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# New Times

'UNITED

AGAINST,  
HATE'

Your guide to  
the Phoenix  
Pride Festival.

By Serena O'Sullivan





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Photo by Matt Hennie



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# 'UNITED'



## AGAINST HATE'

Everything you need to know about the Phoenix Pride Festival.

BY SERENA O'SULLIVAN

**G**rab your rainbow flags, fill yourself with pride, and get ready for the Valley's biggest LGBTQ+ celebration.

The Phoenix Pride Festival will paint a kaleidoscope of floats, artists and activism in central Phoenix on Oct. 21-22. This year's organizers say the weekend's love letter to Phoenix's queer residents is sorely needed after a year of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation.

This year's theme, "United Against Hate," is a direct response to laws proposed earlier this year that targeted drag shows and trans folks, according to Phoenix Pride Executive Director Mike Fornelli.

"We don't want it to be an angry message," he told Phoenix New Times. "We want it to be an empowering message so that people can unite against these attacks and feel like they're supported."

Festival organizers expect 55,000

people to attend the celebration, and there will be plenty in store for partygoers.

"We have eight different stages or venues within a venue," Fornelli said. These stages will offer an array of entertainment and 20 local food vendors will be dishing up lip-smacking grub. Plus, hundreds of local businesses and organizations will be exhibiting their products and services in the health and wellness pavilion.

Funds raised through the festival will support various Phoenix Pride Community Foundation programs, which give grants to nonprofits that create new resources and programs for LGBTQ+ people.

"The Community Foundation also has a scholarship fund for LGBTQ and allied students to continue their education," Fornelli said. "So the proceeds from the festival feed into both of these programs. We're almost at \$1.4 million that we've given back to the community through

these grants and scholarships."

Pride is a family-friendly, inclusive event that welcomes everyone, whether they're out and proud, allies or simply folks who want to meet their queer neighbors.

### When and where is the Phoenix Pride Festival?

The 2023 Phoenix Pride Festival takes place at Steele Indian School Park, located at 300 E. Indian School Road. It is scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 21-22, from noon-9 p.m.

### How to get to the festival

There's one entrance into the festival, and it's easy to miss. If you're driving east on Indian School Road, make a left onto South Herrera Way — or make a right if you're heading west — and continue until you reach the end. Can't see any rainbows? You may have missed it.

### Where to park

Traffic can quickly become congested around the area. If you can't snag one of the free spots in the park's lot, try the nearby 4041 Central Plaza Garage, which has about 1,400 spots for \$12 each. (You can only pay by card, though.)

There's also the Central High School parking lot, which is a short walk from the park and has 200 spaces for \$10 each.

Feeling cheap? Try the Ampco System Parking Lots located at 4000 N. Central Ave. to snag one of 800 spaces.

Or, you can avoid parking woes by using ride-sharing options or the Valley Metro light rail. A dedicated pickup and drop-off area is available for those using apps such as Uber or Lyft.

### How much does it cost?

General admission for a day is \$34; express entry is available for \$40.





LGBTQ+ performers at Phoenix Fan Fusion's "Dragstravaganza" in June and the Phoenix Pride Parade in October 2022. (Photos by Matt Hennie and O'Hara Shipe)

Admission is free for children ages 12 and younger and active military members; while kids ages 13-17, former military and folks ages 55 and older can get in for \$15 if they show their ID at the on-site box office at the admissions entrance.

Want the VIP experience? One-day VIP admission is \$108; two days is \$161. VIPs must be 18 years and older.

This upgrade includes exclusive entertainment, a spot in front of the main stage, a buffet, two complimentary drinks per day and access to an air-conditioned space.

Want to join the official after-party on Saturday night? The celebratory bash takes place from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. at Walter Studios, located at 747 W. Roosevelt St. General admission is \$50 with a VIP upgrade an additional \$13.

Tickets can be bought online or at the gate. Credit cards will be accepted for admissions and beverage sales. ATMs also will be available throughout the park.

### What about the Phoenix Pride Parade?

The Pride Parade kicks off on Sunday, Oct.

