

Crofton pride: Local leaders talk equality and justice following socially-distant parade



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In lieu of a rainbow parade on Main Street in Annapolis, Black and LGBTQ+ community leaders gathered virtually Saturday night to discuss the movement for racial justice, and the fight for LGBTQ+ equality.

The online forum was hosted by Annapolis Pride, a nonprofit that celebrated its inaugural parade last summer. This year, founder Jeremy Browning said the focus is less on celebration and more on education and justice — part of the effort to build a multicultural and anti-racist organization.

“We will not achieve full equality for the LGBTQ+ community if there is not a racially diverse movement,” Browning said. “White people, especially white people in positions of power, have the responsibility to use our privilege to reshape our community to have Black, brown, trans and queer people of color at the table, and in places of leadership to be part of these discussions.”

The conversation spanned from the Black Lives Matter movement to the danger Black trans women are in every day, to self-care, and how to be a good ally to communities you are not a part of.

“It’s important that we realize even moving forward that a lot of a lot of blood sweat and tears went into us being able to even have this opportunity to present it to our wider audience,” said William Rowel, an Annapolis senior advisor and LGBTQ+ liaison. “The history is important because, for several reasons, it’s important to honor and celebrate the people who did work hard for us to arrive at this moment, and future moments but also sacrificed so much in order for all of us to even be able to achieve this amount of equality and acceptance.”

Though Annapolis Pride canceled the flagship event in downtown Annapolis, one neighborhood in Crofton still decided to celebrate pride in-person this year.

In a pandemic-style social distanced parade, neighbors and community members wore rainbow t-shirts, waved flags of transgender and LGBTQ+ pride, and celebrated with a drive-thru parade. Some celebrants stood spread out on sidewalks, and many people remained in their cars for a slow drive-thru.

In some cars, kids decked out in rainbow colors popped up through sunroofs or out open windows to celebrate the 51st anniversary of the protests at the Stonewall Inn in New York, which is widely known to have started the movement for LGBTQ+ equality.

The online panel, held later that day by Annapolis Pride, included both [Anne Arundel County Executive Stuart Pittman](#) and Annapolis Mayor Gavin Buckley, who was joined on Zoom by his son, wearing a rainbow flag as a cape.

Allyship and self-care

The panelists discussed the importance of allies to both the Black and LGBTQ+ community, as they fight for equity and justice.

Allyship is earned, said Leslie Anderson of Annapolis Pride and PFLAG, and it is a powerful contract of mutual support.

It’s more than just publicly proclaiming support, Rowel said. There has to be action.

He said that means considering the impacts of policies on Black and LGBTQ+ communities, identifying other allies for the community, and fighting the violence that Black and brown transgender people face on a daily basis.

Being a good ally also means taking responsibility for educating oneself, said Kyree Stinson, a local organizer with Black Lives Matter. One person cannot speak for an entire group, Stinson said.

Alderman Dajuan Gay, D-Ward 6, said that if he expects this much from his friends who want to better support the Black community, he will hold himself to the same standard when it comes to supporting the LGBTQ+ community.

"It's not their job to educate me, it's not their job to teach me how to walk through this process, and I have to hold myself accountable," Gay said. "I have to teach myself how to correctly engage and interact and what terminology is to use or what is appropriate."

Lee Blinder, executive director of Trans Maryland, said that there can be a lot of sadness and heartbreak in activism.

"I think that there's a lot of really empathetic people who get drawn to this work because it touches our hearts, and we become deeply invested in the well being of our siblings, and even those who walk a different path than us," Blinder said.

Blinder identifies as transgender and nonbinary, and they said it is important to remind the trans community specifically that "trans joy is really real."

"There's a lot of horrible news out there but you are valid and you are loved and you belong," Blinder said.