

Crystal Ann Gray has been in Denver only six months and already has been named as The Center's Transgender Advocate and been selected to serve on the mayor's GLBT Commission.

Born and raised in Woodstock, Ill., as Christopher, Crystal was an active volunteer in high school, serving in student government and as an auxiliary police officer, a volunteer Animal Control officer, as a certified Nurses Assistant and several other programs. He received his high school's District 200 Pride Award for community service.

After high school, Christopher attended McHenry County College to study psychology and sociology, and then attended school for EMS and firefighter training. Eventually he moved to Chicago and began driving a paratransit bus for seniors and the disabled.

It was at this job that he met his wife Rita. Christopher knew from a young age that he was trans, and he told Rita before they were married in 2001. Before Rita passed away from genetic heart disease in October of 2006, Christopher told her that he needed to transition to female, and Rita gave him her blessing, with one condition.

"She told me just before she passed, 'I don't want to see you up here any sooner than you're supposed to be,'" Crystal said.

She then began the transition from male to female and started living as Crystal Ann. She joined Chi TriEss, a Chicago area organization for cross dressers and transgender individuals. In November 2006 she started laser treatments for the removal of facial hair, and in December scheduled a breast augmentation and legal name change. By the following March, her name and gender had been legally changed in the state of Illinois.

Several months later, Crystal moved to Asheville, N.C., to be closer to her father and sister. In Asheville, Crystal became involved with PFLAG, the Phoenix Transgender Support Group, and Asheville Pride, but still felt that she faced a lot of discrimination.

In June 2008, Crystal underwent the final surgery of her transition at the University of Chicago. Upon her return to Asheville, she went through training to receive her Class A Commercial Driver's License; the first trans individual to do so in North Carolina.

Complications from her final surgery forced her to quit driving, and she became ill. Her friend and future partner Shari came to Asheville to take care of her.

After recovering from her illness, Crystal decided to move to Denver to be with Shari and they drove to Colorado in December of 2008. Crystal dove right into the community, becoming involved with the Creating Change conference, TransAction, The Gender Identity Center and the Goldrush Conference. It was through her involvement with these organizations that she wound up at The Center. Crystal's main focus is helping other transgender individuals through their transitions, while networking and building trust among the trans community.

"I'm here to help. I always ask myself, 'What can I do for somebody else? What can I do to help them in their transition?'" she said. Crystal can be reached at cgray@glbtcolorado.org.