual crises of homelessness and AIDS, and later serves as board chair.

1993 — Dennis publicly shares his HIV status in an op-ed in The New York Times.

1994 — Dennis becomes president of the Latino Commission on AIDS.

2009 — Dennis dies of heart failure at age 61.

Sean StrubBill Wadman

Sean Strub

An innovative champion for people living with HIV

By Mark S. King

Sean Strub will be terribly uncomfortable when he learns he has been named a POZ Icon. He'll probably blush, even if you would have to look closely for the tint in his cheeks. His stoic Iowa roots constitutionally prevent him from signs of untethered ego.

Sean will undoubtedly begin to recite the names of other, worthier HIV and AIDS figures he believes have similarly changed our community's landscape. He won't mention that he provided crucial guidance to most of them. His eye for talent and potential is unmatched, and he has nurtured it in our most consequential leaders for decades.

His launch of POZ magazine in 1994 is a feat easily taken for granted today, when people living with HIV are more likely to proudly appear in public media. Starting a slick, colorful magazine dedicated to the lives and opinions of people living with the most stigmatized disease of the century is truly nothing less than visionary.

People had another word for it at the time. They thought he was nuts. But those critics didn't realize what Sean always knew: Our creative, provocative community has the guts and fortitude to turn our lived experience into fascinating, inspirational content. The magazine was an immediate sensation.

It is worth noting that Sean accomplished this while teetering on the thin edge of his own mortality, leading editorial meetings while covered in Kaposi sarcoma lesions and with no promise he would live to see each issue make it to the printer.

Sean is still very much alive, serving as mayor of the idyllic town of Milford in a deeply conservative Pennsylvania county, because his love and committed service to the town he calls home crosses party lines. Since founding an unlikely magazine, Sean has been at the forefront of other uphill climbs, such as helping to bring Undetectable Equals Untransmittable into the public lexicon and creating The Sero Project to address the criminalization of people living with HIV.

I salute Sean for all of this but perhaps most of all for the publication you are reading right now. Sean is a visionary, a hometown hero and absolutely a POZ Icon.

Mark S. King is a GLAAD Award-winning writer and the author of *My Fabulous Disease: Chronicles of a Gay Survivor*.

KEY DATES

1985 — Sean Strub is diagnosed with HIV after having symptoms since 1980.

1990 — Sean runs for Congress, becoming the first person living openly with HIV to do so.

1991 — Sean and other AIDS activists put a giant condom over U.S. Senator Jesse Helms's home.

1992 — Sean produces *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me*, a one-man show by David Drake.

1994 — Sean launches POZ magazine.

2009 — Sean joins the board of directors of the Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS.

2010 — Sean cofounds the Positive Justice Project, a national coalition working to end HIV criminalization.

2010 — Sean produces the documentary short film *HIV Is Not a Crime*.

2013 — Sean becomes the executive director of Sero Project.

2014 — Sean releases his memoir, *Body Counts: A Memoir of Politics, Sex, AIDS and Survival*.

2017 — Sean is elected mayor of Milford, Pennsylvania. He had been appointed to the position in 2016.

Phill Wilson

A large, light gray rectangular area that serves as a placeholder for a portrait of Phill Wilson. The text "Courtesy of The Black AIDS Institute" is positioned to the right of the name "Phill Wilson" at the bottom left of this area.

Phill Wilson

A visionary leader known for empowering generations

By Raniyah Copeland

Phill Wilson is the epitome of a leader who uplifts others as he rises. His legacy represents the best of Black leadership, touching countless lives and inspiring positive change across communities.

From my early days at the Black AIDS Institute (BAI), which Phill led, I was struck by his ability to transform the devastation of the AIDS pandemic into a powerful force for hope and action. His experience during those years, marked by a close proximity to loss, shaped his leadership with a resilience and purpose that have become his hallmark. Today, his influence is felt through the work of the Black decision-makers and organizations reshaping our social fabric. Phill's leadership extends beyond himself; it lives on in the many people he has inspired.

Phill's "unapologetically Black" vision and his deep commitment to uplifting Black communities have driven every initiative at the institute. From creating the African American HIV University and the Black Treatment Advocates Network to engaging Black Hollywood, Phill has been a trailblazer in the fight against HIV. His contributions have been integral to every success in the fight against HIV in Black America. There are few Black leaders and advocates in the HIV movement who have not been inspired or impacted by Phill's leadership.

Phill and I share a special bond. As my mentor, he opened doors, advocated for me before I even entered the room and created opportunities that we both knew would uplift our people. He has always been insightful, understanding when to step back and pass the baton. At that critical moment, he entrusted the organization he had built over two decades to a new generation, confident in their ability to carry on his mission.

While the transition at BAI didn't unfold exactly as he had envisioned, he continues to inspire by supporting Black-led organizations beyond the HIV movement. He has shown us the power of mentorship and shared leadership. Let us follow his example, embracing the next generation while guiding them as we all continue our collective journey toward progress.

Raniyah Copeland is the founder of Equity & Impact Solutions and a former CEO of the Black AIDS Institute.

KEY DATES

1981 — Phill Wilson begins to experience symptoms of HIV.

1982 — Phill moves to Los Angeles and joins the National Association of Black and White Men Together.

1990 — Phill is named AIDS coordinator for Los Angeles.

1990 — Phill becomes cochair of the Los Angeles HIV Health Commission.

1993 — Phill becomes the director of policy and planning at AIDS Project Los Angeles.

1995 — Phill becomes a member of the Health Resources and Services Administration AIDS Advisory Committee.

1999 — Phill creates the Black AIDS Institute, a national think tank focusing on HIV in the Black community.

1999 — Phill is inducted into the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame.

2001 — Phill receives the Leadership for a Changing World award from the Ford Foundation.

2010 — Phill is appointed to the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS by President Barack Obama.

2018 — Phill steps down as president and CEO of the Black AIDS Institute.