



## Freedom shines at Dayton Pride parade

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by Anthony Glassman

**Dayton**--The annual Dayton Pride Parade and Festival went smoothly on June 2, giving life to the theme "It's About Freedom" in more ways than one.

So many freedoms were on display at the event, it was almost hard to keep track.

Around 1,500 exercised their freedom of assembly in the parade, which went from Cooper Park to Courthouse Square. Once there, it let out into the festival, which drew 3,000 people.

Freedom to marry was exercised as the city held its first mass same-sex commitment ceremony, in which 38 couples were united by Rev. Mark Pridmore of Eternal Joy MCC, Father Richard Young of Dignity Dayton, Rev. Valerie Garrick of Cross Creek Community Church and Rev. Martha Hodges of Miami Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship.

And, proving the egalitarian nature of the event, even the freedom of speech of a small handful of neo-Nazi protesters was protected, although increased police presence ensured that they were unable to interfere with the Pride revelers too badly.

"For the first time in the event's existence, protesters from the Aryan Nation assembled across from Dayton's Courthouse Square," said Dayton Lesbian-Gay Center president Vicki Hahn. "Despite attempts to disrupt the festivities, they went basically unnoticed."

The festival, which featured a performance by singer Taborah, was emceed by Derek of the Derek and Romaine program on Sirius Satellite Radio.

According to Hahn, this year's installment saw its largest crowd yet. While she was thrilled with the attendance, however, it was another aspect of the afternoon that warmed her heart.

"My favorite part of Pride was the ceremony," she said. "To see 38 couples repeat vows, exchange rings and participating in the cutting of a wedding cake was wonderful."

"The happiness on their faces made the entire day so very memorable," she concluded.

While Dayton had Ohio's first Pride celebration of the month, their festivities are far from over. The commemoration of Pride Month continues on June 16 with the Pride Dinner and Expo at Sinclair Community College's Ponitz Center.

This year's dinner will feature performances by the Dayton Gay Men's Chorus, the Columbus Women's Chorus and resident artists from the Human Race Theatre Company. **The high point of the evening, however, will be a keynote speech by Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.**

**“With so much going on in our country around LGBT rights, with the recent change in government leadership and the impending presidential elections, it is imperative that we look to those in pivotal positions such as Matt Foreman with the NGLTF to guide us along our journey,” Hahn said. “Mr. Foreman has been an advocate for our right for numerous years and will talk about issues such as hate crime legislation, discrimination of various types and levels and other topics that daily affect our rights as Americans.”**

“We are anxious to hear his thoughts on how the recent election of more ‘friendly’ officials and the possibilities of the November 2008 presidential election may impact our future,” she said.

Admission to the two-hour LGBT and ally business expo is free, but tickets for the dinner cost \$45. Tickets can be purchased by sending a check to Pride Partnership, Box 1203, Dayton, Ohio 45401-1203 and in person at Q Gifts, 1904 North Main, Dayton.

The Ponitz Center is located at 444 West Third Street in Dayton.