Remembering Our Beloved Nancy Keene

By Sara Winter

Nancy Keene, one of the founders of PFLAG Denver and its first president, was 89 years old when she died peacefully on March 24, 2018, with her gay son and lesbian daughter at her side.

Born on December 13, 1928, Nancy Lou Umbenhaur was only three when she lost her mother to pneumonia. She grew up in the Chicago area, then attended college at William Woods University in Fulton, MO. She graduated from Baker University in Baldwin, KS, with a degree in Christian education. Her first job was as an educational secretary at the First United Methodist Church in Pittsburg, KS. In 1957 she married Richard Keene; they had a son Mark and a daughter Meredith, and moved to the Denver area in 1964. The family lived 18 years in Littleton, where Nancy was active in her church, Friends of the Library, and League of Women Voters.

Mark came out to his mother in the late seventies. When Nancy saw the newspaper ad about the first meeting for parents of gays, she decided she and Meredith should attend. Meredith balked but Nancy insisted, saying “We have to support your brother.” So they were both present at the very first meeting of the Denver chapter, in February 1980. When Meredith came out to her mother a short time later, she was almost disappointed that Nancy accepted the news with a ho-hum attitude (Meredith expected drama).

Nancy was elected president of the fledgling organization, known at that time as Parents and Friends of Gays or PFG, and served in that capacity for 12 years. Monthly meetings were inaugurated, and Nancy would start every meeting by cheerleading, “Gimme a P, gimme an F, gimme a G,” with such enthusiasm that it made everyone happy to be there. (Continued on page 3)

Chapter Supports Jeffco Safe Schools Coalition

By Lisa Telk

PFLAG Denver has joined forces with a variety of interested parties to establish a Jeffco Safe Schools Coalition. Headed up by Tracy Selph and Michael Morton, two Jeffco parents, the group has met twice to discuss issues, needs and potential projects (social media, GSA support, online resource library, outreach to schools, community networking, etc.) to provide support to Jeffco LGBTQ kids, youth, and families.

Community members and organizations that are a part of this ongoing project include parents, teachers, school staff, Jeffco administrators, school counselors, the JCPS Diversity & Inclusivity program, ONE Colorado, and Rainbow Alley. This will be the first Jeffco Safe Schools Coalition (JSSC). We are in the process of identifying needs such as in-service training for teachers and school staff; planning community event nights; providing assistance with anti-bullying programs; and many other issues that impact LGBTQ kids, youth and families.

Tracy Selph and Michael Morton have done tremendous work so far organizing this coalition. They have set up a Facebook page, Jeffco Safe Schools; a Twitter account @JeffcoSafe; and an Instagram account @JeffcoSafeSchools.

Please follow JSSC. And if you are interested in joining us at one of the meetings, you can contact Tracy Selph at tracy@jeffcosafeschools.org.
Volunteer Coordinator Reaches Out

My name is Lisa Telk and I am a Board member with PFLAG Denver. I have taken on the role of coordinating volunteers so I wanted to reach out to each individual who is interested in volunteering, to meet you, but I also need your help to update the volunteer register to see who is still interested in volunteering with PFLAG.

PFLAG is also excited to announce our new volunteer training program, with the very first Spring Volunteer Training scheduled for Wednesday, April 11. See the related article “Call to Action!” below.

We also need volunteers for our May 17 Scholarship Award Ceremony, where the LGBTQ youth most qualified (as selected from all applicants by the Scholarship Committee) will receive awards. Please come on April 11 to learn more about the Scholarship Awards Ceremony and how you can help us at this important event. If you cannot make the training session but you want to provide assistance at the Scholarship award ceremony, please respond to this email so that we can sign you up. You won’t want to miss it!

We also are already looking for PRIDEFEST volunteers for the weekend of June 16-17, to help in the booths. So, again, please come join us on April 11 to learn more about our exciting events coming up. If you can’t join us on April 11 but you want to join us for PRIDE, please send us an email and let us know on what day you are available.

If you are interested still in volunteering and can’t make the April 11 training, please send me an email giving me updated information (your name, email, address, and phone number) and letting me know what type of volunteer work you would be interested in. That will help me to update our records.

Dates to put on your calendar:
* Wednesday, April 11, 6-8 p.m., PFLAG Volunteer Training
* Thursday, May 17, Scholarship Awards Ceremony, 7-9 p.m.
* Saturday and Sunday, June 16-17, PRIDEFEST.

Please let us know if you are planning to attend the volunteer training and/or to help us at one of the events above. Thank you for your time, your support, and your devotion to our organization.

Call to Action!

By Lisa Telk

Calling all volunteers and supporters of PFLAG Denver! We are pleased to announce the first official PFLAG Volunteer Training Program of the new Board, to take place on April 11 at 6-8 p.m. at the CHUN mansion, 1290 Williams Street.

Hors d’oeuvres and refreshments will be served. Come meet members of the Board, obtain knowledge about the mission and history of PFLAG, learn what the national organization and the Denver chapter are doing for the LGBTQ community, and inform yourself on what volunteer opportunities are available at our Denver chapter.

The presenters will be Board members Blanca Leos, President; Dustin Krier, Vice-President; and myself, Lisa Telk, newly appointed coordinator of volunteers.

Please come join us for a night of refreshments, education, and fun!

For questions or more details, please contact me at Lisa@pflagdenver.org, or call PFLAG Denver at 303-573-5861.

