

# First pride parade in First Nations community held at Six Nations

By Donna Duric  
Writer

It was history in the making as a crowd of about 200 people marched through Ohsweken Saturday during the first-ever Six Nations Gay Pride Parade.

It all started when Six Nations woman Myka Burning was talking with her daughter about LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) people and her daughter asked her if there are any gay aboriginal people.

"Of course there are," Burning told the crowd.

And it got her thinking: why not hold a pride parade on Six Nations and show support for LGBTQ community members? She teamed up with fellow community members and Lyndon "Longfeather" George, a two-spirited man from the Stony Point First Nation, as well as many activist groups and unions from

Hamilton to help put on the parade.

Saturday's turnout was far better than she had hoped for, she said.

George, who identifies as two-spirited (a term stemming from the belief that LGBTQ people carry both the male and female spirit), said he knows of young aboriginal LGBTQ people who have left their communities and refused to come back after experiencing bullying for their sexual orientation.

"I know our statistics. I know our two-spirited brothers and sisters are living in pain," said George. "Many have left physically, but many have chosen to leave spiritually — and that's what we're trying to avoid."

Rainbow flags - the quintessential symbol of the LGBTQ movement - waved about the park, as elected Chief Ava Hill lauded the celebration of First

Nations LGBTQ people. "This is probably the very first time a First Nation has had a pride march and I think it's fitting that it be done on the largest First Nation in the country," she said, to loud cheers and applause.

She commended the organizers for "having the courage to organize this event. I'm just so happy to be here and share the day with you."

She said, "Our culture is accepting of all diversity. Gay, lesbian, transgender, two-spirited people are very special to us. I know there's a lot of people that are not accepting of it but that's something that we need to work on. I think events like this are going to help to bring that awareness and education to people."

Hill said she is committed to working with LGBTQ people and their allies to educate others about the issue.



*The Gay Pride parade made its way through Ohsweken Saturday. (Photo by Donna Duric)*

Tears flowed after one Six Nations mother recounted the heartbreaking tale of her son, 17, who left the territory after experiencing bullying here for his sexual orientation. He has threatened suicide numerous times, she said. She said her son, although he wanted to come out to the event Saturday, was still too afraid to come back home.

As parade-goers prepped for a march the song, "We Are Who We Are" by Ke\$ha could be heard blaring throughout the park. George said LGBTQ people do not choose their sexual orientation. "I did not wake up one day and decide to be gay," he said. "I did not choose a sexual orientation that would bring me hardship, condem-

nation from others, or violence inflicted on me. Who would make such a choice?" "I was chosen to be born two-spirited by the Creator because the Creator knew I had gifts of love, compassion, intelligence, creativity, humour and a flair for decorating that would benefit others," said George to much laughter. "I am two-spirited."