Many foundational events paved the way for modern era LGBTQIA+ Pride celebrations across the St. Louis region. While St. Louis did not host its first official Pride until 1980, the 1970s were a pivotal time for the St. Louis LGBTQIA+ community. Formal structures were being built by organizations such as Lesbian Alliance, Mandrake Society, Metropolitan Community Church, Mid Continent Life Services Corporation, and Miss Gay Missouri Pageant.

For those who've never known life without a Pride celebration, it's easy to not fully appreciate St. Louis's journey to serve as host to the nation's largest network of independent Pride events (six as of 2021).

St. Louis’s annual PrideFest is held in June and operated by Pride St. Louis, Inc. The following timeline reminds the community of the tireless efforts of the LGBTQIA+ ancestors upon whose shoulders many stand.

### St. Louis LGBTQIA+ Community Events Before the 1980 Pride Celebration
- Drag/Female Impersonator Performances, 1930s
- Miss Fannie's Balls, beginning in late 1950s
- Transgender Networking/Support Groups, late 1960s
- Mandrake Balls, 1970s
- Halloween Celebrations, 1970s (in the Central West End)
- Lesbian Alliance Events, 1970s
- Powder Puff Review Performances, 1970s
- Gateway and Blue Max Motorcycle Club Runs, 1970s
- Gay Parade 1973 (Refer to Appendix A)
- Miss Gay Missouri Pageant, beginning in 1973
- Gay Rights Rallies, 1976 and 1977 (1977 at Metropolitan Community Church)
- Miss Gay America Pageant, 1978 (at Machinist's Hall in Bridgeton)
- Washington University Gay Pride Weekend, 1979
- National March on Washington, 1979 (St. Louis sent delegation)

### St. Louis’s PrideFest Celebrations Organized by Pride St. Louis, Inc. (includes locations and themes):

#### 1980-1989: Central West End/Forest Park
- 1980: Celebration of St. Louis Lesbian and Gay Pride (First official Pride celebration included a series of week-long events organized by several community organizations)
- 1981: Celebration 81 (beginning of annual PrideFest celebrations)
- 1982: Celebration 82
- 1983: Celebration 83
- 1984: Unity and More (First theme)
• 1985: Alive with Pride
• 1986: Forward Together
• 1987: Proud/Strong/United (First annual community award presented)
• 1988: Rightfully Proud
• 1989: Stonewall 20: A Generation of Pride

1990-1999: Central West End/Forest Park and South Grand/Tower Grove Park
• 1990: Look to the Future: A New Decade of Pride (First transgender-related organization hosts an information table)
• 1991: Together in Pride (Nicole Richards crowned first Queen of Pride)
• 1992: Pride=Power
• 1993: Proud/United/Diverse (First St. Louis Mayor attends and addresses crowd)
• 1994: Out/Proud/United
• 1995: From Silence to Celebration
• 1996: St. Louis' Biggest Family Reunion
• 1997: Gateway to Change
• 1998: Continuing Our Journey/Courage to be Fabulous (First held in Tower Grove Park)
• 1999: Foundation for the Future

2000-2009: South Grand /Tower Grove Park
• 2000: Education/Unity/Community/Celebration
• 2001: Embrace Diversity
• 2002: St. Louis Pride Worldwide
• 2003: Just Be (First "Mass on the Grass" religious service held)
• 2004: A Quarter Century of Pride
• 2005: Come Alive
• 2006: Pride not Prejudice
• 2007: Celebrate
• 2008: Educate
• 2009: Liberate

2010-2020: South Grand/Tower Grove Park, Downtown/Soldiers Memorial, and Virtual
• 2010: Living Green/Better Together
• 2011: It's Here/It's Everywhere
• 2012: Be You! (Debut of St. Louis' Pride Flag)
• 2013: Celebrate the Past to Awaken the Future (First held downtown, first Pride flag flown at City Hall, first ceremony held in nation to honor LGBTQIA+ military veterans)
• 2014: Unity/Diversity/History
• 2015: Color Our World
• 2016: Solidarity Through Pride (First Transgender Pride flag flown at City Hall)
• 2017: Community Proud
• 2018: Remember /Rise/Respect
• 2019: Stonewall 50/PrideFest 40
• 2020: We are Family (First held in virtual format)

