Marching Forward Together

June 16, 2010 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

“Marching Forward Together” was the theme of this year’s annual New York City Council LGBT Pride event, which was held June 15. I had the honor of attending.

The vivacious Wendy Williams was master of ceremonies. Speaker Christine Quinn welcomed the crowd (and took over hosting duties when Williams had to leave early to attend another event).

Before the event officially started, a compilation video of the "I Talk Because..." HIV/AIDS awareness campaign sponsored by Quinn's office was shown to the capacity-filled crowd in City Hall.

A heart-warming invocation was given by the Rev. Jacqui Lewis and a defiantly patriotic Pledge of Allegiance was led by Lt. Dan Choi.

Three honorees were given recognition: the family of Jorge Steven Lopez Mercado, a young LGBT man who was murdered in a hate crime in Puerto Rico; Q-Wave, the first LGBT Asian-American group to march in the annual Lunar New Year Parade in Chinatown; and the Brooklyn Community Pride Center (BCPC), the first LGBT center in Brooklyn.

Quinn introduced the other three openly LGBT members of the council, who in turn introduced the honorees. Longtime council member Rosie Mendez from Manhattan introduced the Lopez Mercado family. Newly elected council member Danny Dromm from Queens introduced Q-Wave. Also newly elected council member Jimmy Van Bramer from Queens introduced BCPC.

Outstanding musical performances were given by Tony-award winner Audra McDonald and country singer Chely Wright, who recently came out as a lesbian in a national media blitz.

I admit that my eyes welled up more than a few times during the event. There were so many stories of courage and heartbreak and love. I'll share two moments that made me especially emotional.

One of those moments was hearing Jimmy Van Bramer speak. I've known Jimmy personally for years. When I first met Jimmy, I only knew him as the partner of Dan Hendrick, a friend I met through my association with the New York chapter of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association (NLGJA).

Over the years, I got to know Jimmy in his own right. His passion to serve the people of his district has always been palpable. So it was no surprise that he showed such humility and genuine gratitude during his speech. He's already an inspiration and I look forward to seeing his many future successes in public life.

The other moment was seeing the family of Lopez Mercado. Pictured above from left: Jorge Lopez (Lopez Mercado's father); LGBT and HIV/AIDS activist Pedro Julio Serrano; Myriam Mercado (Lopez Mercado's mother); Gabriel Lopez (Lopez Mercado's brother); and council member Rosie Mendez. Not fluent in English, the family was represented by Serrano.

The four council members led a delegation earlier this year to visit the Lopez Mercado family in Puerto Rico. The reciprocal visit to New York City by the family was in and of itself moving. What

put it over the edge was when Myriam spoke and Serrano translated for her. Her simple yet profound message of hope continues to move me.

Events like these often can be all so much pomp and circumstance, but fortunately for me this event had all the flavor and none of the fat. I left feeling quite proud indeed.

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