



## News Release

### **8<sup>th</sup> Annual Disability Pride Parade Names Constantine “Gus” Zografopoulos, Marsha Koelliker as Van Hecke Award Recipients**

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#### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

CHICAGO – The 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Disability Pride Planning Committee selected Constantine “Gus” Zografopoulos, founder and executive director of the Kostas Z Foundation, as the 2011 recipient of the Dan Van Hecke Award for Outstanding Leadership and Service.

The Dan Van Hecke Award was created in 2009 to honor the work of a man who dedicated his life to empowering people with disabilities. Dan, a major organizer of the Disability Pride Parade, was also an accessible taxi driver and spearheaded the Taxi Access Program in Chicago. His inexhaustible efforts to create more avenues of independence for and empower people with disabilities are reflected in this award. Recipients must be persons with a disability, a family member, friend or ally to the disability community, who display leadership, initiative, creativity, integrity and empowerment to people with disabilities.

Zografopoulos had both legs amputated due to an auto accident in 1995. The spirit of his life experience helped him guide his foundation in its mission to provide information, participation and integration among people with disabilities, their families and friends. His emphasis is on individual empowerment, organizational support and encouraging accessibility and universal design worldwide.

Zografopoulos has been an entrepreneur in the Chicago foodservice industry for 30 years.

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He spearheaded the Chicago accessible beach path project to allow wheelchairs users to swim in the lakefront beaches. He is a member Rehabilitation of Institute of Chicago's (RIC) sports program and peer visitor program and was the recipient of RIC's Tree of Life Award in 2001. He was a Torchbearer for the Athens 2004 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Zografopoulos currently serves on the Chicago Park District Disability Advisory Board and has worked with the Open Doors Organization to make travel accessible to all individuals and was involved in the Chicago Access Guide.

The Van Hecke Award is also being presented posthumously to Marsha Koelliker, former public policy director at Equip for Equality. Koelliker, known throughout Illinois as a person whose integrity was beyond question, played a key role in making Equip for Equality one of the most trusted and respected advocacy organizations throughout the state.

Koelliker always sought to empower people with disabilities and explain to legislators and policy makers the importance of enabling people to be independent and in control of their own lives. The anti-sterilization bill mentioned above is just one example of this. Among her many other accomplishments are passage of bills in the area of abuse and neglect, including protections for adults with disabilities who are victims of violence and neglect; enhanced oversight at community-based programs and institutional settings; and provisions to safeguard students in special education from locked "time out" (seclusion), restraints, and other aversive and dangerous practices. In addition, Marsha has been a steadfast advocate for the rights of people with mental illness, including fighting to prevent a lowering of the standard for involuntary psychiatric examinations as well as involuntary commitment. She also spearheaded an effort to secure training for law enforcement officials about handling individuals with mental illness.

The parade is set for Saturday, July 23, in downtown Chicago. An estimated 5,000 people, floats, and vehicles representing a wide variety of disability and other organizations will march and roll along Dearborn Street from the Harold Washington Library to Daley Plaza – all in celebration of the theme: **Disability Pride is Contagious! Catch the Pride.** (See accompanying fact sheet.)

The Disability Pride Parade is an annual event that celebrates and strengthens the pride, power, and unity of people with disabilities, their families, and allies, and serves to generate national visibility for the disability community.

For more information, [www.disabilityprideparade.org](http://www.disabilityprideparade.org), [askus@disabilityprideparade.org](mailto:askus@disabilityprideparade.org), 1-866-260-5812.

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