

Local LGBTQIA+ groups prepare for new Trump term

Leaders say new administration presents both challenges and opportunities for community

By RACHEL SHUBIN
For the Star and Wave

Many in the LGBTQIA+ community fear the upcoming change in presidential administrations.

President-elect Donald Trump's campaign has attacked transgender rights and the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 agenda threatens to roll back the rights of LGBTQIA+ people.

On the local level, grassroots organization Equality Cape May is preparing for the implications of a new Trump administration with its anti-transgender rhetoric.

"With the change in administrations and the concerning rise in anti-trans rhetoric and policies, we see the year ahead as presenting us both with challenges and opportunities for the LGBTQIA+ community," Equality Cape May founder Ann McCabe said.

Equality Cape May is an all-volunteer group whose mission is to build and strengthen the local community and ally with other LG-

BQIA+ organizations.

"We want to acknowledge that the threat is real and the anti-trans focus evolving is not just political posturing because it definitely represents a threat to the rights and well-being of the transgender and non-binary communities and the broader LGBTQIA+ community," she said.

McCabe explained that being prepared and avoiding acting out of fear is pivotal during uncertain times.

"We want to be prepared for those times when policies and legislation are introduced that are fearful and may jeopardize our way of life that we currently enjoy," she said. "We believe that the road ahead is going to be extremely challenging, but our community has gone through things historically before that create unsafe environments and our community is resilient, and we will stand together. We're going to continue to advocate for a future of equality, dignity and justice for all."

According to the Ameri-

can Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), "following the inauguration of Donald Trump in January 2017, we witnessed a sustained, years-long effort to erase protections for LGBTQ people across the entire federal government."

The ACLU expects the new administration's response to be trifold. It would aim to "reinstate and significantly escalate the removal of anti-discrimination policies, roll back existing protections and proactively require discrimination by the federal government, and weaponize federal law against transgender people across the country."

Local community

In the northern part of the county, We Belong Cape May County is a non-profit organization that supports LGBTQIA+ students and the greater community.

"The change in administrations is likely to be a challenging time, especially for the transgender community," We Belong CMC President Christine Stanford said. "There are fears of safety due to hate and aggression, worries over access to health care, concerns over impacts to mental health and the anxiety of widespread discrimination."

We Belong aims to involve the community by hosting programming and events like the Ocean City Pride Fest, participating in holiday parades and offering local scholarship opportunities.

"We Belong CMC is happy and proud to be a partner of the Atlantic County Queer Alliance (ACQA), which will support us in the navigation of these unprecedented times," Stanford said.

McCabe said it is essential

for Equality Cape May to collaborate with other allies and partner organizations, such as ACQA, to strengthen the community as challenges arise.

LGBTQIA+ in schools

Getting involved locally is one way the community can stay in touch with what is happening in schools.

"[The community can] attend school board meetings and monitoring your board's actions on policy 5756, which is a policy offering protection for transgender students in schools," Stanford said.

During the November 2024 election, Equality Cape May reminded the community to vote for candidates supporting inclusivity, fairness and equality.

Monitoring politics at a local level is another critical juncture for Equality Cape May.

"We know that there is a lot of focus on the school board level, and we want to be prepared to support youths by being actively engaged and attending local school board meetings," she said. "[Especially] when issues related to equality for LGBTQ students is on the agenda."

In 2019, Gov. Phil Murphy signed into law a new LGBTQIA+ curriculum for students in grades five to 12. New Jersey was the second state in the country to require schools to teach LGBTQIA+ and disability-inclusive material.

"What we see is proposed rollbacks on the protections these policies target, [which] would be affecting our health care, education, family rights and marriages," she said. "We understand

that it's extremely clear that vigilance and actions are essential."

This year, Equality Cape May will focus on communication with the community, which McCabe said will help keep members informed about policy changes, legislation and any threats that target the community.

"[We also want to] offer and make suggestions for clear, actionable steps for individuals to advocate for justice and equality," McCabe said. "We already use social media, but we [hope to have] an email blast to make sure everyone in our community is updated on what's going on."

When it comes to being involved in the local community, Equality Cape May has hosted its Pride March every June since 2021. The organization also hosts social meet-ups throughout the year and has a float in the West Cape May Annual Community Christmas Parade.

"We have felt welcome in the Cape May County community," McCabe said. "During our Pride Marches down the Promenade, people have been waving and [giving us a] thumbs up."

McCabe said the response from the local community has been pleasantly surprising.

"When we've had fundraisers, the business community has been extremely generous toward us as far as offering gift cards or baskets for our auctions," she said. "We want to continue to be [involved] in the local community and look for every opportunity for openness and to be in conversation with all areas of the ally community."

A hope McCabe holds for 2025 is to continue to have

relationships with local businesses and service providers.

