POZ Awards 2020 / Best Celebrity Advocate

Read about the nominees, then scroll down to vote for your favorite!

October 1, 2020

Welcome to the 5th Annual POZ Awards, which spotlight the best representations of HIV/AIDS in media and culture.

The POZ editorial staff selects the nominees, but POZ readers choose the winners.

Eligible nominees were active or were presented, published or produced between October 1, 2019, and September 30, 2020.

Be sure to vote for your favorite nominees by the World AIDS Day deadline: Tuesday, December 1, 2020.

VOTING IS CLOSED

Here are the nominees:

Gabriele Bertaccini

Bertaccini is the devilishly handsome chef who co-hosts the Netflix reality show Say I Do, alongside Jeremiah Brent and Thai Nguyen. In the debut episode of the surprise wedding series, the gay Italian born Bertaccini trades stories of life challenges with the groom while cooking a meal, and discloses that he is living with HIV. It's a poignant and powerful moment, showing a vulnerability that is rare in the reality realm. Bertaccini gets our nod for being genuine enough to share his status on as big a stage as Netflix. And besides, who doesn't love a man who can cook?!

Andre DeShields

The snazzy, legendary actor is best known for his roles in such Broadway hits as Ain't Misbehavin', The Full Monty and The Wiz and for winning the 2019 Tony, Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Awards for Best Actor in a Musical for his fantastic performance as Hermes in Hadestown. In a sparkling career spanning five decades, it wasn't until this year that the 74-year-old star came forward as surviving and thriving with HIV for the last 30 years. He is committed to lending his

unique joie de vivre to bringing awareness to HIV causes, including Broadway's Annual Red Bucket Follies benefiting Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS. DeShields is a fierce example of loving your authentic self and living a full and fabulous life with HIV.

Judith Light

An Emmy, Tony and Drama Desk award-winning actor with a career spanning decades, the glamorous Light has also been a vocal and steadfast advocate for the LGBTQ and HIV/AIDS communities since the 1980s. Part of her advocacy work includes taking on acting roles that shine a light on our community, such as in the Netflix series The Politician, Amazon's Transparent, and the Ryan Murphy production of The Assassination of Gianni Versace. She continues to speak out for LGBTQ and human rights, as well as her passionate calls for the end of HIV/AIDS. She lends her support to many HIV causes such as Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS, The Matthew Shephard Foundation and Visual AIDS, among many others. To add to all her awards, she recently received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. She's a shining star to us any day of the week!

WINNER: Karl Schmid

Since coming out as living with HIV in 2018, the debonair Australian-born television host and correspondent has gone full force with his anti-HIV stigma message. In the last year, Schmid has become the editorial director of +Life, a digital platform inspiring and lifting up people living with HIV and their supporters. His interviews with luminaries like the renowned American hero Anthony Fauci, MD, and segments that highlight and discuss U=U and PrEP, propel his cause to normalize HIV in conversation and dispel HIV stigma. Schmid hosted the Virtual Daily show for the International AIDS Conference in July 2020, featuring fabulous high-profile guests and community members. Schmid strives to reach people and educate them about HIV and sexual health, and most recently produced and co-hosted a special on ABC7 in California showing people "the truth about what HIV means in 2020."

Jonathan Van Ness

It seems like Jonathan Van Ness is getting more and more fabulous! The sassy hairdresser from Netflix's Queer Eye came out as living with HIV in 2019 and has not stopped being a media darling. His memoir Over the Top: A Raw Journey to Self Love came out last year and received wonderful reviews, even becoming a New York Times Non-Fiction Best Seller. In 2020, Van Ness released a picture book called Peanut Goes for the Gold about a nonbinary guinea pig with aspirations of being a rhythmic gymnast. He performed a virtual reading of Peanut as a benefit for children affected by the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure they would have meals normally provided to them at school. He said he created Peanut Goes for the Gold to celebrate the uniqueness and individualism of kids. We wish Jonathan would have been around when we were kids!

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