

RICHARD BURNS

b. May 12, 1955

MOVEMENT LEADER

“The call is to each of us to now take responsibility for the conferring of all rights to all people.”

He helped plan the October 1979 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights.

Richard D. Burns is a longtime LGBT community leader and organizer. He served for 22 years as executive director of New York’s Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center (The Center) and has held leadership roles at numerous human rights organizations, including the Arcus Foundation, GLAD and Lambda Legal.

Burns graduated from Hamilton College in 1977 and earned his law degree from Northeastern University. In 1978 he cofounded Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders (GLAD) and served as its president until 1986. He became managing editor of Gay Community News in 1978, the only national lesbian and gay newsweekly at the time, and later became president of its board.

In February 1979, Burns and three other Boston representatives participated in the Philadelphia Conference, a meeting of LGBT leaders from across the nation to organize the historic October 1979 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights.

From 1980 to 1983, Burns served on the first national board of the Lambda Legal Defense & Education Fund. In 1985 he cofounded and led the board of the Massachusetts LGBTQ Bar Association.

Burns became the first executive director of The Center in 1986, at the height of the AIDS crisis, and served until 2009. The second largest multiservice center of its kind in the world, The Center offers health and social services as well as cultural and recreational activities to the NYC LGBT community.

In 1994, while serving at The Center, Burns cofounded CenterLink, an organization serving over 200 LGBT community centers across the United States. That same year, he cofounded the New York State LGBT Health and Human Services Network.

Since 2009 Burns has led prominent nonprofit organizations. He was the Chief Operating Officer of the Arcus Foundation, one of the largest international funders of LGBT initiatives. He has acted as interim executive director of organizations such as the Stonewall Community Foundation, Funders for LGBTQ Issues, PENCIL, the North Star Fund, the Funding Exchange and the Johnson Family Foundation. Currently, he serves at the interim CEO of Lambda Legal.

Burns is a member of the board of directors for the Proteus Fund, a social justice grantmaker; the New York City AIDS Memorial Park; the Nonprofit Coordinating Committee; and the Center for HIV Law and Policy. He is a past member of the selection committee of the New York Community Trust Nonprofit Excellence Awards.

Burns has received several awards for his vision and service. In 2008 the Center for Effective Government (formerly OMB Watch) named him to the Public Interest Hall of Fame for Outstanding Leadership and Commitment to Social Justice.



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