

Pride Month Tackles Asbury Park, NJ

Written by Lana Leonard

This year's 24th annual Asbury Park Pride was once again record breaking, bringing in over 20,000 people from the Asbury Park's original 1,000 back 24 years ago. One could see these ground breaking numbers not only through the festival grounds themselves, but as the parade partied on through Cookman Ave. all the way around and to Convention Hall. The streets were covered in rainbow flags, hats, bandanas, and supporters of the LGBTQ community. A particular golden float, holding Woodbridge High School's GSA and members of GLSEN Central New Jersey, began chanting, "When I say 'happy,' you say 'pride!' When I say 'love,' you say 'equal!'" Having the chant echoed back by bystanders watching the parade, made everyone clap and yell into the air.

"It's a stunning event. What I love is it always showcases the diversity of our community," said Laura Pople, President of Jersey Pride. How true that was. One could see folks of all different styles, knocking the stereotypical LGBTQ definitions of a man and woman out of the park. Pople added that youth participation and volunteers were very gratifying... saying that young people are our future and that these young participants are going to be the future of our community and our events.

Down by the ocean, tents were set up in front of the board walk, where people would buy wrist bands and enjoy the festival. From food, to clothing, to jewelry, to helping the LGBTQ community out through organizations like The Pride Center, Q-Spot, GLSEN CNJ and Pflag, and all the music, people let themselves go and had a good time. As Emma Mann, 18, said via text message, "I thought pride was great like every year. I loved seeing everyone there celebrating a cause. My favorite part was the concert that was being held. I was partying with other people that were quite friendly. I felt welcomed. I am definitely coming back next year." With hosts Ariel Sinclair and Matt Martin making jokes about lost wallets and looking out for Caitlyn Jenner, people in the crowd were covered in gold glitter, hugging their friends and awaiting the next musical act.

Performances included headliner, Frenchie Davis, Catey Shaw, Will Sheridan, Josh Zuckerman, Run Jenny, Keremiah Clark, Nicollette, The Black Mariah, 10 Hairy Legs, and Paper Mill Playhouse Broadway Show Choir. When asked how performing at pride was for her, performer Catey Shaw, 23, said that playing pride was the biggest and most supportive crowd she ever played for. One could only imagine... 20,000 people is practically an arena sized crowd!

For more information on upcoming Pride events this June you can go to The Human Rights Campaign page: <http://www.hrc.org/pride/events>. In addition for more ways to bring pride into your schools K-12 visit the GLSEN website at www.glsen.org and for more ways to educate your parents on LGBTQ visit <https://community.pflag.org/>.