



Celebrating an Extraordinary Life: Mark A. Davis (a/k/a MAD)

Mark A. Davis, M.A., an award-winning mental health, LGBTQ, and human rights advocate who was also known for his warmth, kindness, humor, and his larger-than-life personality, died on September 14, 2020, in Philadelphia. He was 64.

An Ohio native who spent more than half of his life in Philadelphia, Mark was hired in 1985 to work at Project SHARE, the new self-help and mental health advocacy project Joseph Rogers had founded under the auspices of the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania. “Mark helped build the efforts...to be a large part of the national movement for social justice in mental health,” Rogers says.

Mark was the founding president of the Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumers’ Association (PMHCA). According to his bio on the NARPA website, he inspired over 75 consumer-run groups across the country; and he has been a speaker, consultant, and trainer in 43 states for a variety of consumer, family, community, and professional associations.

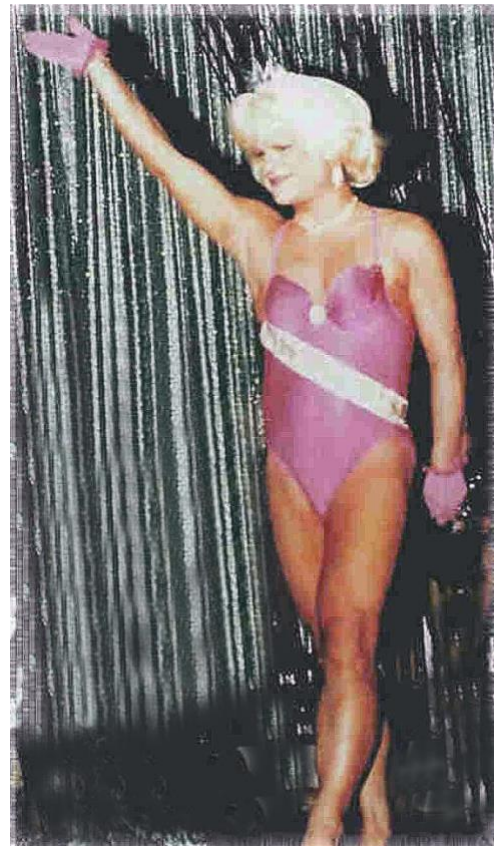
In 2003, Davis founded the [Pink & Blues](#), an ongoing support group for individuals from sexual and gender minority communities who also have lived experience with a mental health diagnosis.

With Gayle Bluebird, Howie the Harp, and others, Mark was a key organizer of Altered States of the Arts, celebrating the creativity of people with lived experience. “To the arts people, he was our role model,” says Bluebird.

Until recently, Mark often performed at conferences and in parades in what he called “drag with a tag.” In his debut performance in this role, at Alternatives ’92 in Philadelphia, Bluebird recalls, “the audience watched him as he was escorted on stage, where he disrobed from a fur coat, then to a ballroom gown, finally to the pink bathing suit. People in the audience were shocked, and laughed until they nearly fell out of their chairs.”

As Miss Altered States, Mark won Best Performance in the 2004 Philadelphia Gay Pride Parade.

As Mark’s NARPA bio noted, “As a person who is gay, living with mental illness, in recovery from addiction, dealing with hearing loss and living with an HIV-positive diagnosis (1988), he has consistently used his experiences and skills to combat stigma, inspire others in similar circumstances and [e]ffect change,” particularly in developing culturally competent services for the LGBTQ+ community.



Having attempted suicide and lost his sister to suicide, Mark served on a committee of the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#).

In his LinkedIn profile, Mark highlighted his interest in “building movements of people seeking personal life enrichment and system change to eliminate stigmas, ignorance, and biases.”

Mark believed that Recovery Happens. He urged those with co-occurring conditions and many identities to **“NAME IT, CLAIM IT, TAME IT, FRAME IT, LIVE IT!”**

He also believed that

SILENCE=DEATH,

TALK=LIFE,

KNOWLEDGE=POWER,

and that **VOTING IS VITAL.**

Addressing the Covid-19 pandemic, Mark wrote on his Facebook page that “We already have experience from Depression, Anxiety, PTSD, with social and physical distancing, unlike those experiencing this for the first time.”

In 2009, Mark received a prestigious Voice Award, presented by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, for his achievements as a mental health consumer/survivor advocate.

Mark Davis will be greatly missed by his many friends and colleagues all over the country; many have left loving messages of loss and remembrance on Facebook and the National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery e-list. One such memory is from acclaimed human rights activist Hikmah Gardiner, who said, “Mark was my supervisor years ago. His sense of humor was phenomenal: He joked about my being a woman of color and I joked about his being gay.” Dr. Mark Salzer, director of the Temple University Collaborative on Community Inclusion, called Davis “a colossal spirit and force in our mental health, HIV, and LGBTQ+ communities.”

Mark earned a B.A. and M.A. in Speech Education and Higher Education Administration from Bowling Green State University (1974-1981), where he participated in student government and the National Forensic League Team. In his LinkedIn profile, Mark reported that he was a varsity cheerleader, Sigma Nu Housemother (*sic*), and “the first ‘Male’ (*sic*) BGSU Homecoming King.” He was also director/producer of Miss Bowling Green State University, and was an “IFC Beer Chugging Champion.”

“The whole world is crazy; I just got caught,” Mark Davis once said. “We know that humor is the best medicine because there is no co-pay.”

Memorial donations may be made to the [Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumers’ Association](#) and/or the [Pennsylvania Peer Support Coalition](#).

Written by (alphabetically): Bluebird, Susan Rogers, Bonnie Schell, and Dr. Phyllis Solomon