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Two Equality Illinois Boards Led By Two Impressive Women

CHICAGO -- Two fascinating women now sit atop the two key Equality Illinois boards, the first time women have led both of the major arms of the state's oldest and largest LGBT advocacy organization.

Catherine Sikora, a photographer and longtime LGBT activist with a special focus on the transgender community, is the new chair of the Equality Illinois Board of Directors, effective July 1, 2012, overseeing the political advocacy work of the non-profit. And **Dalila Fridi**, a 1990 immigrant from Algeria, continues for a second year as the board chair of the Equality Illinois Education Project, which concentrates on community outreach and building alliances.

"We are most fortunate to be led by two amazing women with such interesting personal histories that bring unique perspectives to our ongoing struggle for recognition and equality," said Bernard Cherkasov, CEO of Equality Illinois.

Sikora, a 2005 inductee in the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame, was recognized "for advocacy of laws against discrimination because of gender identity or sexual orientation and for visual documentation of the transgender community as well as the larger LGBT community in the Chicago area," according to her citation. (Her full citation is at: http://www.glhalloffame.org/index.pl?item=240&todo=view_item)

The parent of a grown daughter, Sikora was at the center of successful campaigns to include gender identity in human rights protections in Chicago, Cook County and Illinois. Her photographic documentary work has showcased Equality Illinois, the Chicago Commission on Human Relations, the AIDS Foundation of Chicago and the Test Positive Aware Network.

Fridi's work as board chair of the Equality Illinois Education Project is about building alliances within the faith community and educating the public about LGBT issues.

Fridi believes that the teachings of her Muslim faith support equal rights for all. "I was born to fight for civil rights," Fridi told the Chicago Tribune in an interview several months ago, recalling her grandmother's encouragement in Algeria. "Equal rights come in different colors. ... As a Muslim woman, I might not make an impact fighting for Muslims as a whole, but maybe somehow I could make people think differently about Muslims."

Fridi is a senior technical analyst at Northwestern Memorial Hospital, Chicago, where she has been working since 1998. Additionally, she has worked with the Lesbian Community Cancer Project, raised funds and volunteered for Howard Brown Health Center, and volunteered at the Women's Health Department of Northwestern. In Algeria, she was on the National Women's Junior Hand-Ball Team.

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