

BOB WADE MADE SURE DIVERSE COMMUNITIES FELT WELCOME

Thank you, Bob, for living your values with your leadership, Lyla Miklos writes.

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*Then Mayor Bob Wade poses for a photo getting a celebratory kiss from Enza "Supermodel" Anderson at a Hamilton Pride rally in 2002. Wade worked hard to make diverse communities feel welcome and included, recalls Lyla Miklos. **SPECTATOR FILE PHOTO***

Mayor Andrea Horwath's announcement of Mayor Bob Wade's passing brought a flood of memories of my days organizing Hamilton Pride over 20 years ago.

Wade unseated Bob Morrow who had been Mayor of Hamilton for 18 years. Morrow's legacy was marred by a 1991 Human Rights Complaint. Morrow refused to issue a proclamation in honour of Pride. In 1995 the Ontario Human Rights Commission ruled Morrow had discriminated against gays and lesbians. He was fined \$5,000 and forced to issue a proclamation. He never did apologize.

In 2000 Pride had their first Rally and March from City Hall to the Festival Grounds. Morrow did not attend.

Wade wanted to correct the harm done to Hamilton's Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, plus) community by Morrow and set a new tone.

2001 was the first summer newly elected Wade could attend Pride as mayor. He and his staff proactively reached out to ensure he made an appearance and expressed his support. With a rainbow flag flying over City Hall Wade spoke, letting us know we were an essential part of Hamilton. The rally finished and his staff pulled organizers aside requesting further conversations about what the City could do to support our community. We asked them to let us consult with more community members. Pride was just a small group of volunteers. We didn't fully reflect our community's diversity. Many meetings in bars, living rooms and libraries later, a small group sat down with Wade with a few asks.

Proclamation? No. We don't do proclamations anymore.

Queer Community Centre like The 519 in Toronto? No. If you want one, fund and create it yourselves.

Advisory committee to city council? Yes!

Although we didn't get all our asks, under Wade's leadership several departments began incorporating queer and trans programming and language into services.

Wade proved he was an ally, so we decided to have some fun with him at the 2002 Pride Rally. Drag Queen Enza "Supermodel" Anderson was invited, and she planted a big kiss on Wade's cheek leaving some very distinctive red lipstick

behind. A picture of a smiling Wade with one of Canada's biggest drag icons hit the pages of The Spec.

The joy and excitement of Pride in Summer 2001 was tempered only months later by the sorrow and horror of the 9/11 U.S. terrorist attacks. Racist and violent reactions spilled over into Hamilton. Our city's Hindu temple was firebombed. Community leaders reached out to Wade about the need to bring people together to stop hate in our city. SHCI (Strengthening Hamilton's Community Initiative) was formed with Wade serving as chair. SHCI would later evolve into HCCI (Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion).

Wade did not run for re-election in 2003. Hamilton West NDP MPP David Christopherson stepped down to run. I along with Roy Adams, Wayne Marston and Evelyn Myrie all ran to be the ONDP Hamilton West candidate. I lost the nomination but had approached Marston earlier in the campaign about the lack of queer representation on SHCI. Both he and Myrie sat on its community roundtable. Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ Canadians are one of the largest groups targeted by hate crimes so the lack of representation was a disconnect. Just before the nomination meeting's speeches started Marston told me SHCI wanted me to join them as a representative for the queer community. Larry Di Ianni would continue Wade's commitment after winning the 2003 mayoral election also serving as Chair of SHCI.

After Wade stepped down from office, I would often run into him at events across the city. When I would visit his home church in Ancaster, Ryerson United, to share my musical gifts with the congregation, his beaming smile from the pews always made my heart glad.

Thank you, Bob, for living your values with your leadership. You reached out to Hamilton's diverse communities and found the common humanity in all the Hamiltonians you served as our Mayor.

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