

Proud support for gay community; More than 60 businesses, organizations sponsoring the Hamilton Pride 2002 festival this week

By Jeff Mahoney

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There was a time when they had to go to court to get the mayor to give the city's blessing to their annual day.

But on Thursday, Hamilton's gay community will raise a rainbow flag at city hall to usher in the Hamilton Pride 2002 festival this week.

And the festival is being sponsored by more than 60 businesses and organizations, which festival organizers say reflects a wide and growing level of support in the city.

The mayor -- Bob Wade, not the mayor they had to take to court -- will be speaking at the Hamilton Pride rally at City Hall for the second year in a row.

Other scheduled speakers include Sheila Copps; George Smitherman, a gay MPP from Toronto Centre Rosedale; Enza (Supermodel) Anderson; and Hamilton West MPP David Christopherson.

And there will be scads of entertainment, from free outdoor movie screenings at the Art Gallery of Hamilton to a Bette Midler impersonator to a concert violinist at Whitehern Historical House.

Hamilton Pride 2002 is stretching over four days. Last year it attracted more than 3,000 visitors, says festival chair Lyla Miklos.

"The gay community in Hamilton has grown and the event has grown along with it," says Miklos, a graduate of Mohawk College who is now program co-ordinator for Bravo!, SPACE, and Drive-In Classics.

"We want to forge our own identity separate from Toronto. Over the last 10 years, there has been far more acceptance, though that's not to say there is not still a plethora of issues."

She says the festival's goal is to foster not only tolerance but acceptance and appreciation.

"If you took away all the gay people, it would be a much duller world," Miklos says.

Sponsorship has doubled from last year, she adds, the result of a more aggressive canvassing effort by organizers and a growing awareness of the festival in the city at large.

"It was uplifting," says Miklos, about the increase in sponsorship. "There may still be a stigma attached to supporting a gay event, but I could count on one hand the number of people we approached who did not give."

The festival has evolved from its origins as a subdued, unpublicized picnic celebration mainly confined to the gay community itself.

"Around the time I got involved, there was a tug-of-war over how public we wanted the festival to be," says Miklos, who has been involved in one way or another for five of Hamilton Pride's six years.

"Keeping it a big secret seemed counter-productive."

The festival begins on Thursday from 7 to 11 p.m. at a licensed opening reception (free admission) at the AGH, featuring a silent auction, a performance by singer Kristine Stone, and an outdoor screening of the gay-themed movies, *If These Walls Could Talk 2* and *Boys Life*.

The master of ceremonies will be Matthew Stewart, the host of CFMU's Queer Radio who was also a founding member of Queer Television at City-TV.

On line for Friday is the Siren Women's Dance from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. at the MacNab Street YWCA, 75 MacNab St. S., with DJ Anne Clark. Admission is \$8 in advance, \$10 at the door.

Also from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. on Friday will be the Fab Men's Dance at The Werx, 121 Hughson St. N., with DJ Shaka Shawn. Admission is \$8 and \$10.

The rally at the steps of Hamilton City Hall is on Saturday from noon to 12:30 p.m.

There will be a march from City Hall to Dundurn Park, 12:30 to 1:30 p.m.

It will be led by the festival's first "honoured guest," the Golden Horseshoe Leather Association. It is being recognized for its fundraising for causes such as Camp Oasis, a camp for children infected with or affected by HIV.

Admission to the park is free and there will be barbecue vendors, a licensed bar, and music on the Greater Hamilton Gay and Lesbian Business Association Stage from noon to 6 p.m. with hosts Shamin Ahad and Randy Mattinson.

Kristine Stone will play from noon to 1 p.m.; the Strap-Ons music and comedy act performs from 1 to 2:15; Kathy Thompson appears as Bette Midler from 2:15 to 3; Ben Hartt, model and dancer struts his stuff from 3 to 4; the King Flaire "drag king" act (they're women) takes the stage from 4 to 5; and Nancy Rancourt is on from 5 to 6.

There will be other events at The Werx and at the Embassy Club at 54 King St. E. There may be admission charges at these clubs.

Sunday brings an outdoor brunch and a reading by author Michael Riordon from his newest novel *Eating Fire*, and a concert with violinist Ruth Hoffman, at Whitehern Historic House and Gardens, 41 Jackson St. W. Admission to the brunch/concert is \$15 in advance, \$18 at the door.

Tickets to all events with admission cost are available at Gomorrah's, 223 Locke St. S.

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Correction published (2002.06.12): Matthew Stewart, host of CFMU's Queer Radio was an intern at Queer Television at City-TV, not a founding member, as reported in The Hamilton Spectator yesterday. There will be Hamilton Pride festival events not only at The Werx, 121 Hughson St., and the Embassy Club, 54 King St. East, but also at M Bar, 164 James St. South in Hamilton, and One bar, 63 Dalhousie St. in Brantford. Three politicians listed as speakers for the Hamilton Pride 2002 rally on Saturday will not be appearing. Toronto Centre Rosedale MPP George Smitherman, Hamilton West MPP David Christopherson, and Heritage Minister Sheila Copps are not confirmed speakers at the event, as reported yesterday. Smitherman and Christopherson were originally scheduled but had to cancel. Copps was an invited guest, but not a confirmed speaker.