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## Three LGBT Activists Receive Colin Higgins Youth Courage Awards

**Winners honored with \$10,000 grants to  
further their leadership and activism  
on behalf of LGBT human rights**

**New York, June 29, 2009** – Recipients of the 2009 Colin Higgins Youth Courage Awards, presented by Colin Higgins Foundation, include the youngest HIV Counselor and Tester in Los Angeles county, an organizer who is spearheading the first youth-run nonprofit to serve transgender youth in the Detroit area, and a peer educator working to empower and educate LGBTQ youth of color to reduce HIV/AIDS in the Washington, DC area. Francisco “Frank” Armenta, Lance Hicks, and Terra Tempest Moore are three remarkable young people who have risen above the pain and discrimination they have experienced and bravely created the communities and safe spaces they needed for themselves and their peers to survive.

Acclaimed screenwriter/director, Colin Higgins, creator of such films as *Harold and Maude* and *Nine to Five*, set up his foundation in 1986 to further his humanitarian concerns. After his death from AIDS related illnesses in 1988, the Colin Higgins Foundation has concentrated its support on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) communities. The 2009 winners of the Colin Higgins Youth Courage Awards reflect the strength and courage of a generation on the rise. The Colin Higgins Foundation is proud to honor these three extraordinary individuals for all the contributions they have made to their communities in areas where critical needs were not being met.

Coming from across the country, each of the three awardees has their own unique story, yet they share similar hardships like so many LGBT youth – from enduring physical and emotional abuse from family members, to being kicked out of their homes, to seeking social services from providers that have no training on the specific issues facing LGBT youth, to confronting bullying and harassment in public high schools coming from both students and the school administration. “Our honorees this year are truly an inspiration because when they faced bigotry and harassment, they transcended those obstacles through leadership, and boldly made the choice to be agents of change in their communities,” said Tierney Gleason, Program Administrator of the Colin Higgins Foundation.

The three honorees are connected by their drive to make sure those around them and those that come after them have a safer space to simply be themselves. “My motivation for being an activist is looking towards the future – my future, and the future of the many communities that I call home,” says Terra Tempest Moore, 22. She adds, “I hope my work has made it so things will be easier for others.”

Through his involvement in the Trans Youth Group at the Affirmations LGBT Center in Michigan, Lance Hicks explains, “We had both homeless youth of color from Detroit and white youth from the suburbs with cars in our group. Through my work with transgender youth, I really want to break through the race and class divisions that exist in southeast Michigan.”

With his activism to increase youth HIV testing, Frank Armenta says, “Providers need to be aware of our cultural needs, and sensitive to the fact that we are not only dealing with a diagnosis and being gay, but also struggling with our families, struggling to eat, to find work, to feel safe, to have a safe space to sleep. I am dedicated to improving how counselors go about testing queer youth of color.”

Youth Courage Award recipients receive a grant of \$10,000 and will be honored at The Trevor Project Gala in New York City on June 29<sup>th</sup> and in December at their Cracked Xmas event in Los Angeles. The Trevor Project operates the nation's only 24/7 suicide and crisis prevention helpline for gay and questioning youth. The awardees will also receive an expense-paid trip to attend the *National Conference on LGBT Equality: Creating Change* presented by the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce in February.

The accomplishments of this year's winners are a testament to how much change can be ignited beginning with just one person. As Terra Moore reminds us, "When I speak, if only one mind is changed, if only one stereotype is challenged, a connection has been made." The three winners join a pioneering group of previous winners, all of whom have demonstrated the ability to inspire others, build bridges across communities, and provide insight and leadership far beyond their years. A list of previous winners can be found at [www.colinhiggins.org](http://www.colinhiggins.org).

