

LGBT Alliance Gains National Attention

by Mitch Harvey

As we enter the month of September, the Leisure World Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, & Transgender Alliance is reflecting upon what a great summer it has been and is looking forward to the future.

The summer began with the equality decision by the U. S. Supreme Court. We celebrated the legal victory with an impromptu get together. Joining us were new members and community supporters sharing a common feeling: who we choose to love doesn't define us. We are all Equals. We may have different preferences, but they don't describe what kind of person we are, and certainly don't define anyone as good, bad, right or wrong. We're all equal and fabulous.

This was followed by the Independence Day celebration in which the LGBT Alliance marched. A first in Leisure World history, we received tremendous support and applause from spectators.

Topping this was another first: a lead story in Leisure World News, "Patriotic Pride." How great is that?

It's a new era in our community, recognizing a group that didn't formally exist a year ago. Kudos to Leisure World for opening its eyes and arms to us, making our home truly diverse.

We applaud the LW community for its overwhelming reception.

Another milestone in our first year was the creation the LGBT Alliance website (leisureworldlgbt.com), which has gained widespread recognition and led to a feature story in the Washington Blade newspaper.

The alliance also gained the attention of Heidi Cortese, CEO of RRLH and owner of the national website (leisureworld.com) which links the Rossmoor, Leisure World, Lansdowne Woods, and Laguna Woods properties with a goal of reaching adult communities nationwide and becoming a leader in supporting LGBT organizations, improving communication and opening up new opportunities to seniors.

As a large contributor annually to senior groups and resources, Cortese's involvement with LW LGBT will widen her scope, increasing her generous annual \$500,000 in contributions to benefit several LGBT organizations. Thus the birth of "Rainbow Over the Globe."

Contact with leisureworld.com was just the beginning. The site is a portal for active adults living in Leisure World-related properties and the LW LGBT Alliance is one of the first senior LGBT groups to step forward showing pride within a senior community.

This new alliance will support gay seniors everywhere, especially when a voice is needed to ensure gay and lesbian adults are well represented within their community and outside. This was a natural match, as both groups are

working toward a common goal.

We are embarking on an exciting joint venture between our organization and theirs. Reaching both gay and straight senior adults through a new interactive website, integrating activities and information for LGBT seniors, helps to achieve the goal of making all senior communities truly diverse and safe.

This new website will be a platform for seniors reaching out to peers across the nation, to support each other, find a travel companion, join a globetrotting tour, maybe swap homes for vacations. It could possibly provide a dating pool for everyone, gay and straight, and a venue to run various contests to merge the populations of these communities into one. The site will be free of negative comments.

This will be strictly a place of positive energy, helpful information for the senior and LGBT community and a site for fun experiences.

Due to the prestige of leisureworld.com's ownership and management, contests will be run with prizes that have regional appeal—trips to Disneyland or Disney World with the grandchildren, or a getaway to an SLS luxury property in West Hollywood or Miami.

Annual photo and pet contests are already ongoing, so be sure to get in on the excitement by visiting (leisureworld.com) or (leisureworldlgbt.com).

As the joint venture comes to fruition, we are excited to further introduce the Maryland Leisure World community to leisureworld.com and are having our "Coming Out" party to join the two, what we envision as "The New Leisure World."

Dust off those dancing shoes.

Everyone is invited to celebrate with us on Dec. 4 in the Crystal Ballroom of Clubhouse I, from 5-9 p.m. Admission is free, but you must get a ticket, available soon. With open bar, hors d'oeuvres, and DJs, you don't want to miss out on a night to remember, Save the date, Dec. 4.

We've been rewriting history in Leisure World and this celebration will certainly be one to remember. Watch the local papers for information as the date approaches.

In addition to these groundbreaking events, we needed to relax and during the summer. We had a number of picnics and barbecues, and a bowling/pizza party; saw "The Book of Mormon" at the Kennedy Center and soon we're going to the Rainbow Family Picnic at Hillwood Estate.

Through leisureworld.com, we were contacted by Dr. Philip Yaeger, director/CEO of AIDS Services Foundation Orange County. Yaeger is addressing the U.S. Conference on AIDS this month. He is interested in learning what LW LGBT is doing and agreed to speak at our next meeting, Sunday, Sept. 13 at 4 p.m. in Clubhouse II. Yaeger is discussing "AIDS, Its Effect on the Senior Community," and will answer questions on any topics at the conclusion.

In November, we are celebrating our first anniversary as an organized group in Leisure World and if our first year is any indication of what we can accomplish, our second year will be very exciting. Our membership is growing, attention to our website is increasing and involvement in community awareness is a goal and priority.

Remember our regular meetings are the third Saturday of every month with September being an exception—we are meeting Sept. 13 as noted above. Our meetings are open to all. Feel free to stop by for a visit or pass this information on to a friend.

Information about the LGBT Alliance can be found by visiting our site (leisureworldlgbt.com) or by contacting one of our officers: Pam Galef (240-558-3489) and (pdgalef@gmail.com); Mary Twigger (240-669-9962) and (mary.l.twigger@gmail.com); Mitch Harvey (301-785-4181) and (miamimlh51@gmail.com); or Pat Ritter (240-558-3489) and (pat71451@yahoo.com).

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