22 at 10 a.m. at Thomas Road and Third Street in downtown Phoenix. The rainbow of brightly colored floats and more than 2,000 individual participants will travel northbound along Third Street before ending at Steele Indian School Park near Indian School Road and Third Street.

Event organizers expect more than 15,000 spectators to enjoy the visual feast.

### What concerts are at the Pride festival?

You can groove to live performances on both the main stage and the Latin stage. Here's when and where the featured performances are:

- Main stage**
- Saturday: Zee Machine at 7 p.m.; Paulina Rubio at 8 p.m.
  - Sunday: Niki Harris & Donna De Lory at 7 p.m.; Ashanti at 8 p.m.
- Latin stage**
- Saturday: Host Jessica Wild from 5-7 p.m.; Mar Solis, Jessica Esoterica
  - Sunday: Host Naysha Lopez from 5-7 p.m.; Mariana Seoane at 6 p.m.; Mar Solis, Jessica Esoterica

VIP ticket holders also get exclusive entertainment from Wild on Saturday from 2-4 p.m.

Then, on Sunday, Lopez will throw a VIP-only show from 2-4 p.m.

Kadee Christian Starr will host both VIP shows.

Aside from the main stage and Latin stage, there are six other venues to explore:

- Community stage, which showcases local entertainment performances
- Local stage, which is specifically for Phoenix-based performers
- KidSpace, where youths younger than 18 can party with their friends and families
- Arts Expo, a show for music and art lovers
- Dance pavilions, where DJs spin records
- Erotic World, a venue for attendees ages 18 and older that includes fetish demonstrations, toys and exotic dancers

"I don't know a lot of festivals that have that many venues for entertainment," Fornelli said.

Bottom line: There's something for everyone.

### What to eat and drink

Twenty local food vendors and the eight beverage stations — one for each venue — will be on-site at the Phoenix Pride Festival, providing plenty of bites and sips.

"We also offer nonalcoholic drinks or mocktails for people who don't want to drink or aren't old enough to drink, because (the event) is for all ages," Fornelli said.

He added that attendees will be able to sample a diverse selection of foods. Expect everything from deep-fried treats to pizza, burgers and a whole lot more.

Food offerings also will be available for folks with dietary restrictions, Fornelli said.

### No cannabis allowed

Although it's legal to smoke cannabis in Arizona, it's not allowed at the festival because the venue is a Phoenix city park. If you plan to smoke a joint and relax for the festivities, make sure to do it before the event — and use a designated driver.

### Accessibility upgrades

Is all the partying a little too loud for you? A quiet area will be located near the lake for those who become overwhelmed by all the stimuli. Fenced off from the rest of the

festival grounds, it will be identified with the neurodiversity infinity symbol.

This is the second year Phoenix Pride has added a quiet zone to the festival. The organizers decided to keep it following positive feedback from last year's event, Fornelli said.

"We aim to be as accessible as possible as a festival, so we wanted to be able to cater to the neurodiverse community and 55 and older folks," he told New Times. The quiet area will feature white noise and other relaxing features designed for people who need a break from sensory overload.

"We've also made sure that we have ASL interpreters for our front stages for the hard of hearing community, along with mobility shuttles for folks who aren't able to get around on their own," Fornelli said.

### Why is the Pride Festival in October and not June?

This marks the second consecutive year that event organizers will transform Phoenix into a rainbow-studded extravaganza in October. Most U.S. cities celebrate Pride in June to commemorate the Stonewall Riots, which took place in New York City on June 28, 1969.

In Phoenix, Pride events started more than 40 years ago.

"We started in 1981 as like a march, like a rally, and it's grown into the festival," Fornelli said.

According to Phoenix Pride's digital timeline, the first official Phoenix Pride Parade was thrown in 1997. Back then, leaders strategically scheduled the event for April in order to avoid the brutal summer temperatures.

For 24 years, the Phoenix Pride Festival graced the city streets with vibrant celebrations in April.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic threw a wrench into the organization's best-laid plans.

"When COVID hit, we were out of commission for about a year and a half," Fornelli said. "The earliest we were able to hold an in-person event of our size was at the end of October."

Since it didn't make sense to turn around and hold Pride again just five months later in April, the organization decided to permanently move the annual event to October.



(Photo by Matt Hennie)