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For Immediate Release

### **RAINBOW PRIDE FLAGS PROUDLY FLY OVER MUSKOKA**

All Muskoka Communities Show Support for Diversity during Muskoka Pride Festival  
Recognizing 50 Years of LGBTQ+ Progress

MUSKOKA, ONTARIO – July 22nd, 2019 – Once again, all of the communities in Muskoka have raised the Rainbow Pride flag in celebration of the Muskoka Pride Festival, which runs July 19 – 28.

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 mayors, members of Council, municipal staff, 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 9<sup>th</sup> consecutive year, to applause from over 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 Parade and Picnic. He said the flag raising signifies that Bracebridge “is a community where you can be yourself and we love you all.”

While hugging his daughter, Mayor Smith indicated they “were talking about what inclusivity means on the way over in the car, and it made good sense to her.”

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

For Merv Taylor-Morin, President 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.”

He 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 communities.”

“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.”

This year’s Festival theme is “Reflecting Pride” which recognizes the 50-year anniversary of the Stonewall riots in New York City (which led to the start of the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement) and in Canada the passing of Bill C-150 which partially decriminalized homosexuality. Forth reminds us that “some members of the LGBTQ+ community still face daily discrimination – particularly transgender folks and queer people of colour. This theme challenges us to reflect on where we’ve come, and recommit ourselves to giving allyship to the rights of other marginalized groups.”

The Muskoka Pride Festival continues with events all week throughout Muskoka. The week concludes on Sunday July 28<sup>th</sup> with the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Parade on Manitoba Street at 11:30am and the 11<sup>th</sup> annual Muskoka Pride Picnic at Memorial Park in downtown Bracebridge from noon to 4pm. The Picnic includes free food, live music from local bands “Dirty Little Swing Thing” and “Hot Pink” activities for the whole family, vendors, and community booths.

To see a full schedule of events go to [www.muskokapride.com](http://www.muskokapride.com) or click “Events” on the Muskoka Pride Facebook Page.

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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.

**About Muskoka Pride** - Muskoka Pride 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. Muskoka Pride

hosts the annual Muskoka Pride Picnic on the Sunday before the Civic Holiday weekend and Pride Week activities throughout Muskoka. A conference is held each fall, and regular social events happen throughout the year.

