

Much progress in Hamilton; Gay Pride

By Lyla Miklos

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While I appreciate the Spectator's editorial enthusiasm for Toronto's Gay Pride celebrations, there has been much progress within Hamilton's own queer community.

Just two weeks prior to the Toronto celebrations, Hamilton's gay community -- including families and friends -- put on their biggest Pride celebration ever. It was a four-day event that included movies, dances, theatre, musical entertainment, vendors, a barbecue, spiritual services, and our very first rally and march.

Almost 300 gay folk marched with pride from Hamilton's City Hall to the Dundurn Park Pavilion on Saturday, June 10. It was a validating and encouraging sight for so many activists in Hamilton's gay community.

Hamilton Pride was funded by the generosity of more than 100 local businesses (most of them gay-owned and operated), other southern-Ontario corporations and anonymous donations. The four days drew more than 2,000 in total attendance. Our Web site at <http://gayhamilton.com/pride/> received hundreds of hits but not even one piece of hate mail nor one homophobic phone call.

Hamilton Pride started off very small and also very closeted only five years ago. It was just a picnic that wasn't even publicized except by word of mouth within the community. We have made enormous leaps and bounds since then.

Still, it does make me cringe when I hear reporters in the straight world say things like: "Everyone is so accepting of gays and lesbians now. Why are you even marching?"

That's easy enough to say in the thick of Toronto's gay ghetto at Church and Wellesley at the height of Pride Week. But during the remaining 364 days of year, it is a never-ending journey for gays to come out and feel accepted and secure.

Step outside the urban metropolis of Toronto and go into a farm community in rural Alberta and see how comfortable you feel wearing rainbow colours and shouting: "I'm not gay, but my boyfriend is."

Think of the school teacher who keeps quiet about his/her sexuality for fear of job loss, the individual who is part of a very homophobic religious faith, the person from a culture that would kill someone known to be gay, or the trans person bashed by ignorant thugs while just trying to simply be. All of these examples exist in abundance right here and now.

I had the privilege of seeing Harvey Fierstein in a lecture series at U of T back in the fall. He is an "out" gay actor and writer in Hollywood. His theory is that, if every gay person was "out" to everyone, there would be nothing to fear because there would be nothing to hide.

We are still waiting for a world where we can all be out and proud and live without any negative repercussions or, more importantly, fear.

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