

## Diné Pride Festival caps off 'Pride Month'

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent  
Friday, 06 July 2018 03:42

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### **LGBTQ community CONVERGE IN Window Rock**

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – June is designed Pride Month, a time when people under the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer – or in shorter terms – the LGBTQ banner, honor the Stonewall riots of 1969, a tipping point for the Gay Liberation Movement in the United States, and a time to remember those lost to hate crimes and HIV/AIDS.

Despite the shifts in cultural and societal standards, LGBTQ people still feel there's work to be done in terms of equality, but nonetheless they are proud of the strides they have made.

On June 30, the Coalition for Diné Equality hosted Diyingo 'Adaanitsíískéés, a Diné Pride Festival. With the theme of "Diyin 'Adaosiskéés," or "I am a sacred being," and the hashtag of #WeAreSacred, the festival at Veterans Park drew crowds of family, friends, and supporters to watch song and dance performances and hear the stories of prominent LGBTQ Diné people.

Visitors could also visit booths that gave out information about HIV/AIDS as well as the marriage laws currently in place.

Founded in 2013, Diné Equality's goal has been to work towards a more inclusive Navajo Nation. The coalition's efforts include advocacy for the transgender community, brave spaces programs for schools, LGBTQ youth suicide prevention, and holding tribal leaders accountable.

Alray Nelson, the lead organizer for Diné Equality, said during the festival that the movement really began stirring when rumors of laws that discriminate against LGBTQ people began to emerge.

One such law is the Diné Marriage Act, passed in 2005, which nullifies and prohibits the marriage of persons of the same sex on the Navajo Nation.

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"[It is] historic for us to be standing in Window Rock," Nelson said to the crowd. "[We] need to hold tribal leaders accountable that may discriminate against this community."

This was the first time that such an event was held at the Navajo Nation capital.

The theme running through many of the words spoken at the various panels and presentations was that a unified community will be the way that further progress for equality is made. To that end, LGBTQ people were told to be proud of who they are.

"You're worthy, always be yourself," Zachariah George, known as Mr. Navajo for his public speaking and songs in the Navajo language, told the festival crowd.

Mattee Jim, LGBTQ leader and trans advocate, embraced her role as one of the headliners of the festival.

"You are my family," Jim said to the crowd.

On June 29, Jim was one of the moderators at the LGBTQ Symposium, held at the Navajo Department of Transportation in Tse Bonito, N.M., which hosted a number of panels where LGBTQ Diné spoke of their experiences and answered questions from an audience.

Trudie Jackson, Navajo Nation presidential candidate and LGBTQ leader, was one of the speakers in the panel "Our Diné Trans Community".

Jackson argued that the policies in place should be re-evaluated, such as who wrote them and when they were written, and if there was fair representation by the LGBTQ community during that time, because laws should evolve as the community does.

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"In order for my voice to be heard, I have to be at the table," Jackson said during the panel.

The audience asked questions about what challenges trans people faced on and off the reservation, what they are doing to work through challenges, and how they incorporate traditional Diné values into their lives.

While trans people may have the support of friends and family, Jackson admitted that it can be difficult to relate to people who don't fully grasp her concerns.

"It's really hard to share what I am going through with my siblings because only another trans individual will understand," Jackson said.

The panel brought up notions about trans people being overly sexualized, and not seen as real people, or that trans people are just pretending to be a specific sex. Speakers emphasized that how one acts or behaves is a choice made by that person.

Moreover, the hosts insisted that LGBTQ people need to remember that they are free to speak up because of the contributions of people who came before them.

"Always remember the pioneers who fought for us to be able to express ourselves," Jackson said.

The symposium also drew the support of Navajo Council Delegate Nate Brown. Per the coalition's site, key members of the council will be sponsoring legislation drafted by the coalition to revamp tribal law and ensure no one is discriminated against based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

"We have a duty, we are duty bound to help each other," Brown said in one panel.

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***For more information about Diné Equality, visit <https://www.equalitynavajo.org/>***

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