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Honoring the LGBTQ Community & Diversity in Ossining

JUNE 5, 2019

By Abby Luby

Fifty years ago, on June 28, 1969, police raided the Stonewall Inn, a New York City gay club in Greenwich Village. A riot broke out when police forced out a small group of gay, lesbian and transgender people. The police met resistance and ended up barricading themselves inside the bar. The six days of riots and protests that ensued became known as the Stonewall Riots,



signifying a decisive and positive turning point in the gay rights movement.

Today, June is known as Pride Month and is celebrated throughout the country. The Village of Ossining responded to a request by the Ossining LTBGQ Alliance to, for the first time, formally honor Pride Month and the 50th anniversary of Stonewall by raising the iconic rainbow LGBTQ Pride Flag in front of Village Hall. About 50 people came to see the flag raised along with village trustees, state and town officials.

“We are here today to state unequivocally that all people are welcome in Ossining,” said Ossining Mayor Victoria Gearity addressing the crowd. “Regardless of who you love, where you are born, your age, your gender, your race, your socio-economic status, what language you speak in your home — know that you are welcome in this community.”

Gearity spoke of former Ossining Mayor Bill Hanauer who, in 2006, was the first openly gay mayor elected in Westchester County. Hanauer’s tenure set the stage for the village to adopt many new policies reflecting acceptance of diversity. Just last year Ossining became the first municipality in New York State to establish a gender-neutral signage policy for municipal restrooms.

Christina Picciano, founder of the Ossining LGBTQ Alliance, recounted the 1969 riots and why raising the rainbow flag was so important. “It was a time when kissing or holding hands with a person of the same sex was against the law in New York State,” she said. “We honor the members of the LGBTQ community who fought for our rights and provide hope and solidarity for all regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.”

Poet Cole Rivers, a former resident of Ossining who now lives in Peekskill, read one of his poems that poignantly expressed the hardships and struggles that have long defined those in the LGBTQ community. His opening line read, “We are looking for the rainbow, but we don’t have enough light.” His poem described what it’s like to be different and how building friendships with those who understand can become one’s new family. A line towards the end of his poem read, “No one believes in rainbows until they actually see one.”

Ossining Town Supervisor Dana Levenberg thanked everyone who was in attendance. “I also thank the Village of Ossining for taking the lead in recognizing Pride Month. We are an inclusive community and we always have been,” she said.

County Legislator Catherine Borgia (D- 9th District) praised the Ossining community for being

open minded when it came to issues concerning the LGTBQ community. “This is the Ossining I know — a place where all people are welcome, and this is one more example.”

Donna Rothstein, an Ossining resident for about 13 years, said in the last few days she attended other local Pride Celebrations in the county. “A lot of what’s happening is very positive when it comes to the LGBTQ here in the Hudson Valley. The Ossining community feels like it’s very accepting. There’s more support that services young people so LGBTQ kids don’t have to hide,” she said.

When the Rainbow Flag was hoisted up, Gearity invited all to stand in front of it for a picture. The flag will remain in front of Village Hall for the month of June.