



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Mark Lehman/ craigmark89@gmail.com / 330-631-4415 (cell)
Tom Falcone / tom@pflagcleveland.org/ (440) 413-4488 (cell)

PFLAG Cleveland Awards HIV/AIDS Leaders with Jane A. Daroff Lifetime Achievement Award

Recognizes these leaders who fought against HIV/AIDS in northeast Ohio: Tracy Jones, AIDS Taskforce of Greater Cleveland, Dr. Michael Lederman, Sr. Marian Durkin, Sr. Susan Zion, and Mark Lehman

Cleveland, OH (Nov. 13, 2023) – PFLAG Cleveland recently presented the [Jane A. Daroff Lifetime Achievement Award](#) to Cleveland-area pioneers who stepped up to care for people with HIV/AIDS when others shunned them. In the 1980s, these five people, along with one organization, were among the many who worked to lead the fight against HIV/AIDS.

The pioneers recognized with the Jane A. Daroff Lifetime Achievement Award are: **Tracy Jones**, executive director, AIDS Taskforce of Greater Cleveland; **Michael Lederman, MD**, an infectious disease specialist in Cleveland who is affiliated with University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center; **Sr. Marian Durkin**, Sister of Charity of St. Augustine who co-founded The Open House, a ministry for those afflicted with AIDS and their families; **Sr. Susan Zion**, Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland who is founder/executive director of Ursuline Piazza, which educates and supports HIV-positive people; and **Mark Lehman**, retired manager of the Department of Social Work at The MetroHealth System in Cleveland who was an original member of MetroHealth Pride Alliance and board member at HIT. Additionally, the **AIDS Taskforce of Greater Cleveland**, the successor to the Health Issues Taskforce (HIT), was awarded for being a leading organization for HIV/AIDS care in northeast Ohio and beyond.

“These leaders exemplify what it means to ‘lead with love,’ which is PFLAG’S motto,” said Tom Falcone, president of PFLAG Cleveland. “They took action to help those suffering from HIV/AIDS during a time when federal and local governments did not prioritize this chronic disease as a health issue, primarily because it affected gay men. Research and funding for HIV/AIDS care barely existed, nor were resources like home care and nursing homes available. In fact, there was such a lack of resources that many people living with HIV/AIDS remained in isolation in hospitals for weeks and sometimes months.”

(See what it was like to be gay in the age of AIDS on the [History Channel](#)!.)

Fortunately, leaders existed in Cleveland, Ohio, who found strength, purpose and direction in their work, thanks to efforts led by national groups, like the Gay Men’s Health Crisis, and local organizations, such as the Health Issues Taskforce (HIT).

“The Jane A. Daroff Lifetime Achievement Award is named in honor of PFLAG Cleveland's co-founder, Jane Daroff, LISW-S,” Falcone said. “The award, given out periodically, is reserved to recognize individuals, groups or organizations that have long championed the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals and their families.”

Previous recipients include U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown and Dr. Sharon Groh-Wargo, former president, PFLAG Cleveland. Information about each recipient appears below. Photos can be found [here](#).

About each Jane A. Daroff Lifetime Achievement Award recipient:

TRACY JONES, MNO, ATGC

,Executive Director, Cleveland AIDS Taskforce and Cleveland AIDS Taskforce

- Tracy has been with the Taskforce for 24 years and has been its Executive Director for the past 13 years.
- Tracy has led the organization to be federally funded by more than 10 organizations.
- Locally, she manages over 28 staff, and three programs.
- Nationally, she manages over 200 staff.
- Prior to becoming involved with the AIDS Taskforce, Tracy became involved in HIV work as a teenager. She filled prescriptions as a pharmacy technician for Kaiser Permanente and began to work in earnest in HIV prevention in the late 90s with programs like SAMM (Stopping AIDS is My Mission) and through an appointment with the City of Cleveland HIV/AIDS Unit. She also worked in HIV drug treatment with Project SAFE and worked in HIV prevention for African-American women at The University of Akron.
- PFLAG Cleveland appreciates her constant leadership in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

MICHAEL LEDERMAN, MD, LSMFT

The Scott R. Inkley Professor of Medicine at Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) School of Medicine and University Hospitals/Cleveland Medical Center where he is also Professor of Pathology, Microbiology/Molecular Biology and Biomedical Ethics

