

WITNESSES TO HISTORY

Celebrating Astoria's evolution, Pride

By **HEATHER DOUGLAS**
FOR COAST WEEKEND

Sharyn Hedbloom and Margaret Frimoth have walked in pride parades as far away as Oslo, Norway, but the best one, they say, is right here at home.

The couple have lived in Astoria since the 90s and are known advocates for marginalized groups. They made history in 2014 as the first same same-sex couple to apply for a wedding license in Clatsop County after an earlier ban had been overturned.

Hedbloom is continually in awe of Astoria's evolution over decades and never thought she would "live long enough to see marriage equality," let alone Pride in Astoria.

Frimoth experienced her own awe in 2012 when "Dragulation"—a groundbreaking drag variety show created by local dancer Marco Davis — had fans lined around the block in the rain outside the Columbian Theatre.

Davis's alter ego "Daylight" will serve as Grand Marshal of this year's Pride Parade as part of Astoria Pride 2019 "Bridging Communities," which includes a myriad of events held Friday-Sunday, June 7-9.

Astoria Pride is also the major annual fundraiser for The Lower Columbia Q Center, a non-profit organization that serves the LGBTQIA+ community in the Columbia-Pacific region.

Seeing change

Hedbloom and Frimoth attributed much of the positive change in the area to the efforts of the Q Center.

Tessa Scheller, founder of the Q Center, said, "Pride is a dream and it showcases our area's major talents."

It also helps fund the Q Center.

This year, the Center has been able to add drop in hours every Friday night from 5 to 9 p.m.

Hedbloom acknowledged the work the Q Center is doing during a difficult political climate.

"There are people in this community who are able to fight the good fight but also be able to stand up and speak truth to power and advocate but continue with an attitude of gratitude and presence and love," Hedbloom said.



Colin Murphey/The Astorian

Sharyn Hedbloom, left, and Margaret Frimoth discuss the history of Astoria Pride events.



Photo courtesy Margaret Frimoth

From left: Margaret Frimoth serving as one of the Astoria Pride Parade Grand Marshals in 2017, Sharyn Hedbloom, Trolley Conductor Bob Westerberg and Soleil Rathmell-Stokes.

Passion for justice

The two met working in child services in Astoria in the 90s and still share a passion for youth and community. Frim-



Photo courtesy Margaret Frimoth

Sharyn Hedbloom walking in the 2018 Astoria Pride Parade.

oth serves as Vice President of Academic Affairs at Clatsop Community College and Hedbloom's career before retirement was working as a school counselor.

Together, they created Victory Over Child Abuse, or V.O.C.A., which helps Clatsop County children who are survivors of sexual violence.

But unlike today, the couple did not feel free to be out when they first met.

Frimoth formed a group of like-minded

IF YOU GO

Astoria Pride 2019

"Bridging Communities"

FRIDAY, JUNE 7

Pre-Gayla Champagne Reception

6 p.m. Liberty Theatre McTavish Room, 1203 Commercial St., Astoria. \$25.

4th Annual Astoria Pride GAYLA

8 p.m. Liberty Theatre. \$30.

SATURDAY, JUNE 8

Riverwalk Pride Parade

Noon. Pier 12, Astoria. 10 a.m. day-of registration. Pre-register at facebook.com/astoriapride and lcqcastoria.org. Free.

Pride Block Party

11:30 a.m. Riverwalk at Barbey Maritime Center. Free.

SUNDAY, JUNE 9

Pacific Unitarian Universalist Fellowship Service

10 a.m. Performing Arts Center, 588 16th St., Astoria. Features the LCQC Choir. Potluck to follow at 11 a.m. at the Astoria Masonic Temple, 1572 Franklin Ave.

Drag Queen Reading Hour

3 p.m. Beach Books, 616 Broadway St., Seaside.

For more information, visit facebook.com/astoriapride/ or lcqcastoria.org. Tickets can be purchased at libertyastoria.showare.com

local progressive women who would hold potlucks together. One year on National Coming Out Day, some of the women gathered together for a photo.

"I wasn't in the photo because I worked in the schools and I didn't feel safe being out," Hedbloom said. "When you worked with children, it was not safe to be out at that time."

Frimoth echoed this.

In the past, she could only be herself in San Francisco's LGBTQ-friendly Castro District where she attended school and had many close friends.

Hedbloom attended a conservative college in Iowa in the 1960s.

"I am somebody who almost got kicked out of college because I was having a relationship with a woman," she said.

But the evolution of Astoria — and Pride — have impacted the couple.

Frimoth's favorite part of Pride is the parade and feeling fine holding hands in public, which wasn't something the couple was able to do in the past.

"Pride parades have allowed for that moment and that's just the best," Frimoth said. 