

Looking Forward

## All smiles, joy at annual Pride event



**By Mark James Miller, July 8, 2018**

If someone were to ask me to use one word to describe the 2nd Annual Pride Celebration and Resource Fair, it would be a no-brainer — joy.

The event in Santa Maria’s Town Center West on June 30, like its predecessor last year, fairly overflowed with happiness and good feeling. From the live music and performances to the 50-odd organizations that were represented, there was nothing but smiles, happy faces and a sense of community, inclusivity and hope.

Jesse Funes, of the House of Pride and Equity in Santa Maria and, along with partner Audy MacDonald, one of the primary organizers, was clearly pleased with how this year’s event turned out.

“It’s bigger and better than last year,” she said. “More vendors, more space, more people.”

More happy people. Young parents pushing strollers, older parents with their LGBTQI children, same sex couples enjoying a pleasant afternoon together, and diverse organizations. No matter where I went as I walked about the rows of booths that feeling of joy pervaded.

Eva Didion, a board member of House of Pride and Equity, said, “there were so many expressions of gratitude and countless hugs that you could feel the love all day and into the night.”

This feeling was echoed by Michelle Call, of the San Luis Obispo Gay and Lesbian Alliance: “GALA is very excited to see the outstanding achievements of Santa Maria HOPE! Saturday’s event was lively, affirming and welcoming to everyone on the gender spectrum.” She describes the event as “giving a voice and space to our traditionally underrepresented community” and doing so “with style and grace.”

June 30 was the last day of LGBTQ+ Pride Month. While the rest of the U.S., beginning in 1970, started having gay pride parades, Santa Maria, as one participant who came from San Luis Obispo to attend said, had lagged behind.

“The LGBT community is underrepresented here,” he noted.

This changed last year, when the first event was put on, and this year’s event cemented its place as part of Santa Maria and Central Coast lore and LGBTQ+ history in general a history, like the community it springs from, has been kept in the shadows for far too long.

Erica Andrade, president of Five Cities Hope, noted that, “What made Santa Maria Pride so successful was how diverse and inclusive it was. As a queer and Latina woman I felt very accepted and it made me feel hopeful for the LGBTQ+ community, especially in the smaller cities.”

So, where does the LGBTQ+ movement go from here? What lies ahead for a community that is gaining more acceptance, becoming more mainstream if you will, year by year? It goes without saying it has come a long way since

the Stonewall Riots of 1969, which marked the beginning of the LGBTQ+ movement. Erica Andrade says she is “hopeful the LGBTQ+ community, especially the younger generation, will continue to organize inclusive spaces and events for the community. It’s important that the younger generation knows that they can make a difference and start their own organization that provides people with inclusive environments.”

Her organization mentors younger LGBTQ+ people in dealing with bullying and family issues that can arise for them.

No matter where this movement goes in the years to come, that sense of joy that pervaded the 2nd Annual Pride and Resource Fair will undoubtedly go with it, spreading to everyone it touches.

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