- Dr Lederman was one of a small handful of physicians who addressed HIV/AIDS in the early 1980s.
- In 1983 in collaboration with Dr. Oscar Ratnoff, who conducted research on the process of coagulation and blood-related disorders, the two demonstrated that men with hemophilia had immune issues similar to persons living with AIDS; showed that HIV was contained in the use of anti hemophilic factor used for treating hemophilia.
- In 1983, Dr. Lederman founded the inpatient AIDS service at University Hospitals.
- In 1985-1987, he founded the AIDS Special Immunology Outpatient Unit at University Hospitals.
- He founded and led (until 2019), the National Institutes of Health (NIH)-funded AIDS Clinical Trials Unit at CWRU, which is connected to the International AIDS Clinical Trial Unit. These programs have established strategies and standards of care for treatment of HIV infections throughout the world. Additionally, Dr. Lederman has supervised AIDS Clinical Trial Units in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Kampala, Uganda, Africa.

- From 1980-2020, he led a large research laboratory at Case Western Reserve where he trained three dozen doctoral and post-doctoral candidates who have earned national recognition as the best young investigators.
- Dr. Lederman established and led the NIH-funded Cleveland Immunopathogenesis Consortium that helped define the mechanisms of immune repair in HIV.
- Dr Lederman has co-authored numerous articles and received numerous awards, while also being elected to prestigious societies, for his work with HIV/AIDS.
- PFLAG Cleveland is most thankful that Dr. Lederman was one of the few physicians who was there when others turned away. He was willing to care for many who were suffering and forgotten.

SR. MARIAN DURKIN, CSA

Sister of Charity of St. Augustine who co-founded The Open House, a ministry for those afflicted with AIDS and their families

- Her ministry with Persons with AIDS began in the late 1980s.
- Sr. Marian was working at the Motherhouse in Richfield and felt a calling, something new. A calling to “do something” for those living and dying with AIDS.
- Her journey led her to the AIDS Taskforce of Greater Cleveland where she went through the Buddy Training Program.
- Her first Buddy was Michael and Sr. Marian said it was an honor to be with him in his final years.
- Additionally, during this time she would take people to doctor appointments, visit people in the hospital and staff the desk at The Living Room, a drop-in center for AIDS counseling and education that was founded in 1989.
- In 1989, Sr. Marian found herself planning for an East Side setting that would be comparable to the West Side Living Room. She worked with Gail Frires to co-found The Open House in 1993.
- Initially there were two social workers and a staff member who staffed the “Here and Now” Education Program. Additionally, they were able to add The Positive Touch Program, a massage program, which later received grant funding. Prior to funding, the therapists offered their services for free.
- Besides the paid staff, there were many volunteers that worked in the agency and on the Board of Trustees
- Sr. Marian left The Open House in 2002 when she was elected to serve the leadership team in her congregation.
- PFLAG Cleveland appreciates Sr. Marian, who stated that her ministry working with Persons with AIDS was the most gratifying part of her life.

SR. SUSAN ZION, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, URSULINE PIAZZA

Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland who is founder/executive director of Ursuline Piazza, which educates and supports HIV-positive people

- Sr. Susan, who joined Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland in 1967, was a classroom teacher for more than 20 years.
- Her initial involvement in HIV/AIDS work was in Youngstown, Ohio, where, in 2001, she helped to establish an HIV/AIDS clinic.

- She moved back to Cleveland after learning about the AIDS unit at Saint Augustine Health Ministries. She met with administrators who offered her office space in exchange for her help with AIDS patients.
- In 2007, she founded Ursuline Piazza, whose name recalls Ursuline founder Angela Merici's exhortation to be "living piazzas where all are welcome."
- Ursuline Piazza's mission is to educate and support HIV-positive people to live better, healthier lives. It sponsors programs to assist clients with finding/maintaining stable housing, provides toiletries and cleaning supplies unavailable through the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and encourages volunteer peer-to-peer support with stipend incentives. Additionally, Ursuline Piazza offers assistance in attaining birth certificates and state IDs, and provides medication reminders.
- Ursuline Piazza sponsors Club 95, a monthly support group named for its promotion of 95% adherence to HIV medications.
- PFLAG Cleveland appreciates Sr. Susan providing spiritual ministry to the HIV/AIDS community.

MARK LEHMAN, MSSA, LISW

Retired manager of the Department of Social Work at The MetroHealth System in Cleveland who was an original member of MetroHealth Pride Alliance and board member at the Health Issues Taskforce (HIT).

