

PRESS RELEASE



15 Queen's Park West
Port of Spain
Trinidad & Tobago
Tel: (868) 622-6371

**EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION**

March 26, 2014

**Human Rights Advocates, Judy and Dennis Shepard,
to Visit Trinidad and Tobago - April 7-9**

Judy and Dennis Shepard, founders of the Matthew Shepard Foundation, will visit Trinidad and Tobago from April 7 to 9 to promote their message of understanding, compassion, and acceptance for all, regardless of sexual orientation. Their visit will include meetings with civil society, a discussion forum at the University of the West Indies, and a screening of the award-winning film *The Laramie Project* before an audience of specially invited guests.

In October 1998, Judy and Dennis Shepard lost their 21 year-old son, Matthew, to a murder motivated by anti-gay hate. Matthew's death moved many thousands of people around the world to attend vigils and rallies in his memory. Determined to prevent others from suffering their son's fate, Judy and Dennis decided to turn their grief into action and established the Matthew Shepard Foundation to carry on Matthew's legacy. The award-winning film *The Laramie Project* tells the story of Matthew's murder.

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Judy Shepard is the founding president of the Matthew Shepard Foundation Board of Directors. The Foundation is dedicated to working toward the causes championed by Matthew during his life: social justice, diversity awareness and education, and equality for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people.

In her role as board president, Judy travels across the nation and throughout the world speaking to audiences about what they can do as individuals and communities to make this world a more accepting place for everyone, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, sex, gender identity and expression, or sexual orientation. Speaking from a mother's perspective, Judy also authored a 2009 memoir, "The Meaning of Matthew," exploring the family's journey through the prosecution of Matthew's assailants, the ensuing media coverage, and their continuing work to advance civil rights. Originally trained as a teacher, Mrs. Shepard holds a Bachelor of the Arts degree in Secondary Education from the University of Wyoming where she later pursued some post-graduate studies.

Dennis is the father of Matthew Shepard and has been an advocate for parents' unconditional love for their LGBT children both during Matt's life and, very publicly, since the hate-motivated murder in Laramie, Wyoming, which took Matt's life at age 21. Born in Scottsbluff, Nebraska, Dennis earned a degree in education from the University of Wyoming before marrying Judy in 1973 and settling in Casper, Wyoming, to raise their family. An oil industry safety specialist, Dennis worked for more than 16 years in safety operations for Saudi Aramco in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, before retiring from that position in 2009. He has served on the Matthew Shepard Foundation board of directors since the organization's inception, and currently speaks to audiences around the country, particularly to victims' advocacy organizations and law enforcement audiences about his experiences and the importance of equal treatment of LGBT crime victims and their loved ones. He and Judy continue to live and work in Casper.

