

# Pride matters more than ever

BY JASON VELTRI

AS PRIDE month draws upon us once again (and another year of no in-person events, celebrations, gatherings and parades), we reflect on the past 15 months in the COVID-19 pandemic and wish we could go back to the simpler times of pre-pandemic life. This pandemic has taught us that life is fragile, it can change without notice and what we considered important was no longer at the top of our list.

Every year during the month of June, the Pride communities celebrate the observance in several different ways. Pride Month is about more than parading down the streets or seeing rainbows and colourful costumes or floats. Pride is about acceptance; it is about love and overcoming fear to be who you are authentically. It is about bringing to light the long list of work still to be done to see a world free from persecution just because of your gender or sexual identity.

As the pandemic raged, we saw just how difficult it was for two-spirit, queer and trans folk to be themselves around the world. People struggled to come out because of unsafe home environments, or they were unable to access adequate medical care. We saw schools shuttered and youth unable to be together with their friends or get the extra help needed from teachers.

So much has happened over the past 15 months that we will not be able to determine its effects for a long time to come.



ONE CITY,  
MANY VOICES

**The Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism and Respect Committee and Diversity Thunder Bay produce this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.**

We continue to see stigma around those who are HIV-positive and access to affordable life-saving medication like PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) to help prevent the transmission of diseases like HIV.

We also continue to see the discriminatory behaviour like the gay, bi and trans men blood ban in Canada. We need more action from our prime minister to end this terrible anti-homosexual and anti-transgender policy on those wishing to give blood in Canada.

Pride is a social movement to break barriers while fighting for equality, equity and human rights for all. We would not exist if we were not for the trans women of colour who, in 1969, threw the first bricks in the Stonewall Riots in New York City. We honour those trailblazers by continuing the fight and advocating so that one day we no longer need to defend who we are, who we love, or who we marry.

Acceptance is just the fabric of society.

Pride is inherently political because two-spirit, queer and trans folk still have to fight to be recognized worldwide. Until there is a time where the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities have true inclusion, equity and equality, we will continue to march, take up space, and demand action. The Pride movement will always be there to shine a light and provide the positive space to exist.

Pride is about sharing love and light together. Pride is a beacon of hope for those still working and struggling to see themselves in our communities or world. Pride is simply the opportunity to be around like-minded people, celebrating and coming together to support each other.

This Pride month, show you care by raising a flag of choice, colouring your driveway or sidewalks, or donating to a local organization working to support gender and sexual diversity in our communities. Pride is about showing love and kindness to all people. We do need more love and kindness these days.

Happy Pride, Thunder Bay. We will dance together again, soon.

*Jason Veltri is president and co-founder of Rainbow Collective of Thunder Bay and chair of the City of Thunder Bay Anti-Racism and Respect Advisory Committee. He is also a community champion and activist for two-spirit, queer, trans rights, and inclusion. The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author.*