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Bayfield, Ignacio Pride builds on generations of advocacy

Saturday celebration an effort to create visible LGBTQ+ and two-spirit spaces

By Jessie Bowman Herald Staff Writer

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About 300 people attended the inaugural Bayfield and Ignacio joint Pride Celebration on Saturday in Bayfield as Mr. E performs. (Jerry McBride/Durango Herald)

BAYFIELD — The midday sun is unforgiving. Balloons beside the main stage sag in the heat and people cluster in patches of shade.

But the excitement surrounding the inaugural Bayfield and Ignacio joint Pride Celebration beats the heat. People hoot and holler when drag queens and kings strut through the crowd and younger kids run around with wrists stacked full of multicolored bracelets.

About this series

Just as social norms ebb and flow over time, so do community spaces. This Pride Month series explores how queer spaces emerge.

Organized by Bayfield Queers and the Ignacio Out and Equal Alliance, the festival brought together queer residents, allies and families from across La Plata County on Saturday.

This year the goal was not only to celebrate LGBTQ+ identity, but to ensure younger generations see queer adults being their authentic selves and incorporated within the community, organizers said.

Pine River Shares and Bayfield Queers activist Kaylin Harrison said that during conversations with queer teenagers about what they needed, the items said they weren't looking for support groups or specialized programming.

Alexandra Green watches performances during the inaugural Bayfield and Ignacio joint Pride Celebration on Saturday in Bayfield. (Jerry McBride/Durango Herald)

"They just wanted to see queer adults living their lives and being happy," she said. "So we're trying to be as visible as possible."

What Chicken Does To Dogs

That visibility means holding Pride events in public spaces, inviting community organizations to participate and celebrating queer identity openly, Harrison said.

"I feel like Pride is one of the first things we've done at Pine River Shares that's really making a statement in the community," she said.

Just five to ten years ago, an event like this would not have been possible, said two women from Pagosa Springs wearing broad-brimmed sun hats adorned with rainbow pins.

Caro Gomez, an artist who grew up in Cortez and has lived throughout Southwest Colorado her entire life knows this.

"It's so hard to be queer in a rural community," said Gomez, who came out in high school. She attributed much of that difficulty to the conservative culture and lack of visible LGBTQ+ representation in many rural communities.

"People would try to hit me with their cars on the way home. They would call me a dyke in the hallway and try to fight me," she said. "I feel like that happens to a lot of people. We just don't really talk about it. And who can you really talk to about it when you're the only gay kid in the whole school who's not too afraid to come out?"

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Paohun Cottins, Jr. Moa Indian Colorado, a Ute Mountain Ute tribal member from Towaoc, tips one of the performers during the inaugural Bayfield and Ignacio joint Pride Celebration on Saturday in Bayfield. (Jerry McBride/Durango Herald)

Gomez said interacting with older queer role models as a teenager was liberating. Their friendship and unconditional acceptance helped her become comfortable with herself and her identity.

Today's generation appears more able to be themselves than previous generations, she said, a change she attributed, in part, to growing visibility and acceptance.

What Chicken Does To Dogs

The work of each generation builds on the efforts of those who came before, said Trennie Burch, executive director of the Ignacio Out and Equal Alliance.

Some of the vendors during the inaugural Bayfield and Ignacio joint Pride Celebration on Saturday in Bayfield. (Jerry McBride/Durango Herald)

Seeing the Pride celebration come to life – and seeing LGBTQ+ Native people represented publicly, including performers from an all-Indigenous drag house – felt powerful, she said.

Reaching that point took generations of work. Burch credited elders and community members who created space through small gatherings, advocacy and relationship-building long before a public Pride celebration in the Pine River Valley seemed possible.

Residents celebrated the inaugural Bayfield and Ignacio joint Pride Celebration on Saturday in Bayfield. (Jerry McBride/Durango Herald)

Now, Burch and other Indigenous LGBTQ+ advocates are working to continue that legacy and build a community that young people feel proud to inherit.

"I want our youth to be able to say, 'Yes, we're going to do this. We're not afraid. We're going to carry this forward,'" she said. "Eventually, I want to hand this over to them and say, 'This was built for you. Keep it going and build it for the next generation.'"

jbowman@durangoherald.com

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