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THE GAY/LESBIAN/BITRANS NEWSPAPER & EVENTS CALENDAR FOR THE BAY AREA

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Tree of Hope on Display at City Hall

By **Dennis McMillan**

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The Tree of Hope was lit during a unique and boisterous Mayor's event at City Hall that brought members of the LGBT community, the Japanese-American community, and religious leaders together. Over 120 people had folded origami, and it took over 600 hours to put the whole project together. The ceremony was hosted by Jan Wahl of KRON and Donna Sachet. Speakers included Rev. Chris Glaser of MCC, Rev. Cecil Williams and Janice Mirikitani of Glide Memorial church and Assemblyman Mark Leno.

"As we move closer to the end of a remarkable year in San Francisco, a remarkable year around the state, country, and the world that we are collectively trying to build, I just wanted to honor the remarkable accomplishments of the last six years of Rainbow World Fund," said Mayor Gavin Newsom during the ceremony. "They spearheaded efforts, where literally hundreds of thousands of dollars have gone all around the world because of their idea. The challenge is to make the idea manifest in real change – and that's exactly what they have done".

"Many turned out to listen to the wise and heartfelt words of the speakers," said Jeff Cotter, executive director of Rainbow World Fund, a queer philanthropic world relief charity. "It was a great official kickoff to San Francisco's holiday season." Songstresses Veronica Klaus and Carol Lund entertained at the party following the ceremony with a jazz repertoire and a few holiday favorites. Hundreds of colorful cranes were given away so folks could bring home a bit of the event to their homes as holiday celebrations. The Mihara family had two tables of origami enthusiasts folding and teaching.

Senator Barack Obama wished for "a world for our children more just, more fair, and more kind than the one we know now." Mayor Newsom wished "for a world where hope begets freedom, a world where opportunity is equaled by justice, a world where the health of our planet is considered as precious as the lives of our children." Frances Moore Lappe gave her first speech as the author of *Diet for a Small Planet* at the University of Michigan in early 1972 and went on to co-found Small Planet Institute, serving as a resource for hope and action. Her wish was that "... We discover our power to create the world we want ..."

"Contributions like these, from senators to school children, from San Francisco to Sri Lanka, make City Hall's holiday Tree of Hope on display until January 2nd a unique and powerful symbol of unity and hope," said Cotter. He said the above were just a few of "the beautiful and inspirational wishes that Rainbow World Fund (RWF) received to decorate the holiday tree at City Hall. The Tree of Hope is decorated with thousands of origami cranes inscribed with people's wishes for the future of the world. RWF has gathered wishes on its website, [rainbowfund.org](#), and by mail.

"The global response that we have received is amazing. We have received wishes from amazing people all over the world" said Cotter. "We've folded like maniacs for two solid months!"

"When Jeff and I came up with the idea for this project while in Guatemala on a RWF relief mission this summer, we thought it was something the world needed right now," said Project Coordinator, Paul Stankiewicz. "We have been working so hard on this the past few months that we didn't have time to emotionally prepare for the



The Rainbow World Fund's Tree of Hope lighting ceremony at City Hall. MC Donna Sachet, Ed Jeff Cotter, Assemblyman Mark Leno, MC Jan Wahl, Mayor Newsom and Audre Joseph. THE LGBT-based Rainbow World Fund is a worldwide humanitarian relief

responses." He said, "They are all very, very touching and heartfelt. Several days went by before I could share Senator Obama's wish without my voice cracking."

"We hope this tree will help people to understand that while a single person's action is valuable (in this case, it's a wish), it is the collective effort of many that possesses great power and strength," continued Stankiewicz. "This tree is not going to single-handedly change all the planet's problems overnight. What it can do is inspire all of us to come together and begin to feel that we can start. If everyone could do just one thing today that is good for our planet or for each other, we would be better off than we were yesterday. That is my wish."

Cotter said, "This event celebrated the best aspects of the holidays: community, reflection, the spirit of giving, the wonder of life, and of course, fun! " RWF is continuing to collect wishes for a proposed book. To contribute a wish and for more information including the text of wishes from Danielle Steel, Stanley Gatti, and others visit rainbowfund.org.

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