



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**June 14, 2023**

## **INCLUSIVITY, CAMARADERIE THE GOALS OF DIVERSITY EVENTS**

**Uniontown, PA** – June is the month for celebrating diversity across Fayette County and nationwide.

The Connellsville Diversity and Inclusion Board (D & I) hosted its second Pride in the Park celebration over the weekend and will host its third annual Juneteenth Celebration this Saturday, ahead of the federal holiday observance June 19.

Pride in the Park was part of Pride Month events taking place around the world this month. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) Pride Month is observed every June in honor of the 1969 Stonewall Uprising in Manhattan, N.Y., which was a tipping point for the United States' Gay Liberation Movement.

D & I Board member and Pride Chair Paula Johnston said Pride Month allows for "all kinds of opportunities to learn about LGBTQ history and how it intersects with other histories, movements, communities and cultures."

"That education can create empathy; build support; and, hopefully, create places to live where people share and build upon inclusivity and diversity for our community," she said. "Our minority communities of race, ethnicity, faith and non-faith, disabled, senior, women and other populations are here, vital, and make our communities interesting and successful."

Hundreds of attendees flooded Connellsville's West Side Saturday to join the sunny festivities at Yough River Park.

"Pride in the Park is important to Connellsville and to Fayette County so that members of the LGBT community and our friends and family can support one another and celebrate together," Johnston said. "It is important because there is still more work to do in terms of providing safe and equitable spaces for people and also in terms of fostering the need for work furthering civil rights for our residents and all Pennsylvania citizens."

Event sponsors included Connellsville Counseling and Psychological Services, PA American Water, Chestnut Ridge Counseling Services and Penn Health Group. Vendors included nonprofits, social service agencies, local businesses and artists. Entertainers included drag performers, musicians and other artists. Jack P. Diamond served as master of ceremonies and was accompanied by members of Unique! Pageantry, a group of drag artists that provide creative spaces for artists with disabilities.

"Pride Month is important to me because it's important to be able to celebrate with your community and allies, especially as there are too many places where that is difficult to do. There are places where folks can still be discriminated against without recourse in terms of sexual orientation and gender

identity expression,” she said. “Pride in the Park helps people build support networks for each other and, if they are unfamiliar with Pride, to learn that it is a celebration that aims to provide community, support, fun and friendship across lines of people.”

Johnston said Pride events also “speak to the larger issue of the discrimination and, sometimes, violence that still exists against our community.”

This coming weekend, the Connellsville D & I Board’s Juneteenth Celebration will take place 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. June 17 in the 100 – 200 block of North Arch Street in Connellsville.

Juneteenth, named for the combination of “June” and “nineteenth,” commemorates the anniversary of Maj. Gen. Gordon Granger’s order issued in 1865, granting freedom to enslaved African Americans in Texas – the last state to do so.

Brownsville Borough Councilwoman Jacqueline “Jackie” Jackson will serve as the event’s keynote speaker. A Connellsville native, Jackson earned her bachelor’s degree in psychology and master’s in social work from California University of Pennsylvania. She now works as a licensed therapist at Centerville Clinics.

“I’ll be sharing my life and experiences in a positive way. As an African American person helping out her community, I feel we need to be talking about diversity more and how a person can grow up and do some good and become whatever they want to be. You don’t hear that much about people from small towns,” Jackson said.

As the first African American woman elected to her borough council, Jackson is a trailblazer who has encouraged others to go after their goals. Prior to Juneteenth becoming a federal holiday in 2021, she said, African Americans weren’t always “acknowledged” for their accomplishments.

“It’s about letting others know that it doesn’t matter what age or nationality you are, or what you’ve been through – if you look at things in a positive way, you can graduate from college; you can be a councilperson; you can do this. Whatever it is, you can do it,” Jackson said. “I persevered because I was persistent. I’m just a local girl who made good.”

In addition to Jackson’s presentation, the Juneteenth Celebration will feature performances from Beth Jenkins Dance Zone students; DJ Low Key (Kiesha Rhodes); and live band Next Faze of Columbus, Ohio. Food and craft vendors, as well as a basket auction, will be featured.

The all-volunteer D & I Board, which was founded in 2021, is always seeking event volunteers, Johnston added. Board members include Heidi Henry, chair; Gayle Stafford, vice-chair; Pastor James Stafford, treasurer; Toni Colland, secretary and Juneteenth chair; and Luke Dyer.

“(Connellsville) Mayor Greg Lincoln was instrumental in the board’s formation, and it was city council approved. Our board serves educational and advisory functions, making recommendations to council,” Johnston said. “Our mission is to identify opportunities to address diversity, promote diversity programs, and provide guidance to create a more equitable, accessible, safe, welcoming and inclusive government and community.”

Johnston said part of the board’s educational mission is to work with other boards, including city council, include “neutral language” in advertising city-sponsored events. Later this year, the board will partner

with Armstrong Cable to create educational content on a variety of diversity and inclusion topics. The Fayette County Cultural Trust also sponsored a Diversity and Inclusion Poster Contest for local schools.

Board meetings take place at 6 p.m. on the third Monday of every month at the City of Connellsville Municipal Building. All are welcome.

In Uniontown, the East End United Community Center (EEUCC) will also host a series of Juneteenth celebrations for the next five days. EEUCC board member and Capital Campaign Committee Chairwoman Dr. Norma Thomas is spearheading the second annual observance, along with Fayette County Sheriff James Custer, EEUCC Board President; Education and Program Committee Chair Terry Vassar; and EEUCC Executive Director Steve Strange.

“Dr. Thomas really took the initiative in founding the Juneteenth event in 2022 and growing it significantly for this year. It’s important because it helped me – and could help others – learn things I didn’t know about our area,” Strange said. “I didn’t know our nearby church was part of the Underground Railroad or that a cemetery near Lafayette Elementary School has many African American soldiers laid to rest in it. There’s a very rich African American history in close relation to the community center, so that’s the thing that really stuck out for me last year.”

The festivities begin June 15 with the “Walk Around Historic East End,” highlighting a number of historical sites in the community. The walk begins at the EEUCC at 5:30 p.m.

The Fayette County African American Traveling History Museum will be on display at the EEUCC from 4 to 6 p.m. June 16 and 3 to 5 p.m. June 17. Historical documents may also be donated or scanned for preservation during those times.

A Juneteenth Recognition church service will be held at 11 a.m. June 18 at John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church. A flower laying ceremony will follow in Baker Alley.

The weekend will culminate in the June 19 Freedom Celebration, taking place at 1 p.m. at the EEUCC. It will feature an outdoor program, free soul food lunch, Art Expression Contest presentation and much more.

All EEUCC activities are free and open to the public. They are co-sponsored by the EEUCC, Fayette County NAACP, Story Joy Inc. and John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church. The East End United Community Center is located at 150 Coolspring Street in Uniontown.

For more information, contact Steven Strange at 724-437-1660.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit [www.fayettecountypa.org](http://www.fayettecountypa.org).

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