

Rainbow Richmond Shapes first Pride event

Group hopes for greater LGBT outreach in area

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A revived organization with a focus on LGBT issues is going public in a big way this weekend.

Rainbow Richmond is organizing what's believed to be the city's first gay Pride festival. The event is scheduled for 3-6 p.m. Saturday at Jack Elstro Plaza in the downtown area.

There'll be live music, speakers from the community and a family-friendly drag show. No entry fee will be charged, but the group is seeking donations to help its rebuilding efforts.

"Rainbow Richmond actually was an organization from Richmond 20 or so years ago that tried to do some very good things in the community and then kind of fell out of meetings. People moved away, got older, stuff like that," said Benjamin Guard, the primary organizer for the festival.

"This renewed effort is headed up by college students from the community who are presidents and leaders of their universities' LGBT groups."

The students came across the original Rainbow Richmond organization while doing research in The Palladium-Item archives and decided to reach out about reviving the group.

"We were like, 'OK, let's try to track down who it is and see if we can use the same name, pass the torch to the next generation,'" Guard said. "That's what the goal is."

The effort to pull together the festival began in August but really got rolling in April as logistics and other planning came together.

"We're trying to offer a safe space to everyone to be able to be themselves," Guard said. "At the end of the day, everyone's human, everyone is who they are. We're just wanting to try to pass that message along."

"Hopefully, we do the right thing, and hopefully, we help people. That's all we're here for."

For those who might be apprehensive about taking part in a public pride event, Rainbow Richmond has taken steps to make the festival as safe as possible.

"When you organize a group of 200 people or so, you just prepare for the worst, hope for the best," Guard said.

"We have reached out to various organizations that could provide aid and whatnot. We've cleared things with

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the police department, full support from the city. Everything's approved."

The renewed Rainbow Richmond is using Saturday's festival as a kind of kickoff for its future plans that would include regular meetings open to the public.

"In a perfect world, Rainbow Richmond would be there to provide resources to those who don't have them themselves. We're going to be focusing on community outreach, community projects," Guard said. "This is just the beginning of a greater effect on Richmond, or at least our plan is."

"Just focusing on the little, small things that add up to be the biggest problems. If we can fix one thing, then another, then another, eventually we'll be in a perfect system."

Anyone interested in being a part of the organization should like and follow its Facebook page. That site also can be used by those who might have questions about how to offer their support.

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