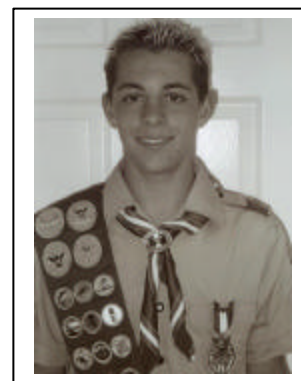


## Scout's Honor Takes on Intolerance

### *Meet Colin Higgins Courage Award Winner Steven Cozza*

When 12-year-old Life Scout, Steven Cozza, submitted a letter to the editor of the local Petulama, CA newspaper, he was just doing his duty as a good scout. He had recently been told that his own Boy Scouts of America (BSA) did not allow gay kids and adults in their program. Though Steven is not gay, he felt ashamed of the program he liked so much and began doing his part – including letters to Congress, requests to the BSA and petitions on street corners – to see the policy changed.



“I’m just doing what the Boy Scouts taught me,” Steven – now 15 and a freshman at Petulama High School, just north of San Francisco – says. “The BSA is supposed to represent the very best values of our society and instead they embrace the worst bigotry and discrimination.” Though he says it isn’t always easy speaking in front of large crowds, this teenager has had the courage to stand by and follow through on his commitment to seeing this policy eliminated by speaking at churches, community organizations and, most recently, at the Millennium March on Washington.

Since December 1997, when Cozza first took a stand against the BSA’s exclusion, he has collected over 55,000 signatures on a petition he makes available at community organization appearances, youth advocacy rallies and the website maintained by his non-profit group, Scouting For All.

On a typical day in his freshman year life, Cozza wakes at 5:30 a.m and doesn’t get home until after 10 p.m. He’s on the Petaluma High Track team and recently has been working with two teachers at his school to start a Gay/Straight Alliance. Between his sign language class at the community college and studying to maintain his 3.4 GPA, he still finds time to devote himself to ending the ban on gays in scouting through his work with a non-profit he helped to found, Scouting for All.

That is, if he’s not in San Francisco receiving the Board of Supervisor’s proclamation of Steven Cozza Day or in Washington D.C. accepting PFLAG’s Flagbearer Award alongside honorees such as Coretta Scott King and Senator Edward Kennedy. Now, in addition to the many honors and recognitions he’s received for being a vocal straight ally to the cause of gay and lesbian equality, the Colin Higgins Foundation, founded in 1986 to make grants to youth advocacy organizations in the name of the acclaimed Hollywood director, is awarding Steven Cozza \$10,000 to further support his efforts.

Though Steven feels that “the message is more important than the messenger,” he does admit that it is encouraging to get such prestigious awards and recognition. With inspiring role models and a dedicated commitment to the Scout oath, Steven Cozza is waging an all-out battle against discrimination at the grassroots level and beyond.

*To arrange to interview Steven Cozza or other recipients of the 2000 Colin Higgins Courage Awards, please contact Paul Cates at 212/245-0510 or by e-mail at [pcates@promediacomm.com](mailto:pcates@promediacomm.com)*