Additional Regional LGBTQIA+ Pride Celebrations
• Black Pride since 1995 (B-Boys Blues Festival)
• Metro East Pride since 2008
• Tower Grove Pride since 2013
• St. Charles Pride since 2015
• Alton Pride since 2020

Appendix A:

Remembrance of 1973 “Gay Parade” in St. Louis, Missouri by Dan White:

“A PARADE? Chuck darling, are you out of your mind?” Chuck Charleston (DJ at FACES bar in East St. Louis, Illinois) was at it again! His infectious enthusiasm sparkled from his eyes as he laid out his crazy idea. He wanted to set up a parade. We would gather at noon in front of the Red Bull bar in East St. Louis, Illinois. Then drive across Eads Bridge, down Market street and end up at “the cannon” in Forest Park. “Chuck are you forgetting this is St. Louis? They will kill us,” I protested. “Oh, they are having parades all over the country now. “It’s been four years since that riot in New York. “It is time we made some noise!” “Yes honey, I knew about Stonewall. “Did you forget I report news on radio? “I reported on that the night it happened.” I had just graduated from Lindenwood College.

Well by this time I knew I was hooked. I would take part, but what was I getting into? Chuck had a way of drawing you into his plans. As I write this, I am unsure if it was 1973 or 1974. (According to Phyllis Kitchen owner of PK’s bar in East St. Louis, Illinois, it was May/June 1973). This was crazy! I could lose my job and never work in radio again. My career would be over before it really began.

Let’s see, I could borrow my grandmother’s 1963 Studebaker. It wasn’t a convertible but it would be an interesting car for a parade. It also could not be traced to me like my own car would. The thought of doing this was exciting! There is always a certain thrill to danger. Can’t remember anyone thinking that we were creating history. It was more like seeing what we could get by with!

Officially this would be “The Red Bull Presents: Mardi Gras North”. Less confrontational than painting signs proclaiming Gay Power! That morning we lined up our cars on Missouri Ave in front of the bar. It was clear and bright as
the drivers attached streamers of crape paper with masking tape to their cars. Chuck had his red and white 1957 Thunderbird at the front of the line.

I can’t remember how many cars started our jaunt to the cannon in Forest Park. I wore a large flowing neon colored boa, dark glasses and a hard hat! We all were honking and waving at the unsuspecting people along the way. We had no permit – could not have gotten one anyway. This was still a time when shoppers would be on the sidewalks in downtown St. Louis. A few would wave back just from habit, I guess.

As we approached the circle drive of “the cannon”, a very real fear struck. I could catch glimpses of a mob around the corner. They were on to us. Visions of being attacked by a large group of angry people instantly played in my imagination. It had been less than ten years since I had to run from an angry mob in Indianapolis. I knew the drill. This could be serious.

However, as we drew closer a huge cheering greeted us. My chin must have fallen. This crowd was all gay! It seemed to me that there must have been thousands! I doubt that now, but that was my impression. I had never seen so many gay people, outdoors in the daylight! Even today I can hardly describe the impact it had. We were the “twilight people” who only came out at night after the sun went down!

Allow me to set the stage for the reader today. Many forget what threats LGBT people had to live under at the time. We got our “gay news” mostly by word of mouth. The few that could afford losing everything subscribed to “The Advocate Magazine”. Yes, the U.S. Post Office did kept tract of such perverts. Of course, that list was passed on to the FBI.

