

Annual Pride festival to return to Maynooth



By Nate Smelle

With the cancellation of public events due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been nearly two years since the local LGBTQ2S+ community and their allies have gathered for the annual Pride celebration in Maynooth.

As the rate of infection continues to slow, and the number of new cases of COVID-19 per day declines, the event's organizers announced last week that the popular weekend-long celebration would be returning to Hastings Highlands in 2021.

The celebration gets underway on the evening of Thursday, July 29 at the Maynooth Skating Rink with an event called "Queers Read from Books that Inspire Them." From 7 p.m. until 8:30 p.m. local queers will read from books that resonate with them personally; and talk about how they found the book and what it means to them. Since this portion of the celebration will take place outdoors, attendees are advised to bring chairs, blankets, and bug spray. The event is free, however, donations will be collected for an honorarium to cover the land acknowledgement before Saturday's Queer History Tour.

The Queer History Tour will take place on Saturday, July 31, starting at 11 a.m. in front of the municipal building. Members of the local LGBTQ Mafia will lead the guided tour through the centre of Maynooth while discussing the rich queer history of the community. In addition to history there will also be music and art displayed.

The 2021 Maynooth Pride festival will wrap up on Sunday, Aug. 1 with the Rainbow Mafia Beach Day. Festivalgoers are invited to Papineau Public Beach on South Papineau Road anytime after noon to enjoy a fun day at the beach. Although the festivities were put on hold to protect the public from the coronavirus, Joey Shulman, one of the organizer's and co-founders of Maynooth Pride, said the local LGBTQ2S+ community and their allies have continued to support one another.

Acknowledging that everyone involved in organizing the event since it was launched some 30+ years ago recognizes the impact COVID-19 has had on the community, he said the LGBTQ2S+ community has felt the loss of social events such as Maynooth Pride.

"We do socializing like it's in our DNA," Shulman said. "It's how we meet each other. It's how we choose alternative family. It's how we find each other. It has been helpful during the past two years that our community - our small community - while not as visible perhaps as in past years, have been caring for each other, checking in on each other, visiting, delivering food, wood. Being part of the larger community: helping with Community Trust; food banks; Indigenous endeavours; the ongoing fight for social justice. We continue to carry that flag as volunteers."

Over the past 30+ years, Shulman said he has seen how the Maynooth Pride celebration has brought members of the LGBTQ2S+ community together. He said the important role Maynooth Pride plays in building the community and helping people overcome their

feelings of aloneness has become even more vital during the pandemic.

Reflecting on how much the community and the world has changed since he and his partner Barry Siegrist moved to Maynooth in 1988, Shulman said when they launched the Pride celebration there were still many residents who denied that there were any LGBTQ2S+ people living in the municipality now known as Hastings Highlands. As the first openly gay candidate to run for office in Hastings Highlands, he said he realized how much progress had been made in the past three decades, and how much more work still needs to be done.

Despite not being able to celebrate Pride together since 2019, Shulman said members of the LGBTQ2S+ community have quietly carried on this work to make Hastings Highlands a better, more inclusive place that everyone can be proud to call home. Noting how some people might appreciate the community's quieter approach in their fight for change during the pandemic, he pointed out that, "calm doesn't always mean that change isn't occurring. You don't always hear change. I think some people miss that opportunity is knocking at the door - they have earbuds in, or they're distracted. I don't know how often opportunity returns to the same door, but we do have opportunities to make a better place. It's a clarion call to this community who have hungered for that kind of change."

Shulman said a great way for people to celebrate Pride and support the local LGBTQ2S+ community is by shopping at a local business that is queer-owned or queer-positive.

"After on and off closures many in the arts community are struggling, said Shulman. "Not to say that all artists are queer, just that we are well-represented. It's hard sometimes to find the 'unity' in community. Most days it's enough to agree on what's for dinner, let alone who to invite to the table."