

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **KINGSTON MAYOR JAMES SOTTILE MEETS WITH STEERING COMMITTEE OF PROPOSED HUDSON VALLEY LGBTQ COMMUNITY CENTER AND EXPRESSES SUPPORT FOR PROJECT**

#### **COMMUNITY CENTER NAMES HISTORIC FIRST BOARD OF DIRECTORS, COMPOSED OF LEADING LOCAL CITIZENS**

KINGSTON, NY -- Mayor James Sottile has expressed his support for the establishment of a Kingston-based community center for the lesbian and gay community, to be named The Hudson Valley LGBTQ Community Center.

(LGBTQ refers to the sexual orientation of those people the Center is designed to help: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer or questioning individuals.)

In a prepared statement, Mayor Sottile said:

“The City of Kingston has always been ready to help all groups in our community. Most recently, we assisted the Arts Society of Kingston in securing a space at 97 Broadway and I intend to use the same energy in helping the Center Steering Committee find suitable space for their community center.

“It is my hope that this community center will give the gay and lesbian community a place to gather and work together to address the serious issues they face. It is my further hope that our community will embrace this center and that this center will embrace our whole community as we continue to break down the stereotypes that, sometimes, divide us.

“I look forward to working with the Center Steering Committee in this valuable project, recognizing that the gay and lesbian community is not a fringe group, but a legitimate section of society and should be treated with the same respect and dignity that we all deserve.”

Mayor Sottile met recently with members of the Center Steering Committee. Committee members stressed the need for the Center for several reasons: the need for a central meeting place for gay and lesbian people facing bigotry and unequal treatment; a resource for public

and private agencies currently not providing much needed services to members of the LGBTQ community; and an educational and cultural center serving the Hudson Valley LGBT community.

“Mayor Sottile expressed the fact that he understood that gay and lesbian people in the Mid-Hudson Valley still struggle for the equal rights granted all other Americans,” said Virginia Apuzzo, the President of the Center Board of Directors. “He recognizes the need for a community center as a meeting place where we may begin to rectify those inequities. We are grateful for his support of this important project.

“The Mayor expressed his ongoing support for the creation of a community center and offered to set up meetings with other key city officials to begin the process of building bridges to agencies whose services are vital to the health, education and well-being of all community residents.

The Hudson Valley LGBTQ Community Center would provide social services, counseling, and cultural programs for all citizens of the region. Its proposal to offer social services is particularly important, since gays and lesbians are underserved by the current infrastructure which overlooks their special concerns, whether they are teens or senior citizens. County schools offer no gay and lesbian history courses nor support for teens who face verbal harassment and physical abuse for their sexual orientation. Nationally, gay and lesbian teens suffer higher levels of depression than their straight counterparts and are twice as likely to commit suicide because of homophobic treatment.

Community response to the Center has been enthusiastic. The first public meeting about the project occurred last October in the City Council Chambers of Kingston City Hall. More than 200 supportive people attended. The next public meeting will take place on April 28 at the Rosendale Rec Center at 7pm. Admission is free.

The Hudson Valley LGBTQ Community Center has appointed its first full Board of Directors. Members will serve until January, 2007. They are new Board members are: Ted Hayes, a Stone Ridge-based retired Southern Baptist minister; Denise Jelley, is a licensed clinical social worker in private practice and co-founder of the New Paltz Pride March and Festival; Tricia Kakalec, an attorney and Executive Director of the Workers’ Rights Law Center of New York, Inc., in Kingston. (Ms. Kakalec was recently appointed by Mayor Sottile to the Kingston Human Rights Commission; she serves as Secretary of the Center Board.) Nicole Ressa, a teen educator for Planned Parenthood of the Mid- Hudson Valley; she serves as Treasurer of the Center Board; Vanessa Shelmandine, a Family Specialist with the Mental Health Association in Ulster County, Inc. (Shelmandine assists youth with high-level needs develop behavioral skills and maintain school and family connections while living in a therapeutic foster home.)

These five members join the existing four Board members: Mike Madsen; Kingston city alderman; he serves on the Executive Committee of the Center Board. Marie (Ria) Slaton, New Paltz graphics arts designer and co-owner of J. Zachary Design; Jan Whitman, director of the Food Bank of the Hudson Valley; she serves as Vice President of the Center Board. Virginia Apuzzo, who currently serves as President of the Center Board, is a former New York State Commissioner under Governor Cuomo and White House official under President Clinton.

**ATTENTION MEDIA:** All members of the The Hudson Valley LGBTQ Community Board of Directors are available for advance interviews. To schedule an interview, call our press attaché at (845) 687-2284.