

Vallejo shows its Pride at Mare Island picnic – Times-Herald

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Justin Cole: ‘It’s camaraderie. It’s a chance to get together’



People greet each other during the Vallejo Gay Network Pride Picnic at Alden Park on Sunday. (Chris Riley/Times-Herald)

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When Eva Luna Gutierrez and Lilly Mosing planned a Sunday picnic with other friends at Mare Island, they believed it would just be them and a few others. As the girls — all identifying with the LGBTQIA+ community — were walking up to Alden Park, to their surprise, they noticed pride flags and a bunch of friendly people.

With no fear of being judged, they set up camp near the Vallejo Gay Network setup and joined in the 25th Annual Pride Picnic in Vallejo.

The duo were just a few of dozens congregating at the venue with food, drinks, and laughter. The Vallejo Gay

The duo were just a few or dozens congregating at the venue with food, drinks, and laughter. The Vallejo Gay Network hung pride flags on the missiles and other weapons that decorate the park for “Love over War.”



Hannah Dunton hugs her dog Ludo as they enjoy the Vallejo Pride Picnic at Alden Park on Sunday. (Chris Riley/Times-Herald)

Thomas Bilbo, Vallejo Gay Network coordinator and chairman of the Stonewall Democratic Club said the Vallejo Gay Network’s efforts during Pride Month — working with Better Vallejo, Solano AIDS Coalition, Louis Lawrence Transgender Archive and the Stonewall Democratic Club — are a team effort.

“It’s a coming together of the community for something outdoors and being part of our greater Vallejo community,” said Bilbo.

Newcomer Justin Cole heard about the Vallejo Gay Network through his partner’s friends.

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“It’s camaraderie,” said Cole. “It’s a chance to get together. It’s for families as well. I had heard that people bring their kids to this event. I visit to feel connected.”

The state of Florida has been at the center of what critics are calling anti-gay and anti-trans legislation. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed the “Don’t Say Gay in the Classroom” bill in June, which bans teachers from discussing the “D. S.”

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed the “Parental Rights in Education” bill, which many refer to as the “Don’t Say Gay” bill. This bill prohibits instructors from mentioning sexual orientation or gender identity in kindergarten through grade 3 or in a manner that is not “age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate” for students in accordance with state standards.

Bilbo said, “DeSantis and the Republican legislature in Florida are not representing the people that live in Florida.”

“They are representing a specific cause. What they need to understand is that all they’re doing is creating divisiveness,” Bilbo said. “That’s going to eventually hurt them in the end, because they’re losing voters and the Republican Party sees that they are losing voters across the entire state.”

Vallejo Gay Network says it continues its efforts to make its organization more inclusive, right down to the ship in the logo honoring the city’s sea tradition.



Brian Maher wears fuzzy ears as he walks through the Vallejo Pride Picnic at Alden Park on Mare Island on Sunday. (Chris Riley/Times-Herald)

“The community is here,” said Bilbo. “The people who are here are striving to make Vallejo more inclusive and the best place that it can be. I like to say Vallejo has such great potential. I’m hoping one day to say look at what VGN has done, but we still have a lot of work to do.”

Solano County District 2 Monica Brown Supervisor was on hand, as was Joseph Hayden of LGBTQ minus Tobacco, who briefly spoke about the importance of educating the community about the dangers of tobacco.

Dozens of people gathered for a group photo on the Alden Park bandstand.

“Let’s blow the city a kiss, so they know they are loved,” Bilbo said.