

## HONORED COMMUNITY ACTIVIST

# Susie Simpson

Suzie Simpson was there at the start, from ComFest's first year in 1972 in the heart of the business district next to Ohio State. "It's hard to imagine now that it was at 16th & Waldeck," she e-mailed recently. "I remember it being fun and political." The festival even then expressed many of its eventual core values.

Those values have carried Simpson, this year's Honored Community Activist, through to her current contribution on the festival's Grants Committee. "The Grants Committee came about to help small community-based non-profits get started and/or keep going," she commented.

Between, Simpson has contributed significantly in diverse roles. Her band Lotta Crabtree performed early on at ComFest and was the first women's band to play at Moonshine Co-op for the club's women's night. (There's a film clip out there in the social ether.)

Suzie was instrumental in the growth of Stonewall Union, now the Center On High, where she became part-time Center Coordinator in 2007. She helped establish the Gay Pride Stage for "Rockin' In The Streets" in the Axis parking lot. She is currently the Pride Entertainment Chair.

Singer-songwriter Donna Mogavero was a big part of that stage, as well. She counts Simpson among the most significant volunteer/organizers/activists in Columbus' gay and women's communities. In 2002 Mogavero, Bobbie Pederson, Mary B, Wahru Cleveland, Sile Singleton, Katie Reider, and Simpson founded the Girlz Rhythm n' Rock Camp, a program for aspiring female musicians, 8 to 18. Volunteer professional and amateur

musicians guide the six-day, overnight convocations in the Hoover Y Park, mentoring students on songwriting, drumming, singing, performance, instrumental technique, and more.

Camp volunteer Sile Singleton praised the program, which she watched "grow from some grocery bags and kids to a well-oiled machine." She added there is talk of expanding the two summer sessions to three.

"It is so amazing and rewarding to provide a creative outlet for young girlz to experience music," summarized Simpson, "as it is our goal to provide them with the confidence to do whatever they choose to do in life."

Suzie was instrumental in organizing a women's music block in the early years of ComFest, which included a performance by Holly Near. With the Women's Music Union years later, she brought Near back, as well as presenting the likes of June Millington, Cris Williamson and Kate Clinton.

After all Simpson has accomplished, she remains down-to-earth, according to her friends and associates. "She is quietly but feistily reasonable," said Leslie Zak, who works with Simpson in the Grants Committee. "She's so modest," said Girlz Camp volunteer Helen Yee. "When I'm with her, I'm kinda like her PR person."

"She is one of the most giving, caring people I've even known," said Mogavero. "When she sets her mind to something, it gets done."

—Curtis Schieber



Photo by Ray LaVoie