- In 1984, Mark was asked to be on the Health Issues Taskforce (HIT) board at the end of 1984 as a member-at-large. In early 1985, Mark was asked to move into the role of Chair of Support Services to assist people living with HIV/AIDS.
- He initially set up a "Divisions of Support," which allowed him to design his own social service programs. Among the services provided were: Buddy Program, Buddy Training Program, Housing, Group Therapy and Financial Support. Each division had a person in charge of it.
- Soon, the number of volunteers rose to more than 150 people. The volunteers included straight women, lesbians, gay men and members of various religious organizations.
- Each division met regularly, and each division head reported to Mark. They also gave a report at a monthly meeting for all support services volunteers, which was held at Trinity Cathedral.
- The Support Services created a Holiday Party held at Trinity for the HIV/AIDS community, which was especially meaningful for those whose families had turned away from their gay sons.
- All this work was done without funding from the local or federal government or agency. HIT held an annual summer fundraiser, called Dancing in The Streets, to provide financial support to the organization.
- Mark oversaw these support services till the summer of 1989. At that time, there finally was funding that supported paid positions to take over the needed social service programs.
- In 1992, Mark was hired at MetroHealth to manage the HIV Social Work staff for the newly established HIV Medical Clinic. In 1998, to ensure services continued in the clinic, Mark applied for a Federal Ryan White Grant to support salaries for Social Workers in the HIV Program. In addition to this role, he was also the Manager, Social Work for the entire Metrohealth System before retiring in 2018.

About the award organization:

AIDS Taskforce of Greater Cleveland

The successor to the Health Issues Taskforce (HIT) was awarded for being a leading organization for HIV/AIDS care in northeast Ohio and beyond.

- In 1983, a small group of gay men and lesbians formed to address “Health Issues” of lesbians and gays. For six months the group met. However, later in 1983, HIV/AIDS began showing up in Cleveland. At that point, the group decided to change its name and became the Health Issues Taskforce (HIT) in 1984.
- HIT had an all-volunteer workforce until 1987-1988 when its first part-time executive director was hired.
- Soon other funding started to emerge and more paid positions were added in 1989.
- The Taskforce grew, merging with the AIDS Housing Council (due to AHC’s financial stresses). The Taskforce next helped launch Proyecto Luz, a faith-based initiative that specifically provided services to the Latinex community. Additionally, the Taskforce partnered with the AGAPE program at the Antioch Baptist Church.
- In 2001, the Taskforce received a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention geared towards young, Black and Latino men who have sex with men. It is called Beyond Identities Community Center Program.
- In 2002, The Open House became affiliated with the Taskforce.
- In 2013, the Taskforce was the first to sign an agreement with AIDS Healthcare Foundation, a national organization; 13 other affiliations have since been brokered around the US.
- The Taskforce, which began as a VERY grassroots organization in people’s living rooms, became a lead organization for HIV/AIDS care for northeast Ohio and beyond.

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About PFLAG Cleveland: PFLAG is the first and largest organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) people, their parents and families, and allies. With over 400 chapters and 200,000 members and supporters crossing multiple generations of families in major urban centers, small cities, and rural areas across America, PFLAG is committed to creating a world where diversity is celebrated and all people are respected, valued, and affirmed. In our community, PFLAG Cleveland was established by Jane Daroff, LISW & Dr. Jes Sellers in July 1985. To learn more, visit <http://www.pflagcleveland.org>.



The Jane A. Daroff Lifetime Achievement Award HIV/AIDS pioneers are (from left): Tracy Jones, executive director, AIDS Taskforce of Greater Cleveland; Michael Lederman, MD, an infectious disease specialist in Cleveland who is affiliated with University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center; Jane Daroff, co-founder of PFLAG Cleveland; Sr. Marian Durkin, Sister of Charity of St. Augustine who co-founded The Open House, a ministry for those afflicted with AIDS and their families; Sr. Susan Zion, Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland who is founder/executive director of Ursuline Piazza, which educates and supports HIV-positive people; and Mark Lehman, retired manager of the Department of Social Work at The MetroHealth System in Cleveland who was an original member of MetroHealth Pride Alliance and board member at HIT. Additionally, the AIDS Taskforce of Greater Cleveland, the successor to the Health Issues Taskforce (HIT), was awarded for being a leading organization for HIV/AIDS care in northeast Ohio and beyond. (Photos credit – Jim Pojman)

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