

09.07 Pride Brings Unity to the Community

By Mike Monopoli

The climate is changing for the GLBT community, and...good news...it's changing for the better! The theme of this year's Pride celebration is Unity, and it appears that we are not only uniting as a community, we are also uniting with the straight community. Justice prevailed as the amendment to ban same-sex marriage in Massachusetts was voted down, one giant step towards ensuring equal rights for ALL of our brothers and sisters, not just the straight ones. This step has made our state more attractive to a diverse population which will serve to enrich and

enhance the quality of life here for everyone.



While many still enjoy the night life and the party scene, this year's Water Street celebration provides information and entertainment for families as well.

"This is open to younger people, people who can't get into the bars, children, families, college kids and it's also a way to celebrate for those people who don't drink" says A.J. Leto, Worcester Pride Association member and unofficial spokesperson. "Currently Massachusetts is the only state where gay marriage is possible ~ the full rights of marriage ~ so that makes Central MA an important place for the gay community. Although Boston does have a significant number of gay families, there are a lot of them moving west for the benefit of a neighborhood home with a big back yard to raise their kids."

Leto adds, "Worcester is home to several open and affirming religious institutions, this in turn has contributed to the increase of gay population in the Worcester area. One prime example is the Hadwen Park Church. Pastor Judy Hanlon is probably one of our most successful gay activists in all of Worcester County, and she's a straight woman. She has had such a positive impact on our

community. She even invited several state representatives to an open forum meeting in hopes to change their minds about banning same-sex marriage. The one who accepted her invitation walked in to the meeting just days before the vote, and met with almost a hundred people in an open forum discussion, a number of people stood up and spoke for a few minutes, and convinced him to vote in our favor. The great thing about that particular event was that there were many straight people who spoke out for their gay neighbors who have wonderful children and families.”

“This year the theme is Unity,” reiterates Sean Fitzpatrick, longtime supporter of Worcester’s gay community. “In the past, the Pride committee was comprised of mostly gay men. This year we have [included] representation from every aspect of the GLBT community. Maria Depasquale is the co-chair of the Worcester Pride Association with me. This is the first time in five years that we’ve had a lesbian on the committee...we all want equal rights but sometimes we distance each other.” While a strong community is good for everyone, it’s not always easy to bring people together. This is the fifth year the WPA has held the pride celebration on Water Street, and it has been immensely successful. Explains Fitzpatrick, “We wanted to extend it so that it was more of an event for the whole weekend so that people from out of town could come into the city to stay, not necessarily just for the Pride celebration, but also to see what Worcester has to offer.”

“This year we have separated the business expo from the non-profit,” says Fitzpatrick, “We’ve had a lot more non-profit organizations who want to participate this year. For example, a woman from Elder Services wants to rent space to distribute information on retirement, something we’ve never seen before in Central MA.” Adds CMBC member Tony Sanders, “One thing that will be different about the CMBC expo is that businesses will be able to sell things right from their booths.”

The celebration will continue throughout the weekend, starting Friday night September 7th when you can warm up at the MB Lounge on Grafton Street for cocktails and then move on to BLU Ultralounge for a pre-pride dance party. Saturday promises fun for everyone: beginning at noon, the block party takes over Water Street with a beer garden, business expo, political rally and Triple Crown Pageant hosted by Crystal Mess. Finish your night with a dose of high-energy at BLU’s Pride Dance Party, and don’t forget Sunday’s Awards Breakfast Brunch at 86 Winter Bistro, with hosts Billy Minogne and David Lemanager.

For more information visit: WorcesterPride.net