### **Meet the 2009 Youth Courage Award Winners:**

**Francisco "Frank" Armenta, 21** - Battling homophobia on a daily basis in East Los Angeles, Frank was routinely harassed and called a "faggot" throughout high school. After being kicked out of class by a teacher for "gay" artwork on his binder, Frank called a parent-teacher meeting, only to learn that his Mexican-Catholic family would not stand up for him due to their embarrassment that he was gay. This experience fueled him to become an activist, spanning from collaborating with the GSA to design a new web-based "Be An Ally" campaign to support LGBT youth at his predominantly Latino high school, to becoming the youngest certified HIV Counselor and Tester in LA county. Through his activism to increase youth HIV testing, Frank has been able to provide invaluable recommendations to key policy makers on best practices for treating queer youth of color during the testing process. Currently, Frank works at REACH LA as a Social Enterprise Assistant and Peer Health Counselor, and continues to fuse his passion for art and graphic design with his activism by creating all the electronic and print media for the Ovahness program serving queer young men of color. He also volunteers his graphic design skills to many other community groups serving LGBT youth.

**Lance Hicks, 19** - Born female in the Metro Detroit area to a white mother from the suburbs and a Black father from the city, Lance moved back and forth between communities divided along race and class lines, struggling intensely to come to grips with being biracial and questioning his gender identity. At age 15, Lance came out as transgender and began transitioning at his high school in a predominantly white suburban town where he was still trying to find his place. Lance organized his high school's first Transgender Day of Remembrance, which opened him up to bullying and harassment by other students. In search of a community, he began attending the youth group at Affirmations, the LGBT center serving southeast Michigan. Lance founded the center's first Trans Youth Group, and organized with staff to make the center's space and services more inclusive of trans and gender non-conforming people. Currently, Lance is one of the organizers of the Midwest Trans Youth Conference, and is working to get GenderSpark, a collectively organized, youth-run nonprofit organization, up and running. GenderSpark, the only organization dedicated to serving trans youth in southeast Michigan, provides resources and education around the acceptance, safety, and rights of transgender and gender-variant people.

**Terra Tempest Moore, 22** - Terra grew up in a large multiracial family in Maryland and DC, the middle son of five children. Labeled gay at 14 - an identity forced upon her - Terra began to feel disconnected from her family, and faced abuse from her older brother. Feeling suicidal, Terra pretended to be someone she was not in order to survive. Her life changed when a friend led her to the Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League (SMYAL), the only organization solely dedicated to supporting LGBTQ youth in the Metro DC area. With a safe space to explore who she was, Terra stopped hiding and bravely stepped into the world as a transwoman in 2005. Coming out as transgender was difficult for Terra's family to

accept – they view her transition as the loss of a family member. These experiences moved Terra to become an activist with numerous social justice organizations including SMYAL, Different Avenues, DC Trans Coalition, and Advocates for Youth, to name a few. An all-around leader amongst LGBTQ youth in DC, Terra currently serves as a Peer Educator and Co-Chair of STIGMA (Spreading Truth Is Gaining Mass Appeal), a program housed at Metro Teen AIDS established to reduce HIV/AIDS amongst LGBTQ youth of color.

### **About Colin Higgins Foundation**

Colin Higgins (1941 - 1988), acclaimed screenwriter, director and producer of films such as *Harold and Maude* and *Nine to Five*, established the Colin Higgins Foundation in 1986 to further his humanitarian goals. In addition to the Youth Courage Awards, Colin Higgins Foundation supports organizations that build the power and leadership of LGBT youth (ages 13-24) through grassroots organizing and/or comprehensive leadership development and organizations dedicated to HIV/AIDS service, advocacy and prevention. Colin Higgins Foundation is administered by Tides Foundation. To learn more, visit [www.colinhiggins.org](http://www.colinhiggins.org).

### **About Tides**

The Tides mission is to partner with philanthropists, foundations, activists and organizations across the country and around the globe to promote economic justice, robust democratic processes, and the opportunity to live in a healthy and sustainable environment where human rights are preserved and protected. Tides is a nonprofit organization founded in 1976 that provides an array of services to amplify the efforts of forward-thinking individuals and organizations to make the world a better place. With offices in San Francisco and New York City, Tides provides fiscal sponsorship for over 200 groups across the country, operates and supports green nonprofit centers and granted \$108 million in 2008 alone. For more information, visit [www.tides.org](http://www.tides.org).

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