

WINDY CITY MEDIA GROUP

Chicago's 44th annual Pride Parade focuses on marriage

Photo spreads and video links included

by Kate Sosin, Windy City Times

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Chicago's 44th Annual Pride Parade kicked off June 30 under sunny skies and mild temperatures, with a heavy focus on bringing marriage equality to Illinois.

Mayor Rahm Emanuel led the parade, with Gov. Pat Quinn following later in the parade.

Serving as grand marshal was former NFL player Wade Davis, who was followed by Members of the NFL Players Association.

Hundreds of thousands lined the route in Uptown and Lakeview, in what appeared to be a relatively safe event.

According to Chicago Police News Affairs Officer Daniel O'Brien, more than one million attended the parade.

Pfeiffer said that overall, he felt the parade was a success.

"I think it went very well," said Pfeiffer. "It was a balance of the social and political."

Spirits were high just days after the U.S. Supreme Court effectively struck down the Defense of Marriage Act and California's ban on same-sex marriage. But many contingents focused on equal marriage in Illinois, where the Illinois House failed to vote the issue in May.

The marriage shortfall sparked backlash against out gay representatives and other sponsors and prompted a petition calling for their removal from the parade.

Rep. Greg Harris, chief sponsor of the legislation, gathered a large contingent of politicians and marched without incident. Accompanied by hundreds of marchers, the group sported shirts that read, "I'm a yes for marriage equality."

Elected officials in that group included Reps. Deb Mell, Kelly Cassidy, Lou Lang and Sara Feigenholtz. State Sens. Daniel Biss and Mike Frerichs were also present.

They marched in close proximity to Illinois Unites for Marriage, the coalition of groups organizing for equal marriage. Coalition organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois, Lambda Legal, Equality Illinois and The Civil Rights Agenda were also represented, in a massive show of support for equal marriage.

But many of those not working on marriage also displayed Illinois Unites for Marriage signs throughout the parade.

Religious representation was also high in the parade, with dozens of churches and faiths represented in a contingent that stretch over two blocks in lengths.

Other favorite entries included Asians & Friends of Chicago, whose "Gayflower" boat was topped by a person dressed entirely in popcorn; a large race car-themed float by Sidetrack bar; Windy City Cowboys; a shiny silver and pink float by The Baton Show Lounge; a huge and colorful entry by Balloons by Tommy; and the American Veterans for Equal Rights large American flag, among others.

Anti-gay protesters appeared to be small in numbers, and spectators largely drowned them out with cheers for the parade.

Pfeiffer said that major incidents had not been reported. Ambulances were called for people suffering alcohol poisoning and heat exhaustion along the route. At least one fight broke out at Oakdale and Broadway. Crowd control was required at Clark and Halsted.

According to police, the day saw 52 arrests, with 50 misdemeanors and two felonies. Details on the felonies were not immediately available.

Elected officials included Ill. Lt. Gov. Sheila Simon, Comptroller Judy Baar Topinka; Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, State's Attorney Anita Alvarez, Treasurer Maria Pappas, Commissioners Jesus Garcia and Jeff Tobolski, Circuit Court Clerk Dorothy Brown; U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin; U.S. Reps. Mike Quigley, Robin Kelly and Jan Schakowsky; Alds. Tom Tunney, James Cappleman, Bob Fioretti, Scott Waguespack, John Arena, Danny Solis, Joe Moreno; the Alliance of Illinois Judges, lesbian and gay judges including Judge Nancy Katz. Chicago Police Supt. Garry McCarthy also participated, rising in front of the Gay Officers Action League contingent. A spokesperson for Attorney General Lisa Madigan said that she also marched.