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For Immediate Release

## **RAINBOW PRIDE FLAGS PROUDLY FLY OVER MUSKOKA** All Muskoka Communities Show Support for Diversity

MUSKOKA, ONTARIO – July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2017 – Once again, all of the communities in Muskoka have raised the Rainbow Pride flag in celebration of the Muskoka Pride Festival, which runs July 21 – 30.

The Townships of Muskoka Lakes, Georgian Bay, and Lake of Bays, Wahta First Nation, and the towns of Huntsville, Bracebridge, and Gravenhurst all raised the flag again this year.

The day started off with most raising the flag simultaneously across the region. Weather aside (it rained in most municipalities) there was a good turnout from staff and the public. Rain did not deter the celebratory feeling. Muskoka Pride board member, Shawn Forth, commented in Port Severn that they “even turned the wind on so the flag could flutter”

The ceremonies were attended by each mayor, who all extended their best wishes for a successful week of Pride events.

Bracebridge Mayor Graydon Smith expressed his pleasure in raising the Rainbow Pride flag for the 7<sup>th</sup> consecutive year, to applause from almost 25 people who attended the ceremony. Mayor Smith thanked the Pride organizers for their time and dedication. He was thrilled to be raising the Rainbow flag and that Bracebridge will once again host the annual Pride Picnic. He said it is “a testament to our community that continues to celebrate diversity and inclusivity.”

The Rainbow Flag symbolizes the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) community with the different colours representing the diverse groups.

For Lennox LePage, Chairperson of Muskoka Pride, the flag raisings are a symbol of acceptance of the LGBTQ population of Muskoka. “It says to the people in Muskoka that our community is diverse and inclusive, an important message for residents and visitors.”

LePage stressed the need for the flag raising's visibility within Muskoka. "It's important for all people to see it and know that they're welcome in their own community."

"It is significant that all communities of Muskoka are once again recognizing the Muskoka Pride Festival this year," says board member Shawn Forth, "because there are LGBTQ residents all over Muskoka, who want to feel supported by their town."

Having grown up in Muskoka, he understands the feeling of isolation that comes with thinking you are alone. "Visibility is important for the LGBTQ community so that you don't feel isolated. LGBTQ Pride is not just about tolerance and acceptance – it's about celebrating the rich diversity in our community."

The Muskoka Pride Festival continues with events all week throughout Muskoka. The week concludes on Sunday July 30<sup>th</sup> with the 9<sup>th</sup> annual Muskoka Pride Picnic at Annie Williams Park in Bracebridge from noon to 4pm. The Picnic includes free food, a beer tent, activities for the whole family, vendors, and community booths.

For further information about all events, go to [www.muskokapride.com](http://www.muskokapride.com) or visit the Muskoka Pride Facebook Page [www.facebook.com/muskokapride](http://www.facebook.com/muskokapride)

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**About LGBT Pride Events** – Pride events celebrate lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) culture. Most pride events occur annually and many take place around June to commemorate the Stonewall Riots in New York City on June 28, 1969. The first Pride march happened in 1970. Today Pride events are held in cities and towns all over the world. One of the largest and longest-running, Toronto Pride, happens at the end of June and is attended by over 1 million people.

**About Muskoka Pride** - The Muskoka Pride Community is a volunteer group that formed in 2009, whose purpose is to increase awareness of the LGBTQ community of Muskoka and to create opportunities for inclusivity within Muskoka that overcome heterosexism and homo/bi/trans-phobia, providing a safe community for LGBT people. The Muskoka Pride Community hosts the annual Muskoka Pride Picnic on the Sunday before the Civic Holiday weekend and Pride Week activities throughout Muskoka.

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