



MEDIA ALERT * MEDIA ALERT *** MEDIA ALERT *** MEDIA ALERT**

**THE BETSY HOTEL TO HOST PUBLIC EVENT WITH JUDY SHEPARD,
FOUNDER OF THE MATTHEW SHEPARD FOUNDATION**

Miami Beach, FL September 7, 2009 - WHO: **Judy Shepard**, author of *The Meaning of Matthew: My Son's Murder in Laramie, and A World Transformed*, will travel to South Florida for a series of educational, outreach and advocacy programs, **Friday, September 11 through Monday, September 14**, including a reception at **The Betsy Hotel** and a book signing at **Books & Books**, both on **Miami Beach**. Ms. Shepard is the founder and president of the board of the Matthew Shepard Foundation, which she co-founded with her husband Dennis in memory of their son Matthew who was murdered in an anti-gay hate crime in Wyoming in October 1998.

WHEN/WHERE: **The Betsy Hotel, 1440 Ocean Drive, will host a reception** for Ms. Shepard on **Sunday, September 13 from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. The event is free and open to the public.** The Betsy-South Beach opened in March 2009 after a remarkable transformation, and has already garnered superlative reviews for five-star performance. With service excellence and good citizenship as driving goals, The Betsy is committed to a corporate culture that celebrates diversity and embraces community in South Beach and beyond.

BACKGROUND: The Matthew Shepard Foundation was founded by Dennis and Judy Shepard in memory of their 21-year old son, Matthew, who was murdered in an anti-gay hate crime in Wyoming in October 1998. Created to honor Matthew in a manner that was appropriate to his dreams, beliefs and aspirations, the Foundation seeks to "Replace Hate with Understanding, Compassion & Acceptance" through its varied educational, outreach and advocacy programs and by continuing to tell Matthew's story.

The story of Matthew Shepard began on December 1, 1976 when he was born to Judy and Dennis Shepard in Casper, Wyoming. He went to public school in Casper until his junior year of high school when he moved with his family to Saudi Arabia. Matt had to finish his high school education at The American School in Switzerland because there were no American high schools in Saudi Arabia at the time. In both high schools, he was elected by his peers to be a peer counselor. He was easy to talk to, made friends easily and actively fought for the acceptance of all people. Matt had a great passion for equality. His experiences abroad fueled his love for travel and gave him the chance to make many new friends from around the world. Matt's college career eventually took him back to Wyoming where he studied political science, foreign relations and languages at the University of Wyoming in Laramie.

The horrific events that took place shortly after midnight on October 7, 1998 went against everything that Matt embodied. Two men, Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson, led him to a remote area east of Laramie, Wyoming. He was tied to a split-rail fence where the two men severely assaulted him. He was beaten and left to die in the cold of the night. Almost 18 hours later, he was found by a bicyclist who initially mistook him for a scarecrow. Matt died on October 12 at 12:53 a.m. at Poudre Valley Hospital in Fort Collins, Colorado with his family by his side. His memorial service was attended by

friends and family from around the world and garnered immense media attention that brought Matt's story to the forefront of the fight against bigotry and hate. The life and death of Matthew Shepard changed the way we talk about, and deal with, hate in America. Since his death, Matt's legacy has challenged and inspired millions of individuals to erase hate in all its forms.

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