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National Gay and Lesbian Task Force to honor Miami Beach attorney Elizabeth Schwartz

BY STEVE ROTH AUS, SROTH AUS@MIAMIHERALD.COM

Miami Beach attorney Elizabeth Schwartz, one of South Florida's best-known champions for same-sex couples and alternative families, will be honored Saturday by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force at its annual Miami Recognition Dinner.

Schwartz, 40, will receive the 2012 Eddy McIntyre Community Service Award, named for her friend, a prominent South Florida attorney and gay activist who took his own life in 2007.

"It's especially

meaningful to get this recognition in the name of Eddy, whom I loved, and from an incredible organization that's doing so much in our community," said Schwartz, who specializes in family law and is chairwoman of the Gay and Lesbian Lawyers Association of South Florida.

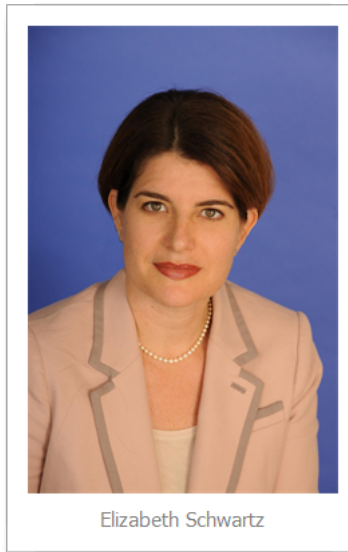
Among her causes:

- Serving as pro-bono counsel in several cases leading to the 2010 overturn of a Florida law that banned gay people from adopting.
- Helping hundreds of gay and lesbian clients have children via surrogacy programs and sperm banks.
- Working as an estate-planning advocate for gay and lesbian couples who are prohibited from marrying in Florida.

"If we could clone Liz Schwartz, we would and place her in communities across the country," Task Force Executive Director Rea Carey said. "Her work has national importance and national implications. Thousands of children, thousands of couples and thousands of families lives are markedly better solely because of the work of Liz Schwartz."

Schwartz, whose partner of 10 years is Miami Herald writer Lydia Martin, described her work with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender clients:

"The most important thing I'm doing is helping members of the LGBT community to shift their mindset that they are deserving of having these legal protections," she said. "Taking away the shame of being gay or lesbian and helping us celebrate the lives of our families and deem them worthy of the highest protections under the law."



Elizabeth Schwartz

The Miami Recognition Dinner, hosted by Roots co-star LeVar Burton, will also honor former Task Force Executive Director Matt Foreman, now program director of the San Francisco-based charitable Evelyn & Walter Haas Jr. Fund.

Eight years ago, Foreman helped save the Miami awards dinner, along with the annual Winter Party fundraiser, when the Gay & Lesbian Foundation of South Florida abruptly shut down. The Task Force immediately paid the foundation's debts and assumed ownership of both events, and has kept its promise to donate two-thirds of the net proceeds to the Miami Foundation's GLBT Community Projects Fund.

The Task Force in June donated \$211,291 to the Miami Foundation, which this week announced distribution of \$204,900 to 22 area groups, including Miami Beach Gay Pride, Pridelines Youth Services and the Miami-Dade Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce Foundation.

IF YOU GO

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's 16th annual Miami Recognition Dinner hosted by actor LeVar Burton and honoring Miami Beach attorney Elizabeth Schwartz and former Task Force Executive Director Matt Foreman begins 6:30 p.m. Saturday at the Fontainebleau Miami Beach hotel. Tickets are \$350 and \$250. www.thetaskforce.org

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