

# For Annapolis Pride brides, a chance to celebrate ‘love, acceptance and unity’



Paul W. Gillespie/Capital Gazette

Tammy Collins, left, and Crystal Dove, right, are getting married Saturday at Annapolis Pride Parade. They got engaged at City Dock in Annapolis and posed for photos there, June 1, 2023.



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Tammy Collins and Crystal Dove are the first to admit they aren't attention seekers.

The Annapolis residents have been a couple since October 2020 and got engaged at City Dock in August 2022. Their plan was to quietly take their vows and head off on a honeymoon trip last fall. To their surprise, friends and family pushed back. And that backlash came from a place a love.

"We have so many people in our corner that just want to support us," Collins said.

So, when they heard Annapolis Pride was looking for couples to renew their vows or get married at the [2023 parade and festival on Saturday](#), "We just looked at each other, and we said, 'This is a sign, and we're going to do this,'" Collins said.



Nearly 140 groups from around Maryland are expected to join in the festivities from noon to 5 p.m.

At 2 p.m. Saturday, Collins and Dove will be married at the People's Park in downtown Annapolis, with Scott A. Poyer, clerk of the Anne Arundel County Circuit Court, officiating. They expect at least 50 friends and family to attend, plus a few hundred strangers.



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"Pride is really all about love and community," said board member Christine Feldman. "Why not celebrate love with a wedding?"

Two other couples, Alexis and Jennifer Whitfield and Irene and Leia Burks, will also be renewing their vows. Feldman acknowledged that in a majority-blue state like Maryland, throwing a public LGBTQ+ wedding is hardly a political statement in 2023, but as Annapolis natives, Collins and Dove have watched the city shift over the 20 years that they've known each other.

"It's changed tremendously, like a whole 360-degree turn" Collins said of Maryland's capital. "We have a whole month dedicated to Pride, and the whole town shows up."

Their wedding festivities are, essentially, the Pride festivities, starting with the Friday night pre-Pride party at The Graduate Hotel, the parade and ceremony Saturday, drag brunch on Sunday and finally, “a big Pride cookout” for family and friends Sunday afternoon.

Collins and Dove attended Annapolis Pride for the first time last year and were struck by how family-friendly many events there were. Collins has three daughters, and even her youngest, who is now 14, can attend most events.

“The whole theme is for the youth,” she said, referring to the 2023 parade and festival tagline, “Express Yourself: Protecting LGBTQ+ youth.” There’s also a new youth “passport” of experiences for kids to complete.

As a teenager, Dove, knows she would have benefited greatly from a community celebration centered around queer young people. She’s now 39 but came out to her parents at 14. Both encouraged her to be herself, she said. “My first relationship was with a woman and my first kiss was with a girl,” Dove recalled. “I had always known.” But that didn’t mean she found complete acceptance at Annapolis High School in the 1990s.

“It was terrifying,” Dove said. “It was good to have a supportive family because at school it’s a different story.”

Collins, 40, came out much later, after marrying and having children because, “That’s what I thought I was supposed to do.” When she did begin identifying as queer, many peers were not surprised. And her first gay relationship was with Crystal. The women had known each other in high school and reconnected on Facebook. A breakup and series of life changes followed, but when they began dating again in April 2020, it didn’t take long to figure out they’d be staying together for good this time.

“What I love about Tammy is her heart,” Dove said. “She is so inspiring and always willing to help others. She’s just amazing. She’s helped me overcome a lot.”

Collins works at Soul Sistās, a local nonprofit that helps women in recovery find safe and secure housing. Dove works in hospitality. On Aug. 18, 2022, the women and Collins’ daughters all took what Dove did not know was a strategic trip to City Dock.

“I had it all planned,” Collins said. “My daughters distracted Crystal and I got down on one knee.”

“I did not see it coming,” Dove said. “It was a complete surprise.”

All three of Collins’ daughters will be at Saturday’s ceremony, and Dove considers them her own. Both are also active in the recovery community; one reason they reversed course and didn’t elope is that so many people want to celebrate the positive force they’ve been in each other’s lives since dating for a second time.

“No matter if it is good, bad or ugly, we show up for each other. That’s one of the biggest aspects of recovery” Collins said. Their wedding will be a chance for their family, LGBTQ+ friends and the recovery community to all “show up” for what should be a fun day, and cheer on the couple as Collins and Dove exchange vows on the main stage.

“We like to have fun,” Collins said, “But neither of us likes the attention on us at all.”

That said, they invite anyone who is available to attend their wedding.

“It’s all about love and acceptance,” Dove said.

Collins had one more word to add: “The love, the acceptance and the unity.”

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