We look forward to meeting many of you on April 11!

Two New Board Members on Board

Jaime Marston Cook — Jaime moved to Denver from Minneapolis in 2004, and immediately started fundraising for progressive causes. One of those causes was Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains (PPRM), for whom she raised $20,000 to send a busload of advocates from Denver to Washington, DC, for the March for Women’s Lives. Shortly thereafter, Jaime started working for PPRM, first in the health centers, then managing the volunteer program, and ultimately joining the development team with a focus on major gifts.

Deciding that it was time to venture beyond the nonprofit world, Jaime then pursued a career as a Financial Services Professional with New York Life. When she found that the work didn’t pull at her heart strings, she returned to the nonprofit community and joined Colorado Health Network as the Development Manager.

Jaime is an avid reader, a writer and editor for a local magazine, a gardener, and an intuitive cook. Her husband Ash jokes, “She earned the last name long before she married me!”

The bio of Rebecca Reynolds, the second new member, will follow next month.
Jean Hodges, PFLAG National President, sent this surprising communication on March 21: On behalf of the entire Board of Directors, I am reaching out to let you know that Executive Director Jaime Grant departed the helm of PFLAG National yesterday. (Jaime was in the position less than a year.) Regardless of this change, there is no better time than this—our 45th anniversary year—to reflect on, acknowledge, and be grateful to all of you tireless volunteers across the country who throughout PFLAG’s history have helped move us closer to realizing our collective vision of a world with full LGBTQ equality.

A new Colorado PFLAG chapter has been organized in Roaring Fork Valley, between Aspen and Glenwood Springs.

Rainbow Alley’s Queer Prom will take place from 8-11:30 p.m. on May 5 at the Auraria Campus. This year’s theme is Queers Through Time.

Save the date — May 19 — for the regional premiere of the trans documentary Raising Zoey. This is a powerful film about a Latina mom raising her transgender daughter Zoey. Screening will be in the Althea Center sanctuary, 1400 Williams St., with our special guests Dante Alencastre, the filmmaker, and Ofelia Dafne Barba, Zoey’s mom. The filmmaker has suggested an afternoon time in the hopes that parents might bring their children, since Zoey became a trans activist at age 13!

The Denver Gay Men’s Chorus seeks sopranos and altos to sing in its June concert, when it will be performing the Colorado premiere of a new choral work, Street Requiem, by Kathleen McGuire, Andy Payne and Jonathan Welch. The concert will benefit four charitable organizations in Denver and highlight the concept of home within all walks of life, including the homeless population in Denver and the support networks in place. The performance will take place at Trinity United Methodist Church in downtown Denver.

The Scholarship Committee is hard at work reading application packets and narrowing the list of this year’s recipients. Please mark May 17 on your calendars for the Scholarship Awards Ceremony at the Artwork Network Gallery, 878 Santa Fe Drive, from 7 - 9 p.m.

Remembering Nancy Keene (from p. 1)  
In an organization blessed with count-les and loving and supportive parents, Nancy was in a class by herself. From the beginning she didn’t want to just sit on the sidelines, in that heterosexual comfort zone, she wanted to get to know gay men and lesbian women. Mark introduced her to the gay bar scene, and soon she was going to gay bars regularly, dancing disco with the guys and urging them to come to PFG meetings. Nancy made every gay man she met there feel loved and appreciated, and she did the same with all lesbian women.

Tim Wilson has observed, “...the thing that really set Nancy apart was her unwavering demonstration of UNCONDITIONAL LOVE. Nancy reached out to the LGBTQ community in a way that was extraordinary in the 1980s. She went TO the community, while also attracting LGBTQ community members to come to and support PFLAG.”

By 1985 the AIDS epidemic was upon us, and Nancy felt compelled to provide comfort and solace to the many men who were dying of AIDS. She was one of the four founders of PFLAG Denver’s AIDS Family Support Group, which offered support to families suddenly challenged with an AIDS diagnosis. For 18 years she attended virtually every monthly meeting of this group, and she was a beloved presence. She also attended many, many services for men who had died of AIDS.

Over the years Nancy did her share of education and advocacy too. She was even arrested during a Soulforce protest at a National Episcopal Convention held in Denver.

Nancy went to innumerable drag shows and LGBTQ fundraising events, to Imperial Court coronations, to gay rodeos, to the Gay Games in San Francisco in 1983 and in Vancouver in 1990. She attended nearly all concerts of the various LGBT choral groups, nearly every Pride Parade and AIDS Walk.

Carole White remembers, “Whenever the PFLAG contingent would walk by in a gay pride parade, there would be cheering and tears from folks along the way, and Nancy taught some of our other parents how to respond to that reaction by walking over to people and hugging them instead of just waving and smiling. She became known as the ‘Mother Teresa of Capitol Hill.’”

Sadly, in her last years Nancy suffered from macular degeneration and dementia, and a series of falls and fractures weakened her frail body. Throughout she remained beautiful, with her ready smile and lovely white hair, and gamely carried on.

The extraordinary outpouring of grief and love that has attended her passing will surprise no one who knew her.

The family requests that, in lieu of flowers, a donation be made to PFLAG Denver (www.pflagdenver.org, or P.O. Box 18901, Denver 80218).

Send condolence messages to Mark and Meredith Keene

1080 Marigold Drive, Denver 80221.