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MECLA Celebrates 13th

by Sandy Dwyer

There were many special moments during the 13th anniversary celebration of the Municipal Elections Committee of Los Angeles on May 5.

A beaming Thomas Coleman and Christopher McCauley accepted the Peter Scott Founder's Award on behalf of the Los Angeles Family Diversity Project. The Project was recognized for its pioneering work in research and advocacy on behalf of the nation's diverse family units -- the majority of which in Los Angeles, is other than the traditional married couple with children.

The Family Diversity Project evolved from the Los Angeles City Task Force on Family Diversity, established by Councilman Michael Woo. The Task Force completed the landmark report, "Strengthening Families: A Model of Community Action," which, among other items, demonstrated the need for legal recognition of domestic partners.

Coleman, a civil rights attorney and recognized authority on family law, was the principal consultant to the Task Force, and civil rights activist McCauley, was a Task Force co-chair. Following the dissolution of the Task Force, the two felt the need for a group to continue the research and advocacy, becoming the Project's first co-chairs.

Equally pleased and proud to be honored were Jewel and Rue Thais-Williams. Presented with the Gayle Wilson Memorial Award,

the women were recognized for their joint and individual contributions to the overall welfare of the gay and lesbian community. As a couple, they obviously have similar interests.

Jewel, owner of Catch One nightclub, has underwritten many benefit fund raisers for non-profit organizations at the club, is a co-founder of the Minority AIDS Project and the Unity Fellowship Church, plus since 1986 has been involved with addiction recovery programs, including the only residential program specifically for gay men and lesbians, Van Ness House.

Rue has been professionally involved with social service and mental health programs, serving as a social service advocate for Phoenix House's Glendale Battered Women's Center. A year ago last April, she established the country's first residential home for women and children diagnosed with AIDS or who are HIV positive.

Together, they are now working on establishing a facility to help people recover from drug and alcohol dependence.

MECLA's Communication Award was presented to Home Box Office for their contributions to increasing awareness of AIDS and the gay and lesbian community to the general public through their productions. The productions included: "Common Threads" about the NAMES Project AIDS Quilt which won the 1990 Academy Award for best documentary.

The Humanitarian Award was presented to Kate

Michelman, head of the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL), the political arm of the pro-choice movement. NARAL has been instrumental in the victories of California Assemblywoman Tricia Hunter and state Sen. Lucy Killea as well as other pro-choice candidates in other states across the nation.

U.S. Assemblywoman Pat Schroeder of Colorado was the evening's keynote speaker. As the fourth ranking Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee and chair of its Subcommittee on Military Installations and Facilities as well as a senior member of the Judiciary Committee, Schroeder is an outspoken advocate for sex equity in the Armed Forces and pro-choice as well as a champion of equal rights for gays and lesbians.

In her speech she accused the former Reagan Administration of being a "government of style, not of substance." In regard to Bush, she said, "I think people are enchanted," she said, but that it was merely a "change in style ... there isn't much difference in substance." Schroeder took Bush to task for his display of compassion for people with AIDS while failing to adequately budget for care, research and education.

"We must talk about AIDS ... money for AIDS," she said. Schroeder said that \$400,000 is spent by the Administration per day on the homeless while \$15 million is spent per day on the B2 bomber. "We must change America's [spending] priorities before we can go forward."



Thomas Coleman and Christopher McCauley, co-chairs of Family Diversity Project, accept MECLA's award on behalf of the organization.