



Amy Schecter waits for the parade to start.



Ted Azary with his wife Christine Schaetzl, a behavioral health therapist, and their two daughters, left, Violet, 10, and Evelyn, 6. She has clients who are part of the LGPTQ community and wanted to show support.



Robyn Schlesinger, left, and Blair Perryman



PHOTOS: ABBY LUBBY

The Putnam Pride Parade marching down Gleneida Avenue.

# Putnam celebrates pride and diversity

*Annual parade and concert draws hundreds*

BY ABBY LUBY  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

More than 250 people took part in the second annual Putnam Pride Parade and Celebration last Saturday as a crowd gathered in front of the historic Putnam County Courthouse. Before marching down Gleneida Avenue, community members spoke about the importance of diversity and the support for Putnam for Black Lives.

Until last year, Putnam County was the only county in the lower Hudson Valley that never held any public pride events. The 2020 Pride Parade in Cold Spring was canceled because of COVID. Shortly thereafter, a parade in Carmel was organized in soli-

arity with Black Lives Matter in the wake of George Floyd's murder.

From the courthouse steps speakers shared how their lives had been impacted by gender issues resulting in exclusions from society. Speakers included Chappaqua attorney Kristen Browde; James Young, director of Equality New York and president of the LGBT Bar Association who started Westchester County's first LGBTQ youth program in 1992; Robyn Schlesinger, a White Plains attorney on the Westchester County LGBTQ advisory board and on the board of LOFT/LGBTQ Community.

Schlesinger spoke of legislation impacting young trans children.

"They know they're not allowed to express themselves, which has led to mental illness," she said. "In Connecticut, they are trying to stop trans kids from playing sports. It's draconian. We need to propose legislation to ensure the gender of one's choice is respected."

"We live in a country where the institutions are corrupt and repressive," Drew United Methodist Church pastor Martha E. Vink said in a passionate speech. "We see death by police and the murder of trans black women and how more trans youth are committing suicide. We have to make a commitment to them to make a better world."

As the crowd listened and

cheered, passing cars and trucks honked in support.

Holding a rainbow flag and waiting for the parade to start was Amy Schecter who recently moved from Manhattan to Brewster.

"This is a great way to meet the community," she said. Pride Parade volunteer and Carmel resident Anthony Bonfiglio handed out glossy, 28-page Pride Guides filled with numerous local business ads. Bonfiglio stood next to Eileen McDermott, a parade organizer.

"One year ago, the pride parade was canceled in Cold Spring because of COVID," McDermott recalled. "But on June 22 we walked the same route we are

walking today in solidarity with Black Lives Matter."

Parade hosts and emcees Angel Elektra and Shay D'Pines led the parade down the sidewalk towards the Gilead Presbyterian Church where the crowd settled on the lawn to enjoy a slate of singers and entertainers. Pastor of the Gilead Presbyterian Church, Martin McGeachy, greeted everyone and said he was sixth generation Presbyterian minister.

"When my older brother came out as a gay man, he was not welcome in his local church. To live to see this day makes me so proud," he said.

Elektra and D'Pines recounted

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their relationship and their eventual marriage before Electra broke out into the song “This Is Me.”

Blair Perryman, program coordinator at Queery, a national LGBTQ organization, sat at the Queery table speaking and handing out information.

“It’s been an honor to be invited and to table at the pride parade,” said Perryman.

Also tabling for Putnam Progressive was Rabbi Steve Altarescu of the Reform Temple of Putnam Valley.

“We believe every human being is worthy and no one should be shamed for who they are,” he said. “We live in a culture where it’s too easy to support a culture of shame.”

After singer Liv DiFusco of her band P3tch belted out her original song “Sugar Honey Iced Tea,” she said, “I’m happy to be a part of this community.”



Violet Schaeztl Azary, 10, left, and Evelyn Schaeztl Azary, 6, show their pride.



Emcee Angel Electra and the crowd celebrate on the lawn at the Putnam Pride Celebration at Gilead Presbyterian Church.



The crowd gathers on the church lawn to take in the program.

PHOTOS: ABBY LUBBY

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