

Pridelines Hosts Sixth Annual Gay Prom

Gay Youths Have Separate Prom to Avoid Harassment

By Michael James

For the last six years, Pridelines has been hosting a prom specifically for gay and lesbian youth. This year's event, themed "Fab As You Are," is expected to attract more than 500 people. It will be held on June 9, at Wolfson Hall of Temple Israel, 137 NE 19th Street, in Miami.

Denise Hueso, Executive Director of Pridelines stated that the event grew out of necessity. She said, "Sadly, harassment is still a pretty standard occurrence in schools."

She stated that students are being given religious message from their peers and teachers. She said, "Kids are being told they're going to hell because they're gay... Schools should be free from religious beliefs, but it's still there."

At the Pridelines prom, gay youth can gather, party and have fun without fear of harassment. As Ms. Hueso explained, the discrimination also comes from school principals as well.

"Students are told that if they show up to the school's prom with a same-sex date, or if they cross-dress, their diplomas will be withheld." She went on to state that such tactics are not only wrong, but also illegal.

Ms. Hueso said, "Students have every legal right to bring whomever they wish to the prom." She stated that in such an environment "people just don't feel comfortable."

Pridelines Youth Services of Miami was founded in 1982 by a group of concerned gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender young people with the help of Dr. Marilyn K. Volker and the late Peter Meyer. Since then, they have been committed to leadership, development and empowerment for GLBT youth and young adults to "help them achieve



Last years Pridelines prom was a "huge success"

their fullest potential."

Pridelines works to educate the individuals, organizations and community agencies that work with youth and young adults to affect change and foster safe, nurturing and inclusive environments for youth and young adults.

Their many programs include a gay youth support group that meets every Monday night from 6-9pm and is open to those between 13 and 22 years of age.

Youth Chair Josh Santiago, 18, said the youth groups deal with many issues, including "coming out, acceptance at school,

dealing with over-protective parents and suicide." He said, "The groups deal with issues and experiences that every teenager has to deal with - gay or straight. People get to see that they're not alone and that there are others that understand and can help."

With support groups, such as the ones offered through Pridelines and through the efforts of gay/straight alliances Santiago said that he has not heard of a single case of gay-related teenage suicide. He stated, "Issues, such as suicide, are discussed in group. By discussing things like that in group helps to prevent it from going that far."

When asked about students having their diplomas withheld, Santiago, who graduated two years ago, stated that when he was in school that he had never heard it said directly. However, he said, "I've heard from friends that were threatened to have their diploma withheld."

Santiago stated that the Board of Directors wants to hear what the youth members have to say about the organization and its programs. The youth members voted him to be the organization's Youth Liaison between the members and the Board.

Last year's prom was the first one that Santiago attended. "It was an eye-opening experience," he said. "That was the first time, outside of the club scene, that I saw that many young people together with their dates and having fun."

"The clubs are full of drugs and drinking," Santiago said. "The gay prom is a drug and alcohol-free environment. It's a fun place where you can be comfortable and safe."

The contests at this year's event include an entire "royal court." Those in attendance will vote for King and Queen; Prince and Princess; and Duke and Duchess. Participation is open-gender. There will also be a drag contest.

The DJ for last year's event was Tracy Young. Santiago said, "DJs from Power96 have already confirmed... We're still trying to get Tracy as well."

The events and activities are planned and assembled by youth committees. "Our prom committee is doing a really good job," Santiago said. "They've made me very proud."

For more information visit their website at www.pridelines.org or call Denise at 305.571.9601. See advertisement on page 29.



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