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For Immediate Release

MUSKOKA PRIDE WEEK CHANGES FORMAT FOR 2020

Socially distanced...but still Fabulous!

MUSKOKA, ONTARIO – July 7th, 2020 – Muskoka Pride has announced that **July 18th through 26th** is the **2020 Muskoka Pride Week**. The annual week of activities celebrates the Muskoka lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) community.

This year's Pride celebration is very different, explains Merv Taylor-Morin, President of Muskoka Pride. "Due to covid-19 we are not able to hold our signature events such as the Parade and Picnic. Instead we have been working on a series of virtual and in-person events that celebrate Pride while ensuring social distancing. Pride cannot be cancelled – it is inside all of us – Pride can only be reimagined."

Muskoka Pride board member Shawn Forth explains, "Many larger Pride festivals across North America have been able to hold all of their events online. In Muskoka, where internet can be intermittent, we did not want to rely solely on virtual events. Taking advantage of Muskoka's wide-open spaces and natural beauty, we are also holding some in-person events that are safely socially-distanced."

VIRTUAL EVENTS

Muskoka Pride Week will feature several events online. The annual Pride church service at Bala and Port Carling United Church is being held Sunday, July 19th through Zoom and YouTube.

Muskoka Pride will be holding a special MQFF (Muskoka Queer Film Festival) Pride Edition through Facebook on Saturday, July 25th. Look for favourite films from the May festival, along with some new films.

On Friday, July 24th Littlewoodsmith presents a virtual reading of "The Laramie Project". Featuring 16 actors from Muskoka and Toronto, "The Laramie Project" is a play about the community reaction to the 1998 murder of gay university student Matthew Sheppard in Laramie, Wyoming. Registration in advance is required, and is available on the Muskoka Pride website.

FLAG RAISINGS

All municipalities in Muskoka will be raising the Rainbow Pride flag on Monday, July 20 and Tuesday, July 21. This year all flag raisings will be live-streamed to the Muskoka Pride Facebook page. Members of the public may attend, but must ensure social distancing and are asked to wear face masks.

SOCIAL DISTANCING

Some in-person events are being held. The annual Mini-golf tournament at Northern Escapades in Bracebridge on Thursday, July 23rd at a special Muskoka Pride rate. A take-out dinner and tailgate party is being planned, along with an evening at the Muskoka Drive-in. Social distancing and face masks will be expected for all in-person events.

The annual Sawdust City drag show has had to be cancelled this year – usually attracting over 100 viewers. In its place, the local drag performers will be hosting Driveway Drag Shows – which have become popular in larger cities during the pandemic. Details and dates will be available online.

RAINBOW ROAD TOUR

The annual Muskoka Pride Parade and Picnic have had to be cancelled this year, due to limits on social gatherings. The planning committee instead has chosen to bring the spirit of Pride to the main streets of Muskoka's towns by holding the Muskoka Rainbow Road Tour on July 18th and 26th.

People are invited to decorate their vehicles and join us for a road tour around Lake of Bays (on July 18th) and Lake Muskoka (on July 26th). Participants are asked to sign up at the Muskoka Pride website, and they will receive details about the starting point and checkpoints along the route. Face masks and social distancing will be expected.

Everyone, no matter how you identify, is welcome to attend Muskoka Pride events.

To see a full schedule of events go to www.muskokapride.com or click "Events" on the Muskoka Pride Facebook Page.

Muskoka Pride receives funding from the Government of Canada through the Local Festivals - Building Communities Through Arts and Heritage grant.

We would like to thank our 2020 Signature Sponsors: TD Bank, Walmart Canada, Bala Cranberry Festival

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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.