



PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Rob Darrow, robdarrow@santacruzpride.org

50 Years of Pride with IllumiNight Event and Rainbow Procession

Community invited to celebrate with Pride colors and join historic celebration May 27

This June, Santa Cruz County will mark a powerful milestone in LGBTQ+ history with the 50th Anniversary of Santa Cruz Pride, celebrating one of the earliest Pride events held in the United States.

To commemorate the occasion and serve as a kickoff for events leading up to the annual Pride Parade and Festival on Sunday, June 1, in downtown Santa Cruz, the community is invited to a celebratory IllumiNight Pride Event and Rainbow Procession on Tuesday, May 27 at 7 p.m., starting at the Santa Cruz County Governmental Center, 701 Ocean St.

The evening will include speeches by local leaders and community advocates, followed by a joyful procession from the County Building to the Santa Cruz Town Clock. Both iconic landmarks will be illuminated in rainbow lights to symbolize decades of LGBTQ+ advocacy, resilience, and love, and the event will feature the debut of a symbolic Pride Torch, which will be prominent at events during Pride Month.

“Santa Cruz County has long been a leader in celebrating diversity and advancing civil rights,” said Supervisor Monica Martinez, who spearheaded the Board of Supervisors’ decision to illuminate the building. “Fifty years after the first LGBTQ+ gathering in San Lorenzo Park, we honor those who took that brave first step — and we carry their legacy forward. At a time when rights are being challenged across the country, we must hold the line and keep moving progress forward. I invite everyone to join us in celebration and solidarity.”

“This celebration is not just about history—it’s about community, visibility, and joy. It’s a reminder that Pride began as an act of resistance and has become a beacon of hope,” said Santa Cruz City Councilmember Sonja Brunner, who has led the City’s efforts to light the Town Clock. “I hope everyone shows up in full color to express support, love, and solidarity for our LGBTQ+ friends, and family.”

Rob Darrow, Chair of Santa Cruz Pride emphasized the significance of the moment: “Santa Cruz is the first smaller city in the nation to reach the milestone of 50 years. We as a county continue to be one of the most inclusive and welcoming counties in the nation thanks to the organizers of the first Pride events in 1975 and everyone who has been involved for the past 50 years. We hope that this year’s celebration honors our history of LGBTQ+ activism and inspires the next generation. Come out, show up, and celebrate our shared legacy of equality for all people.”

Everyone is encouraged to attend, wear rainbow colors, and fly Pride flags across Santa Cruz County in celebration and solidarity throughout Pride Week. The May 27 event is free and open to all ages. For more information, visit www.santacruzpride.org.