

Local young men to carry out mission of AIDS activist

By Jen Colletta
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Jonathan Lax was a Philadelphia AIDS activist and a founding member of Philadelphia FIGHT and the local chapter of ACT UP. Lax died in 1996, but his legacy lives on through the countless lives his two organizations have touched. Before he died, Lax made one last effort in his fight for social justice: He established the Lax Scholarship Fund, which honors young gay men who have emerged as leaders in their communities.

Bread & Roses Community Fund, which garners and distributes funding for social-change organizations across the Delaware Valley, honored five local Lax scholars in an awards ceremony Nov. 7 at the William Way Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center.

Bread & Roses distributed \$40,000 among the five students- four \$5,000 scholarships and one \$20,000 award. While each of these young men comes from a vastly different background and is pursuing varying education and career goals, they all share the common mission of working to enhance the quality of life for members of the GLBT community.

Liam Dacey, 25, grew up in Cape Cod, Mass., and attended the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, where he studied film and television production. Dacey came out during his sophomore year in college.

Two years later, as a senior, Dacey founded the Notre Dame Queer Film Festival, which showcased films about and by GLBT individuals. Six months after graduation, Dacey moved to Philadelphia, where he worked for Equality Forum and the Delaware Valley Legacy Fund, an organization that allocates funds to local GLBT groups.

Dacey enrolled part-time in Temple University's Strategic Communication master's program in the spring, and is not attending full-time. He said the \$5,000 scholarship will enable him to keep attending full-time classes and earn his degree in a shorter amount of time. Dacey is interested in pursuing a career in radio.

"I hope to take my experience with the film festival into the radio world and create change there. I think media is already a little more progressive than other industries, but it still has a long way to go in terms of the gay and lesbian community."

Lax scholar Sheldon Brown-Brunk, 19, was born in Marlton, N.J., but grew up in Pennsylvania. Brown-Brunk attended Germantown Friends School and is currently a freshman at the University of Pennsylvania. Although he has not declared a major yet, he is certain he wants to be an entrepreneur after college.

Brown-Brunk came out two years ago and is now on the Board of Directors at the Delaware Valley Legacy Fund. He said he heard about the Lax scholarship opportunity from a family friend and researched Lax's life and goals before learning he was awarded the money.

"The scholarship's going to make my Penn education possible, and because of that I think the sky's the limit," Brown-Brunk said. "This is basically ensuring I have a bright future."

Awardee Marcus Borton, 18, is a native of Philadelphia who is in his freshman year at Eugene Lang College, a liberal arts school in New York City. Borton has not yet

declared a major and said he's currently "enjoying finding out what I like [by] taking different courses," although he is directing his studies toward pursuing a master's or doctorate degree.

Borton came out two-and-a-half years ago and, while still living in Philadelphia, was active in such organizations and programs as The Attic Youth Center, the Gay and Lesbian Latino AIDS Education Initiative and the Youth Health Empowerment Project.

Borton said the Lax scholarship will enable him to continue to pursue his education, as well as set an example for other young gay men.

"It will allow me to be able to get a degree and show other GLBT youth that getting a degree is not an unattainable goal," Borton said. "Despite whatever other people may tell them, higher education is something realistic they can strive for and attain."

Recipient Marcus Bachhuber, 25, is originally from Madison, Wis., and is enrolled in the University of Pennsylvania's School of Medicine. Bachhuber was not able to attend the Nov. 7 awards ceremony, however, because he is currently in Botswana working on a tuberculosis drug-resistance survey.

"TB is a huge problem in Botswana and around the developing world. It's the most common opportunistic infection and the most common cause of death in people with HIV/AIDS," he said in an e-mail.

Bachhuber came out after he graduated from college and served as the co-chair of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender People in Medicine during his first year-and-a-half of medical school.

He said the Lax scholarship will help lighten his debt and, in turn, pursue his career without having to worry as much about financial restrictions. Bachhuber is eager to emerge as an openly gay doctor in a field where he said openly gay individuals are few and far between.

"The scholarship was to encourage gay men to pursue visible positions in society where they could be a role model and mentor for other gay men. In the medical profession, there is a huge opportunity to do this."

Misha Isaak, 25, is a native of Portland, Ore., where he attended Reed College. Isaak is currently in his third and final year of law school at Penn. He has already been offered and accepted a two-year clerkship position with a federal judge in Camden.

Isaak was a member of the Queer Alliance in college and is now involved with Lambda Law, Penn Law School's GLBT organization. Isaak said he's been involved with political activities with the Human Rights Campaign and Basic Rights Oregon, his home state's antidiscrimination organization.

Isaak learned about the application for the Lax scholarship through a Lambda-circulated e-mail and said he was "ecstatic" when he was notified that he was chosen for the top award of \$20,000.

Isaak said the University of Pennsylvania Journal of Constitutional Law is publishing a scholarly article he wrote on the topic of gay marriage versus civil unions. Isaak and his partner of three years have a marriage ceremony planned for May.

"I think being an openly gay person by itself is a sort of advocacy. I'm trying to become the best lawyer I can be and earn people's respect and also become an advocate in antidiscrimination cases on behalf of gays and lesbians and an active participant in political advocacy on behalf of gays and lesbians," Isaak said. "I think that another

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important part of living my life as a good role model is being in a committed relationship and showing other people that gays and lesbians can have standard, monogamous, healthy, loving relationships just as heterosexuals can have.”

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