

Mayor tells gays they aren't alone; City Hall trying to strengthen ties, Pride event told
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Enza (Supermodel) Anderson has left her lipstick on the cheeks of Toronto Police Chief Julian Fantino and Mayor Mel Lastman.

But on Saturday, the drag queen -- who ran for mayor of Toronto and for the leadership of the Canadian Alliance -- puckered up for Mayor Bob Wade, to the delight of about 200 people who turned out for the city's Pride rally and march.

"It's great to see local politicians supporting this event," Anderson told the crowd, motioning to the municipal and provincial politicians seated behind her. "Ten years ago, they wouldn't have stepped foot in front of this crowd. Today, they're here with open arms."

The day's events -- which celebrate the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community -- kicked off with a rally in front of City Hall, followed by a march to Dundurn Park and six hours of festivities.

Some came decked out in leather, others wearing rainbows. Some simply came with their partners and held hands without fear.

The event was a far cry from the small Pride picnic held six years before. There was no evidence of the controversy that existed in the past. The sponsors have ballooned to 60 and politicians eagerly made time to address the crowd.

Two Hamilton Liberal MPPs, Dominic Agostino and Marie Bountrogianni, spoke at the rally, while NDP MPP David Christopherson appeared with a group flying the NDP banner.

Most significantly, Mayor Bob Wade appeared for the second year in a row to show his support.

Unlike his predecessor, who had to be ordered by the province's Human Rights Commission to proclaim Gay Pride Week, Wade told the crowd that city hall was working to strengthen its relationship with the gay community.

"I know when you are trying to influence change, it can get lonely," Wade told the rally.

"You are not alone."

While many talked about how far Hamilton has come, they were quick to add that the city still has a long way to go. Many say it needs more events like this to change the attitude from tolerance to acceptance.

Lyla Miklos, chair of Hamilton's Pride committee, said the city's gay citizens should feel comfortable holding hands and kissing every day, rather than just on a designated day.

"People still lose jobs. We're not good enough to adopt kids or give blood," she said. "Some people feel we have no right to exist at all. We shouldn't be judged on who we choose to love."

Ian Skinner, another member of the committee, said the event not only helps to foster understanding about the gay community but helps encourage other gays who may not be fully "out" yet. "Not everyone can do this every day, at their workplace.

"This is the one day when everyone can be out. There is more freedom and expression. It's important."