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RHONDA RIVERA

The Legacy Fund voted to award Rhonda Rivera its inaugural Legacy Fund Honors award in 2006 in a ceremony at the Columbus Foundation. Professor Rivera, an emeritus professor of law, made it her mission to challenge inequality and end discrimination for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community in Ohio. She is considered the “matriarch” of the state’s LGBT civil rights movement.

Professor Rivera is recognized for being on the front lines of the early struggles for LGBT rights and equality as an LGBT lawyer, activist, and OSU law professor. In 1979 she wrote a groundbreaking legal article about the treatment of lesbians and gays under civil law. She was among the first to write about the application of the law to protect the rights of those living with AIDS. Because of her expertise, she served as a member of the OSU President’s Task Force on AIDS. She also held a seat on the Affirmative Action Council. A colleague expressed deep admiration and respect, stating that Rivera has worked “to empower the disempowered, to include the excluded, and to articulate the voices of the ignored or silenced in our community”.

Rhonda Rivera was part of the second class to be named to the Ohio Civil Rights Hall of Fame as voted on by the Ohio Civil Rights Commission. “All of us at Ohio State are at once proud and humbled by the induction of Frank Hale and Rhonda Rivera into the Ohio Civil Rights Hall of

Fame,” said President E. Gordon Gee. “They accomplished uncommon good on our campus and on behalf of our students and our state. The excellence of their work — and their unwavering commitment to what is right and fair and just — has made a tangible and enduring difference on countless lives and on our university.”

Rivera also advocated for an Ohio executive order banning discrimination in state employment based on sexual orientation. She followed suit with a similar 1990 ordinance for the city of Columbus. During her two decades at Moritz College of Law, Rivera was a driving force behind the development of the university’s equality policies. Rivera received the University’s Distinguished Affirmative Action Award in 1991.

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THE LEGACY FUND OF THE COLUMBUS FOUNDATION, 1234 EAST BROAD STREET,
COLUMBUS, OH, 43205