

Pride parade ridiculed on James Street
By Carmela Fragomeni
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Hamilton's gay and lesbian community has been reminded by a few intolerant soccer fans why they must support each other with an annual Pride parade and festival.

This year's parade on Saturday ran into a group of Portuguese men rejoicing over their old country's World Soccer Championship win, but who were not very receptive to the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered (GLBT) community celebrating its own victories as the parade made its way up ethnic James Street North.

While the jubilant parade participants paused for a moment of silence in front of Christ Church Cathedral to commemorate people who have died of AIDS, the soccer fans taunted them and called them derogatory names in Portuguese, observers said.

Lyla Miklos, spokesperson for Hamilton Pride Festival Inc., said some of the men were poking parade participants with their flagpoles before police stepped in to defuse the situation, "before it got stupid."

"That was a real sad reflection of things because the businesses along James were very supportive (of gay Pride)," she said.

Tara Atkin, 46, a lesbian out on James just after the parade went by, was also saddened when she heard about the incident from Miklos.

She had been celebrating the Portuguese soccer win herself and preparing to head down to Pier 4 for the festival to celebrate Pride, the other event of the day.

"I thought, 'Wow, how cool is this city? ... Portugal won and the Portuguese are celebrating and (at the same time) the gay Pride parade is coming down James.' I thought, 'Oh ya, we'll all celebrate together.'"

Hamilton police Staff Sergeant Scott Rastin said there were only a few isolated incidents of inappropriate comments that were addressed by police.

With an estimated 1,000 fans celebrating their soccer victory and several hundred in the Pride parade, that wasn't too bad, he added.

"It was very peaceful, considering how many people were involved (in the celebrations)."

Deirdre Pike, named Pride Citizen of the Year on Thursday, said the Pride parade encountered a more welcoming attitude on James last year. Businesses were supportive and when participants went into the pubs, they saw little rainbow flags -- the Pride flag -- all over the place, she said.

Pike, chair of the GLBT advisory committee to city council, hopes to tackle homophobia so next year's Pride has no negative response. Despite the incident, Pride revelers enjoyed the biggest parade and festival in 10 years. About 750 people participated, Miklos said.

"Our community is getting bigger and bigger."

This year's added attraction of a performance by songwriter and former Rough Trade band musician Carole Pope, sexual shock rocker long before Madonna and now queer pop icon, also attracted a bigger crowd for Pride's 10th anniversary, Miklos said.

Supportive information booths at Pier 4 included those of the Canadian Armed Forces on recruitment and two Hamilton church groups.

And it wasn't just gay businesses and people at the festival. Hamilton Pride chair Jae Adams said many volunteers are straight.

"It (the festival) is not just for us, but for anyone happy to celebrate with us ... We even watch World Cup soccer," Adams said.

Chris Guevara, who as Christina Dior is reigning empress of the Imperial Court of Hamilton-Wentworth service club, said the James Street incident is not representative of the entire Portuguese community. There are always narrow-minded people around, even in the gay community, she said.

In general, the city has, "a live and let live attitude, as long as you're not harming anyone. "I'm very proud of Hamilton."