Just identifying as LGBT was illegal. The police could and would rough you up when they felt like it. You could get arrested for holding hands, for guys to wear a dress, for looking the wrong way in the rest rooms when taking your “relief”. What was legal, Ipso facto, was killing a “pervert”. As part of “Corpus Juris Secundum” (the second body of the law) the premise of “Homosexual Panic” was a viable defense to murder. It outlined that just being confronted with a disgusting thing like a homosexual, would cause a temporary insanity. Thus, the killing, while unfortunate, was to be expected!

From today’s safety, it is easy to say we were just being paranoid, or timid, or at best, not very effectual in bringing change. We lived with a gun to our head. We faced not only the loss of our jobs but the possibility of never finding work in our field again. We faced being evicted over rumors of what went on in our bedrooms between consenting adults.

Our progress was slow, but things were changing. “Gay history” hardly existed. We might hear a boring story told by some old queen. We did have local gay newspapers: No Bad News or The Gay News Telegraph. We could find out what was going to happen, but very little about our own history.

It had only been four years since the founding of the Mandrake Society and St. Louis’ own gay rights event “The 1969 Halloween Arrests”. But look at us now! We just held a parade. We were starting to come together to be a “people” a “tribe” and we liked being in the sunlight.
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**St. Louis Celebration of Lesbian & Gay Pride**

**Schedule of Events**

*April 12-20, 1980*

**APRIL 12th Saturday**
9:00 p.m.
DANCE at Holmes Lounge at Washington University $1.50 admission.

**APRIL 13th Sunday**
2:00 p.m.
PICNIC in Forest Park, located near the northeast corner of the Steinberg parking lot. Meat and beverage provided.

**APRIL 16th Wednesday**
7:30 p.m.
FILMS "In the Best Interest of the Children" and "Daughter Rite" at the Gargoyle, Washington University. Free

**APRIL 17th Thursday**
7:30 p.m.
GREEN AND YELLOW POTLUCK DINNER AND AFTER-DINNER PERFORMANCE at the Metropolitan Community Church, 5108 Waterman. Beverage provided.

**APRIL 18th Friday**
7:00 p.m.
OPEN-HOUSE at The Women's Eye bookstore, 6344 Rosebury Ave.

8:30 p.m.
FILM "A Very Natural Thing" at Washington University Rebstock Building, Room 250.

**APRIL 19th Saturday**
10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
WORKSHOPS at Forest Park Community College. Topics will include: Parents and Gays and Gay Youth, Politics in Missouri, Dealing with the Heterosexual World, Communication.

**APRIL 20th Sunday**
2:00 p.m.
WALK from Maryland Plaza to Washington University.

4:00 p.m.
RALLY at Washington University Quadrangle

8:30 p.m.
COLOR FOR THE 80's BALL at Carnegie's at Soulard, 704 Lafayette.

*Club St. Louis CBC Chain-- Sponsor

*Washington University Women's Group-- Sponsor

*Metropolitan Community Church, Iris, and The Celebration Committee-- Sponsors

*CLGS--Sponsor

*The Celebration Committee-- Sponsor

*The Magnolia Committee-- Sponsor

*LGOAL--Sponsor

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*Figure 1 - 1980 St. Louis Pride Schedule of Events graphic, courtesy St. Louis LGBT History Project/Steven Louis Brawley.*
Figure 2 - 1980 Pride Parade photograph, courtesy St. Louis LGBT History Project/Steven Louis Brawley.

Figure 3 - 1981 Pride Parade photograph, courtesy St. Louis LGBT History Project/Steven Louis Brawley.
Figure 4 - 1982 Pride Poster artwork, courtesy St. Louis LGBT History Project/Steven Louis Brawley.
Figure 5 - 1986 Pride Parade photograph, courtesy St. Louis LGBT History Project/Steven Louis Brawley.

Figure 6 - 1991 Pride Parade photograph, courtesy St. Louis LGBT History Project/Steven Louis Brawley.
Figure 7 - 1998 Pride Logo artwork, courtesy St. Louis LGBT History Project/Steven Louis Brawley.

Figure 8 - 2017 Pride Poster artwork, courtesy St. Louis LGBT History Project/Steven Louis Brawley.