

Gay Pride Parade Louder, Bolder
Growing community celebrates itself with an ever-growing confidence
By Rob Faulkner
The Hamilton Spectator
June 16, 2003

When gay activist Lyla Miklos belted out a medley of show tunes across from City Hall, you knew the Hamilton Pride parade was more than just Santa Clause in drag.

“There’s a place for us . . .” she sang to the rainbow clad crowd.

Then came I Am What I Am (La Cage Aux Folles), Don’t Rain On My Parade (Funny Girl) and finally, I’m Getting Married in the Morning (My Fair Lady).

Not a bad political soundtrack for Hamilton Pride 2003, which culminated in Saturday’s parade of about 160 people, just five days after Ontario’s highest court ruled that banning same-sex marriages is unconstitutional.

The ruling leant momentum to Hamilton pride as its events – from the Miss Hamilton Pride pageant to its leather fetish night – spanned a week instead of three days.

In another first, its annual march officially became a parade with motorized (if modest) floats.

Miss Gay Hamilton, Christina Dior, wore sequins and a headdress while dancing in the back of a yellow pickup. Miss Hamilton Pride, bartender Ian Carrick, waved from atop an SUV. A Toronto baton corps spun their flags, and grand marshal Bernie Marcoux led the way.

“It’s a demonstration that we are louder and bolder than we ever were,” said Marcoux, former owner of Gomorrah’s Books on Locke Street, as a small crowd lined Cannon Street West to see what the sequins and sweat were all about. “We want everyone to celebrate with us.”

Quite a departure from 1991, when former Mayor Bob Morrow refused to proclaim gay pride day.

In 1995 the Ontario Human Rights Commission ruled he had discriminated against gays and lesbians, and he was forced to make a proclamation.

On Saturday, Ward 1 City Councillor Marvin Caplan noted how far Hamilton has come on diversity since 1991. Hamilton East MPP Dominic Agostino urged Prime Minister Jean Chretien to “do the right thing” and give federal support to last week’s Ontario same-sex marriage ruling.

As the sun-baked parade wound from King Street West up Bay Street along York Boulevard and into Dundurn Park, it represented one more step into mainstream for a community that hasn’t always felt at home in Hamilton.

In 1996 Hamilton Pride began with a small, quiet picnic. In 1999 organizers felt secure enough to tell local media about it. In 2000 we saw its first rally and march. Now it resembles a smaller cousin of the Toronto Pride Parade, a massive moving party that will run Sunday, June 29.

Hamilton Pride Chairman Jae Adams has big plans for future events: more awards to volunteers and businesses; closer ties to Tourism Hamilton to make Pride a destination event; more links to Toronto, so Hamilton can be part of a Pride tour circuit; and a new home to the post-parade barbecue that may include Gage Park, Bayfront Park or the top of Jackson Square.

But he had more pressing concerns Saturday. He learned late last week that city staff had accidentally double-booked Dundurn Park's pavilion – Pride's usual home. In response, the city paid for fencing and tents so Pride could stay in the park, just not in the pavilion.

"It was a bit frantic, but it seems to be working," said Adams, who does Web Design for Rogers Media in Toronto. "It does seem like a smaller crowd than usual, which may be because we're not where we usually are."

Still, as the temperature hit 25 C, the makeshift tents and scattered booths seemed to work well for the 1,000 or so people assembled.

The Golden Horseshoe Leather Association was tending bar and plugging Camp Oasis, which sends kids with AIDS to camp.

New Democrat and Liberal party activists were roaming, the police and the military were recruiting, vendors were selling everything from religion to rainbow dog collars and an ABBA cover band was warming up.

And David Lockie, executive director of the Righteously Outrageous Twirling Corps, revealed the soundtrack that boomed as his 11 twirlers brought Toronto flair to Hamilton Pride. They perform in Santa Claus parades for cash so they can do Pride events for free – and they certainly have the gay anthems to match.

A little something from Strictly Ballroom Sparkling Diamonds from Moulin Rouge and, of course, I'm Beautiful from the gay icon herself, the Divine Miss M.

"That's it, baby! When you got it, flaunt it, flaunt it!" Bette Midler sang over and over in a tune that embodies the spirit of every Pride Parade. "I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful, dammit!"