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Hundreds gather to celebrate Pridefest in Lake Worth

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Everybody was a superhero at the 17th Pridefest parade, from a variety of caped crusaders and marchers wearing black "I'm a Hero" T-shirts to the Gay American Heroes Foundation, which marched for those killed in gay hate crimes.

The heroes theme also was meant to honor gay members of the military, said Tony Plakas, head of Compass, the Lake Worth-based gay and lesbian community center.

"These are people who are putting their lives at risk and can't tell anybody who they are," said Plaka, also grand marshal of the parade.

Though it maintained its traditional political tinge, the parade was also very much a hometown affair.

Local activist Javier del Sol, a familiar figure with his long gray ponytail, waved from his bicycle, getting as much applause as candidate for Congress Ted Deutch, who walked the whole parade route shaking hands.

Among the marching groups were American Veterans for Equal Rights; Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays; Metropolitan Community Church; St. Andrews Episcopal Church; Quakers, including a man in Elizabethan costume; the Greater Lake Worth Chamber of Commerce and the Fort Dix Club, whose float included a bubble-making machine.

There was a small dog in pink feather boa and a very large man dressed as a showgirl, a tall woman making good on her T-shirt's motto, "Free Hugs for Everyone." There were strollers, motorized wheelchairs and a phalanx of motorcycles, including one with a sidecar holding two delighted Labrador retrievers.

"Shake it if you're sexy!" yelled a voice from a float. Up and down the sidewalk, men, women, gay, straight and undecided jubilantly complied.

Compass sponsored the parade and its two-day music and food festival at Bryant Park. Proceeds will benefit Compass, which provides health, informational and other services. Based on past festivals, Plakas was estimating the two-day crowd at about 10,000 and counting.

From a street corner, Charles Williams watched the spectacle bemused. He was wearing a maroon T-shirt emblazoned with a shortened form of "Gamecocks," the team mascot of the University of South Carolina, a gift from a friend.

"I figured if I didn't have the nerve to wear it today, when would I ever wear it," said Williams.

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