

news

(Pride) In the Name of Love

EUGENE MINOR LEAGUE BASEBALL TEAM
AIMS TO 'STRIKE OUT HATE'
WITH PRIDE NIGHT

By Henry Houston

Candace Gingrich, who uses they/them pronouns, loves baseball. A Chicago Cubs fan, they had plans to propose to their partner at the end of the seventh inning during a Cubs' Opening Day game — the weather said otherwise. Gingrich proposed before the game, got married and sang "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" at the wedding.

Gingrich, who lives in Chicago, is a queer activist who happens to be the much-younger sister of Newt Gingrich, the far-right former speaker of the House. Candace is looking forward to talking with Eugene Emerald fans before the Ems' June 22 game about coming out, gender identity, and workplace protections and challenges that the LGBTQ community faces.

Gingrich has baseball running in their blood, so it makes sense that the Eugene Emeralds, an affiliate of the Chicago Cubs, would invite them to have a pregame discussion about LGBTQ issues with fans and throw out the first pitch that night, which is themed Pride Night in recognition of Pride Month.

Gingrich won't talk politically during the pregame conversation but more on what the climate is like for the LGBTQ community, and why a minor league Pride Night is so important.

One night dedicated to Pride might not seem like a lot, but Gingrich tells *Eugene Weekly* it's a message that people care about making a world safe for people who aren't out yet or aren't their authentic self. Gingrich adds that it's a big deal that the Eugene Emeralds decided to dedicate a night to LGBTQ Pride knowing that some fans and baseball players might not know why it's important.

"I am positive there are players on minor league rosters who are queer but not out," Gingrich says. "This sends a message to them that they have support. Even though they might not be able to be visible themselves yet, their clubs are able to be visible in their support of queer people — and that matters."

At the end of the night, talking about what the LGBTQ community faces and confronting these issues can be a big step to "strike out hate," Gingrich continues.

A 2018 poll by Public Religion Research Institute, a nonprofit research organization, suggests Americans are less likely to perceive discrimination against LGBTQ



people. Fifty-five percent of Americans believe LGBTQ people face discrimination in the U.S., down from 68 percent in 2013.

Regardless of how Americans view discrimination against LGBTQ people, politics created by the Trump administration has had an impact on the LGBTQ community.

"It's a painful reminder that we still have a lot of work still ahead of us," Gingrich says. "It's hard to see a lot of the advances that have been made in the previous administration — not just supporting LGBTQ people but protecting them — be rolled back and taken away."

They add that these policies include protecting transgender rights in schools and how landlords can discriminate against transgender people with housing.

Although Oregon is more progressive in LGBTQ

rights than other U.S. states, how do you talk to someone who's ignorant on the issues? Considering Candace's brother, Newt, this is someone who is used to dealing with people who hold more-conservative views on LGBTQ issues.

Candace is 23 years younger than her brother, and says Newt is more like an uncle. When the family gets together, Candace says, the family doesn't talk politics, and nowadays doesn't try to change Newt's anti-LGBTQ policies.

But Newt's terrible track record of LGBTQ policies isn't something that Candace can ignore completely.

When Candace first came out, Newt supported a bill that said you couldn't be a public school teacher if you were openly gay, Gingrich says.

"I remember trying very hard to get in front of him and explain why he would support something like that," they say. "He has softened a little on some things in the past few years."

They add that every now and again he still does some "really stupid things," saying Newt doesn't understand transgender rights and gender identity.

Plus, he's supportive of the Trump administration, which has undone a lot of the LGBTQ protections implemented by the Obama administration, Gingrich adds.

Gingrich isn't the only one with a relative who has such strong conservative views about LGBTQ rights — it's just that her brother is in a position of power. For Gingrich, it's better to see a person with more conservative views as someone who's ignorant of the truth and not a hateful or antagonistic person.

They add that you can't change someone's mind right away and that people need time to come to terms with these issues.

"Every conversation with them kind of chips away at the mortar," Gingrich says. "They might think to themselves, 'I've had this conversation, and I know better.'"

Gingrich adds that although some people may never change, most people do have the capacities to evolve; it might just take some patience on your part.

"Give them the space to do it," they say.

Eugene Emeralds' Pride Night talk with Candace Gingrich and fans starts 5 pm Saturday, June 22. Soromundi: Lesbian Chorus of Eugene will sing the national anthem at 6:50 pm. For more information about the game and to buy tickets, visit Milb.org/Eugene.