"We want to capitalize on those relationships as well as partnering with educators to support LGBTQIA+ students and encourage businesses to adopt more visible, welcoming practices during these unsafe times," she said. "We also want to work with health care providers, law enforcement and others to be allies, not barriers to our community."

McCabe said some of the goals may be a stretch for the all-volunteer organization's bandwidth.

"They are pretty lofty goals, but that's why we need to look toward our ally-ships and partnerships," she said. "Going forward, we need to stand in solidarity with the trans and non-binary community."

Equality Cape May has applied for non-profit status, which McCabe said would mean political restrictions for the organization.

"That doesn't mean we can't educate our community about what is happening and what candidates stand for," she said. "[While] we can't support any one candidate, we can encourage people to join other political groups that will be canvassing. Equality Cape May is not the only game in town to become politically active."

Email equalitycapemay@gmail.com for more information about Equality Cape May and find the organization on Facebook and Instagram @equalitycapemay.

We Belong Cape May County can be found at webelongcmc.com or on Facebook and Instagram @webelongcmc. Atlantic County Queer Alliance can be found at acqanj.com.

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Classical Cape May

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an extended bass range.

"This is possibly the first time this instrument has been played in Cape May," co-director Brenda Leonard said.

Besides bringing excellent regional performers to our area, Classical Cape May's mission includes showcasing the best of local classical artists. The concert Feb. 9, Music of our Time by People of our Place, will feature Cape May County musicians.

This year local musicians are focusing on works written during the past century, featuring vocal perfor-

mances and pieces on the piano and organ. In addition, Leonard will be playing a new piece for unaccompanied cello by a talented local composer, Koren Cowgill.

On March 9, co-director Robert Bullington brings one of his ensembles to sing the Brahms Liebeslieder Waltzes during Romantic Love Songs. PolyVoce is an ensemble of four singers — soprano, alto, tenor and baritone — and two pianists.

Brahms Liebeslieder Waltzes are a collection of love songs for voices and piano, four hands (two pianists, one piano). Not all of the waltzes use all four voices; there are solos and some pieces featuring two voices.

Piano Quintets, set for

April 13, will feature Main Street Chamber Players of Fairfax, Va. Cellist Kenneth Law works at the Main Street Music Studios in Fairfax, teaching and mentoring young cellists from the Washington, D.C., area, including one who was recently featured on NPR's national program "From the Top."

The Main Street Chamber Players include violin, viola, cello, double bass and piano. The musicians will play as a quintet and as various smaller ensembles. Part of the program is the rarely heard Vaughn-Williams Piano Quintet, as well as works by three women composers: the early 20th century composer Rebecca Clarke, Belize-born

composer Errollyn Waller and one of Argentina's most celebrated young composers, Adriana Figueroa Manas.

Classical Cape May is co-founded and co-directed by Leonard and Bullington. The mission is to bring a variety of free classical performances to Cape May during the winter season and to celebrate local and regional classical music talent. The series is open to all ages; donations are appreciated.

The series is in partnership with the annual Cape May Music Festival, now in its 36th year, presented by Cape May MAC and supported in part by a grant from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

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Teen motorcyclist killed

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Carol Sabo said.

According to his obituary, Schofield was born March 15, 2007, in Cape May Court House. He was the son of Rebecca Smith and Stephen Schofield of Villas.

Schofield recently graduated from Coastal Prep High School in Cape May Court

House.

He was described as outgoing, smart and kind.

Schofield had a passion for riding and racing dirt bikes, motocross and SE bike riding.

In addition to his parents, he is survived by his paternal grandmother Ann Nichols; uncles Joshua Smith, Jacob Rinier and Rocky Pel-

lerito; aunts Jessika Smith and Christa Pellerito; and cousins Savanna Smith, Mckenzie Dallin, Jaycee and Jacob Rinier Jr., Gianna Smith, Justin Smith and Mia and Dominic Pellerito.

Family and friends are invited to pay their respects from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. Jan. 25 at Evoy Funeral Home, 3218 Bayshore Road in North Cape May. A celebration of his life will immediately follow. Interment will be private and at the convenience of the family.

The preliminary investigation revealed the trash truck was traveling northbound on Bayshore Road and turning right onto east Atlantic Avenue when it collided with the dirt bike, which was traveling southbound in the northbound shoulder of the roadway.

Authorities said the truck driver told them that while attempting the turn, the dirt bike was seen approaching at a high rate of speed and an attempt was made to stop. Despite these efforts, the dirt bike collided head-on with the truck, coming to rest in front of the vehicle.

Witness interviews corroborated the driver's account, indicating the truck was traveling approximately 5 mph and came to a complete stop at the time of the impact.

Investigators conducted a comprehensive scene investigation, including photographic documentation and the use of a Faro scanner to capture critical data for further analysis.

Surveillance footage from a nearby camera depicted the moment of the collision, which corroborated the driver's and witnesses' observations.

This is an ongoing investigation. Sutherland urges anyone with information regarding the incident to call (609) 465-1135.

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