



Chicago Celebrated Pride with 39th Annual Parade

By [Kevin Wayne](#)

"Live, Love, Be Proud" was theme of this year's parade, drawing over 450,000 spectators

Chicago, IL - Gay pride flags lined Halsted and neighboring streets as the Gay Pride Parade stepped off at Belmont and Halsted on Sunday. Midday sunshine gave way to afternoon showers, but the rain couldn't dampen another spectacular Pride day celebration in Chicago.

Spectators celebrated Gay Pride from the streets, rooftops and balconies in the Lakeview neighborhood known as "Boystown." The parade, which is organized by PRIDEChicago, culminates a month of pride events being held around the community. Organizers estimated over 450,000 people attended Sunday's parade.

The theme of Sunday's march was "Live, Love, Be Proud" and many entries were themed with gay marriage surrounding the June 16 decision in California to legalize same-sex marriage. Chicagoans John Pennycuff and Robert Castillo flew to San Francisco and were married Friday. They returned to participate in the parade and celebrate their recent marriage.

"This is our reception, actually. What better way to celebrate our marriage than with 400,000 of our brothers and sisters, It's a perfect way to do it," the newlyweds told ABC7 Chicago.

The rain slowed the parade, which was also stalled for nearly an hour after a parade participant slipped and was injured by a float on Halsted just north of Addison. He broke a bone in his leg. In another minor incident a dancer fell off a float and cracked her leg bone.

Along with the festive and colorful floats were the usual politicians, decorated vehicles and walking contingents. Near the front was a contingent of young people working for Sen. Barack Obama's presidential campaign.

Leading the parade as grand marshal was Eric Alva, a gay rights advocate and ex-marine from Texas who came out in 2007. He was the first American who was injured in the Iraq war and has been a vocal opponent of the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy.

First held in 1970 as a protest march with only 150 people participating, this is the 39th year for Chicago's Pride Parade making it one of the longest-running pride parades in United States. With 250 entries the annual parade has grown to become the second-largest parade in Chicago, behind the annual Bud Billiken Parade, which is also the largest African-American parade in the country.

Political attitudes toward the gay and lesbian population have changed and Chicago's Pride Parade has gained visibility and prominence. "Attitudes about the LGBT communities have changed significantly since 1970," said Richard Pfeiffer, Coordinator PRIDE Chicago. "As more and more LGBTs have come out over the years, there have been changes in laws and attitudes."

Several protesters stationed near the end of the parade shouted anti-gay insults but were generally drowned out by the enthusiast crowd, parade participants and music.

Other major cities such as New York City, San Francisco and Toronto also held their parade on Sunday.

The pride parade commemorates a three-day riot in New York City in 1969, a happening that many say sparked the modern gay rights movement.

[\(View Parade Photos\)](#)

The following is a list of awards in several categories from PRIDEChicago, the parade organizers:

BEST ALL AROUND FLOAT: YWCA Out & Affirmation Center (YWCA Berrien County, Michigan) - for their colorful self- described, "Hawaiian themed Aloha float with a volcano, wave surf and cruise ship."

BEST BUSINESS FLOAT: Green Dolphin Street/Boom Boom Room- for their new generation take off on popular television characters.

BEST ORGANIZATION FLOAT(S): (a tie !): Filipinos and Friends in Chicago (FINC) - for their colorful visual presentation and Lake View East Chamber of Commerce for their ornate float announcing their Fall arts festival.

BEST ENTRY USING PRIDE THEME: "Live, Love, Be Proud !": Whole Foods- for using an adapted version of the theme.

SPECIAL JUDGES AWARD: Illinois State Lottery- for their ornate and colorful float promoting certain lottery tickets whose proceeds benefit people with HIV/AIDS.

HONORABLE MENTION: Columbia College- for their ABBA, Dancing Queens entry.