

Annapolis Pride rides the rainbow wave to double in size for 2022



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So much has changed in the past five years for the nonprofit group Annapolis Pride and Severna Park resident Abbie Ellicott, who will serve as one of three grand marshals in Saturday's Pride Parade.

In 2017, a local Pride gathering was just a glimmer in the eye of founder Jeremy Browning, inspired by a rainbow flag flying from Saint Luke's Episcopal Church in Eastport, the first he'd ever seen in his native Annapolis. Within a year, Browning and a few friends asked Mayor Gavin Buckley to proclaim June Pride month. Not only did the mayor make the proclamation, he surprised them by announcing the city would [host a Pride parade in 2019](#). After two straight years of pandemic cancellations, Pride is back, and twice as big as before.

The expansion is in part due to Ellicott and others like her, people who want Anne Arundel County to be a place where gay and transgender people feel welcome and included. In 2017, Ellicott was a self-described, "straight, cisgender married mother of two" who had never been politically active. Then she attended the Women's March in Washington, D.C., and came home to Severna Park knowing she could do more to help further women's and LGBTQ rights than walk a mile in a pink woven hat.

"People ask, 'Do protests work?'" Ellicott said. "Protests work because they inspire people to go back home and do the work."

Ellicott went home to Severna Park and joined WISE, Women Indivisible Strong Effective, a grassroots group of Anne Arundel County women who split up into "huddles" to affect change. As a psychologist, she had the professional background to advocate for legislation that would ban conversion therapy for minors, which was still legal in Maryland at the time. Over the course of her successfully lobbying efforts, Ellicott realized there was more she could do. Soon she was [working with the Anne Arundel County Board of Education to develop policies](#) that would affirm students' gender expression and help prevent bullying.

"Our WISE advocacy huddle morphed into a bigger coalition," Ellicott said. She's now the facilitator and leader of Coalition for LGBTQ+ Students, an informal group of educators, students and other community leaders who continue to push for inclusive environments in public spaces. She'll be joined in the "cool cars" at the front of the parade by her fellow grand marshals Billie Hoard, adviser of the Gay-Straight Alliance/Gender Sexuality Alliance at Chesapeake High School, and Drake Smith, a former student member of the school board.

"I am so honored to be in their company," Ellicott said. "I was completely thrilled and completely stunned."

Browning said the Annapolis Pride board of directors made a deliberate decision to crown advocates as their grand marshals, not celebrities.

"We want to highlight people in the community that are working hard toward LGBTQ advocacy," he said.

Browning wishes he had a few more adults like Ellicott and Hoard in his life while he was growing up in Eastport. Seeing that flag at Saint Luke's was revelatory for him as a gay man. "It just got me thinking like, 'Hey, why don't we have more visibility here?' I know that we're here. I know I have friends here."

Given that Washington has been hosting a gay Pride day since 1975, it's a little astounding that few rainbow flags could be seen in Annapolis prior to 2017. And yet Browning believes that was the perfect year for the nonprofit to launch. Thanks to social media, the organization has grown immensely, connecting him to LGBTQ people and allies he never knew before, some of whom joined the Annapolis Pride board.

"It was such an amazing experience in 2019," Browning said. "The whole community showed up to show their support."

This year's parade and festival have both nearly doubled in size. Ancillary Pride events — both official and unofficial — are sprouting up across town. More than 100 groups are expected to appear in the parade, which steps off at noon. The route proceeds down West Street from Amos Garrett Boulevard, turns left onto Calvert Street and ends at The People's Park, one of four "festival areas" for booths and concert stages.

Motorists should be on the lookout for street closures, and organizers strongly encourage parking at Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium and boarding a free Annapolis Pride Shuttle (one of three rented school buses).

Entertainment lineups at two stages include Annapolis rapper IAmYoungAye, Baltimore TikTok phenom L. Rodgers and two teen bands from Millersville: Q-Funk and The Procrastinators.

More than 140 artists, businesses, community organizations, faith groups and government officials signed up to set up booths at the festival. "It's a really great mix of organizations that are coming out to support us, and a lot of them will be providing resources and giveaways for the LGBTQ community," Browning said.

He emphasizes, however, that Annapolis Pride is open to all. More organizations wanted to participate than Pride had space.

"We think the event will just keep growing as we find ways to expand it," Browning said.

Highlights of [Annapolis Pride 2022](#) include:

Wednesday, 1 to 7 p.m. FreeState Justice Free Legal Clinic at Annapolis Public Library: The Baltimore-based nonprofit offers consultations related to LGBTQ discrimination and other issues.

Wednesday, 8 p.m. at Rams Head Live: Dragapella! [The Kinsey Sicks](#), a drag barbershop quartet best known for its holiday show "Oy Vey in a Manager," celebrates Pride by performing in Annapolis for the first time, featuring Annapolis native J.B. McLendon as "Angel."

Friday, 6 to 11:30 p.m. Pre-Pride Party at The Graduate Hotel

Saturday, noon to 5 p.m. Pride Parade and Festival

Saturday, 5:30 to 8 p.m. Arts Week Kick-Off Picnic at Maryland Cultural and Conference Center field at Park Place. (MC3 will also sponsor a photo booth at Pride)

Sunday, 3 p.m., Interfaith Service at St. Anne's Church: [Rev. David P. Gushee](#), author and distinguished university professor of Christian ethics at Mercer University, speaks on the moral obligation for equity and inclusion in Christianity.