

# The Gay Pioneer

## Elizabeth Schwartz is honored with the 2012 Eddy McIntyre Community Service Award

Words by Martin Haro

For years, I have known of Elizabeth Schwartz, but not of her work.

A real shame, I'll admit, since I've shared a handful of dinners with the lady, whose partner of 10 years is the longtime *Miami Herald* writer Lydia Martin. Martin and I would be invited to the some of same press events here and there, and I often would see Schwartz with her, playing the role of plus one.

I can't help but imagine, however, that in her role as a "gay law" attorney who for 15 years has helped enrich the lives of countless LGBT individuals and families, Schwartz has enjoyed her share of the spotlight. When I heard that come Oct. 6 The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force will present Schwartz with the 2012 Eddy McIntyre Community Service Award at its Sparkle event at the Fontainebleau Miami Beach, I knew I had to learn about her double-pronto. (Sparkle, a.k.a. the Miami Recognition Dinner, is now in its 16<sup>th</sup> year.)

I'm glad I did, as I find myself a new fan of my once-anonymous tablemate. She obviously exemplifies the values for which she's receiving the award to a T. The McIntyre is named in honor of the late gay-rights activist and arts philanthropist who supported organizations like the old Dade Human Rights Foundation, SAVE Dade, Pridelines Youth Services, and the Miami Light Project.

Like McIntyre before her, the Miami Beach-born, Hollywood-raised attorney has given plenty of her time and efforts to further her community's fight for equality. Among her passions? Working to help overturn Florida's 1977 ban forbidding gays and lesbians from adopting children, which finally happened two years ago.

"It is one of the great privileges of my career and life to work with gay families," said the attorney, who graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with a degree in communications and minors in art history and Afro-American studies.



Schwartz and Martin had known each other for years before they started dating. They say that, *One day, things just clicked.*

Effecting change in the world was always on her mind, though, and it was in 1994, a year after leaving Penn, that she had an epiphany while at Jazz Fest in New Orleans. If what she wanted was to help make social change, she should go to law school.

"I was very anti-establishment, but I realized that with a law degree you can work within the establishment to change the rules," she said. She enrolled at UM and began her law studies.

While she was invested in fighting a number of social causes, she realized her heart was in working specifically with the gay and lesbian community, which was up against numerous challenges on the legal front. In her 15 years of practice, she has served on countless boards and taken on legal challenges too numerous to detail, but rejoices in how far our community has come on the local, state, and national level.

"There's still a huge battle ahead of us," she said. "Marriage equality is next on the docket, but what I would like to see across the board is accepting our families no matter what they look like."

Schwartz has focused her practice on the representation of the LGBT community in family formation and dissolution matters. She has lectured extensively about the

importance of gay couples protecting themselves and loved ones through estate planning and binding contracts. She is most passionate about fairness when it comes to these matters – both from the outside and within. Too often, the very same gay couples that clamor for marriage rights take advantage of the lack of protections.

"A legal parent will deny rights of a non-legal parent. A partner with the deed to the house and all of the assets will kick the ex to the curb because the law doesn't recognize the relationship," she said. "Sometimes people, left on their own, won't do the right thing."

By practicing therapeutic jurisprudence, Schwartz often manages to help clients see the bigger picture rather than focus on "getting theirs." It is because of this dedication to her community to that she's getting the McIntyre Award.

"Elizabeth is a pioneer – she's an advocate and a fighter," said Michael Bath, the Task Force's Miami events director. "The recipient of the Eddy McIntyre Community Service Award is chosen by all the past recipients, and hers was the only name put forth in 2012. It was unanimous and extremely well deserved."

Schwartz – who is also a founding member of the Aqua Foundation for Women, president-elect of the Miami Beach Bar Association, chair of the City of Miami Beach's Human Rights Committee and is a member of the National Center for Lesbian Rights' National Family Law Advisory Council – could not be more humbled by the honor, for she knew and loved McIntyre.

"It truly is such an honor to receive an award in Eddy's name," she said.

Looking ahead at the future, she says only one thing would make her happy (other than still having Martin and their dog Buttercup in her life): being obsolete.

"I hope that in 20 years there's no need for me in this 'gay law' arena," she said. **ML**