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NY State Fair Holds First-Ever LGBT Pride Day

by Winnie McCroy
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Ross Levi, Vice President, Marketing Initiatives for Empire State Development (Source:Winnie McCroy)

On Friday, August 28, the **New York State Fair** held its inaugural LGBT Pride Day, the first-ever officially-sanctioned LGBT presence at a U.S. state fair. The historic event was complete with a rainbow flag raising, a parade featuring local LGBT pride groups and a free evening concert by none other than LGBT icon Melissa Etheridge.

"The New York State Fair is a great attraction that should be experienced by everyone. LGBT guests will now have another reason to visit and take part in all the fun the Fair has to offer, from unique foods to thrilling rides to entertaining performances," said Ross Levi, Vice President of Marketing Initiatives for Empire State Development, and coordinator of the I Love New York LGBT Tourism Initiative.

With livestock, exhibits, vegetables, a hopping midway and every type of fried food on a stick imaginable, the New York State Fair has all the trappings of a traditional event. But with the welcoming of the LGBT community, it was an especially joyous day; one that was very long in the making.

History in the Making

On August 30, 1975, the Gay Citizens Alliance of Syracuse first came together for an "unofficial Gay Day" at the Fair. Longtime gay rights activist Earl Colvin tried to pass out literature, but the fair promoters told him there was no space available 'anywhere' for gay rights advocacy. He was escorted off the property by the New York State Police, and told not to return.

LGBT groups were denied a booth for 25 years, until 2000, when Colvin's friend Nancy Lorraine Hoffmann became Chair of the New York State Agriculture Committee, and gave the local gay group space in the Center of Progress building.

CNY Diversity, the Stonewall Committee and the Empire State Pride Agenda staffed the first booth on August 23, 2001, and then-Senator Hoffmann cut the opening ribbon. Fourteen years



(Source:Facebook)

later, the New York State Fair held its First Official Pride Day.

A Gay Day at the Fair

The day began with local activists raising the rainbow flag over the fairground, and later, the first-ever LGBT Pride parade, complete with local youth groups, organizations and gay-affirming congregations. One lonely Religious Right protestor stood at the entrance of the fair, decrying not only gays but all of us 'sinners of the flesh.' Few people paid any attention to him.

These 'sinners' were more intent on sampling the delicious treats offered by local vendors. Purists went



"The Defibrillator" (Source:Facebook)

straight for the delicious pulled pork and barbecue ribs at Dinosaur BBQ, or Gianelli sausages with peppers and onions.

Other local treats include Montezuma Winery Wine Slushies, Chicken 'Riggies' (aka rigatoni), and the State Fair specialty, aptly named the Defibrillator: a 1 lb. burger topped with six pieces of deep fried bacon, fried cheese curds and fried pickles, served between two grilled cheese sandwiches. There was every imaginable food served fried, on a stick, from corn dogs and caramel apples to alligator and kangaroo.

Spectators walk off this insane amount of calories with forays through the Iroquois Indian Village, and turns through the Dairy Building to sample local milk and gawk at the butter sculpture.

A buck gets you a go in the Butterfly Pavilion, where 1,000 butterflies look to be fed from your Q-Tip, dunked into nectar.

Other attractions include an amazing sand sculpture, prize-winning produce, beautiful hand-sewn quilts, tiny miniatures of the State Fair and cooking demos.

Animal lovers can see horses, cows, pigs, sheep, goats, llamas and bunnies. But this year, due to the threat of avian flu, there are no roosters or chickens at the fair.

But you won't miss them. Whether you have three hours or three days, the New York State Fair will find something to tantalize you. Before long, you'll be loosening both your wallet and your belt in an attempt to take in everything there is to offer.

The New York State Fair runs through September 7 in Syracuse, New York. For more information, visit <https://nysfair.org/your-visit/maps/>

Winnie McCroy is the Women on the EDGE Editor, HIV/Health Editor, and Assistant Entertainment Editor for EDGE Media Network, handling all women's news, HIV health stories and theater reviews throughout the U.S. She has contributed to other publications, including The Village Voice, Gay City News, Chelsea Now and The Advocate, and lives in Brooklyn, New York, where she writes about local restaurants in her food blog, <http://brooklyniscookin.blogspot.com/>

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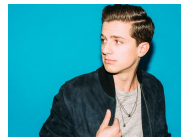
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