

LGBT Chicagoans, Victory Fund set sights on elections

by Kate Sosin, Windy City Times

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With political campaigns gearing up across the country, the Gay and Lesbian Victory rolled into Chicago Sept. 8-11 to talk LGBT politics with local leaders and potential candidates across the nation.

The organization held its first-ever Chicago roundtable discussion on LGBT politics Sept. 8 and then convened its candidate and campaign training over the weekend, bringing in political hopefuls from all over the nation.

Metropolitan Water Reclamation District Commissioner Debra Shore hosted the roundtable discussion. Shore also sits on the Victory Fund's Gay and Lesbian Leadership Institute board.

The strategy for upcoming elections, said Shore, is to increase the number of openly gay legislators in states where a small increase could make the difference between passing LGBT protections and seeing them fail.

"In every state that has been able to achieve marriage [equality] by legislative means, they've had at least five openly gay members in the state legislature," Shore said.

For Chicago specifically, Shore said, LGBT leaders are working on diversifying both their candidate and voter base.

"We need to be west of Halsted and be seen as that," she said. "We live in lots of districts and need to become more active in being well-known all over the city, the country and state."

The Victory Fund is also working to teach candidates how to balance being openly LGBT with running a mainstream political campaign, without getting pigeonholed as a gay candidate. The idea, said Shore, is to use questions about sexual orientation to "pivot" the conversation back to the reasons why they're running.

Approximately 15 LGBT leaders attended the roundtable discussion while 40 people filled the limited number of slots at the candidate and campaign training.

The next step is to get more local LGBT people to consider candidacy, said Shore: "Folks need to think about it and step and run."