



New Jersey: A State Big on Pride

By: Karly Kay, Training Technician

June in New Jersey is synonymous with Pride events that recognize the history and experience of the LGBTQ+ community while also highlighting ongoing efforts toward inclusion and equality. Many of these events trace their origins to the Stonewall Riots of 1969, which began after a police raid on a gay bar in New York City. The protests that followed are widely considered a pivotal moment in the movement for LGBTQ+ rights in the United States.

In the years leading up to and immediately following Stonewall, early demonstrations were often referred to as “gay liberation” marches or rallies. The term “gay pride” began to emerge in the late 1960s and early 1970s, influenced in part by broader civil rights–era language emphasizing dignity and self-affirmation. The word “Pride” gradually became the common term used for these events over time.

In 1970 the first Pride marches were held in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago to mark the one-year anniversary of Stonewall. In the years that followed, New Jerseyans often traveled to nearby cities such as New York and Philadelphia to participate in these events, prompting interest in organizing celebrations within the state.

New Jersey held its first official statewide Pride Parade in 1992. That same year, the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination was amended to include protections based on affectional and sexual orientation. Advocacy efforts by organizations such as the New Jersey Lesbian & Gay Coalition contributed to these developments.

The Coalition also established a committee to organize statewide Pride events. Asbury Park was selected as the site of the first Pride Parade due to its history and reputation as an inclusive community. Approximately 1,500 participants attended the inaugural event, which helped establish a foundation for future Pride celebrations in the state.

Subsequent Pride events developed in communities across New Jersey. Jersey City held its first Pride event in 2001 and continues to host the Jersey City LGBTQ+ Pride Festival. In 2002 Trenton expanded its annual Pride Picnic into the first Capital Rainbow Fest in Mill Hill Park. Newark introduced the Newark Pride Festival in 2005 in remembrance of Sakia Gunn, whose death brought attention to issues of violence and safety affecting LGBTQ+ individuals. Additional events include the South Jersey Pride Festival, first held in 2008, and the North Jersey Pride Festival, established in 2011.

Today, Pride events in New Jersey vary in size and format, but they commonly serve as opportunities to recognize LGBTQ+ history, build community, and support ongoing efforts related to civil rights.

Inspiring Quotes for Pride Month:

“Openness may not completely disarm prejudice, but it’s a good place to start.” —Jason Collins, NBA’s first openly gay player

“When you put love out in the world it travels, and it can touch people and reach people in ways that we never even expected.” — Laverne Cox, actress and activist

“Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.” — Harvey Milk, politician, and activist

“Accept no one’s definition of your life, define yourself.” —Harvey Fierstein, acclaimed actor, playwright, and screenwriter

“When you take risks you learn that there will be times when you succeed and there will be times when you fail, and both are equally important.” —Ellen DeGeneres, comedian, actress, television host, and producer

“I am a firm believer that you don’t achieve greatness on your own. There is always someone there to lend a hand.” —Greg Louganis, Olympic diver, and gold medalist

“It’s just really important that we start celebrating our differences. Let’s start tolerating first, but then we need to celebrate our differences.” —Billie Jean King, tennis legend, social activist, and pioneer for gender equality in sports

“One cannot deny the humanity of another without diminishing one's own.”—James Baldwin, writer, essayist, playwright, and civil rights activist