



There's No Place Like Home in OC's Most Inclusive Neighborhood

Take a drive through the Floral Park Historic District and you're bound to see a number of gay PRIDE

flags, not just during PRIDE month, but all year long. And there's a good reason for that. It has long been be-

lieved that Floral Park has the largest concentration of LGBTQ+ residents, not just in Santa Ana, but in

all of Orange County. While there is no definitive figure for the gay and lesbian population in Floral Park, few question the claim.

“As LGBTQ+ communities have become more visible in many American cities since the 1960s, gay people have often chosen to live in affordable neighborhoods with architecturally significant housing stock, which they preserve in an effort to maintain their historical merit and raise local home values,” according to The American Planning Association. And that is certainly the story of Floral Park.

While Floral Park was the most coveted neighborhood in Orange County during the 1920s and 1930s, it had entered into a state of decline by the 1970s. Downtown Santa Ana became overwhelmingly blighted with deteriorating buildings and the city was experiencing a period of rising gang violence. In 1976, Santa Ana had the highest crime rate of any major city in the state. As elderly Floral Park residents passed, new families were reluctant to move in, preferring newer, safer neighborhoods to the south. Floral Park instituted a home tour in the 1980s as a way of attracting attention to the beauty and architecture of the neighborhood to both attract new residents who value historic architecture and to inspire current residents to invest in their homes. Word got out and slowly preservation and restoration followed.

“For many years, a perplexing phenomenon has made its way into real estate markets across the country: where there is a high concentration of same-sex couples, real estate tends to be more expensive and appreciate in value faster,” says Ralph McLaughlin, a housing economist at the real estate website Trulia. McLaughlin studied the prices



Lou Pecora and Joe Banger, Floral Park's OGs (original groundbreakers)

and price appreciation of homes in neighborhoods with a high concentration of married same-sex couples, both among male and female pairs. He found home prices increased on average 23% in zip codes with high concentrations same-sex couples.

In his book *A Passion to Preserve: Gay Men as Keepers of Culture*, author Will Fellow observes “a lot of gay men really do have a sense of good design, a good aesthetic sense. Whether or not it’s politically correct, I believe that stereotype is the truth,” Fellow wrote. “Seeing the potential of old buildings to be attractive, gays are not afraid to go into marginal areas and fix them up.”

According to a report published by the real-estate website Zillow, buyers looking to purchase properties in so-called “gayborhoods” should now expect to pay a premium. The American Community Survey defines gayborhoods as areas with a high share of same-sex couple households. According to Zillow, home values tend to be higher in gay inclusive neighbor-

hoods as gay couples tend to have fewer children than heterosexual couples, which leaves them with a larger disposable income. Having less children also gives them greater flexibility to move to areas where the quality of local schools and kid-friendliness are less important. Instead, they look for places that are safe, welcoming and financially viable.

Economists have long speculated about the effects of gayborhoods on everything from diversity to gentrification. One common theme of this analysis is that neighborhoods with a higher than average density of gay residents are by definition more diverse and open-minded, with a wider range of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups as well. Another common argument is that gays often pioneer the revitalization of disadvantaged, crime-filled urban neighborhoods and their presence can be seen as an early marker of gentrification and a precursor to a jump in housing prices.

In their article “*Uncovering the Relationship Between Historic Districts and Same-Sex Households*” authors Kelly L. Kinahan and Matthew H. Ruther found that tracts with higher shares of gay households are more likely to establish locally designated historic districts. And certainly, that was the case in Floral Park which became a National Historic District last year.

Lou Pecora and his partner Joe Banger may have been the first gay couple to see the potential of Floral Park. They purchased their first home on Santa Clara in the 1950s while Lou taught at Golden West College and Joe taught interior design. Soon they were buying more. At their height, they owned approximately 20 homes in the neighborhood, saving them from being destroyed architecturally and/or



Jacob Turrietta with his moms Sarah & Tracie on Heliotrope Drive.



Peter and Evan Jackson with their son Ace on Heliotrope Drive.

Frank Patti, who lives with his husband Craig Kalthoff-Patti on North Park Boulevard, agrees. “Floral Park is filled with friendly, open-minded and affirming families from various communities. My husband and I have felt the love and acceptance in this community that is rare in other parts of the county, state and country” said Patti. “Floral Park reminds me of the line from *The Wizard Of Oz*, ‘there’s no place like home.’ And we are proud to call Floral Park our home.”

There truly is no place like Floral Park. The Floral Park Neighborhood Association once sponsored a booth at the Orange County Gay PRIDE Festival specifically to attract LGBTQ+ residents to the neighborhood. Two years ago it introduced its own neighborhood version of the PRIDE flag, which is flown all year long throughout the neighborhood. Along with West Floral Park and Fisher Park, the neighborhood holds quarterly LGBTQ+ mixers. And the neighborhood association has repeatedly supported Santa Ana’s LGBTQ Center OC, which is the second oldest such center in America.

Community inclusion means more than being tolerant and allowing individuals to participate in our community. It means empowering, encouraging, and creating

aesthetically. They were well accepted in the community at a time when those suspected of being gay were often ostracized from their families, communities and even their jobs. Times have certainly changed since then and Lou talks about his life in the neighborhood with pride, appreciative of the love and openness he has always experienced here.

And he’s not alone. “As the mother of a gay child, I was searching for a community where my child would feel safe, not an easy thing in conservative Orange County,” said one resident. “We ended up driving through Floral Park and I was impressed by the number of pride flags all throughout the neighborhood and knew that this was a place where we would be accepted, that this was home.”

“Floral Park is certainly the most welcoming and inclusive neighborhood in all of Orange County,” said Kevin Shuler, a realtor who lives with his husband, Brian, and two sons on Heliotrope Drive. “For those looking for a diverse neighborhood that is accepting and loving, then Floral Park is the place.”

That’s exactly how Sara and Tracie Turrietta feel. “We were living in Yorba Linda, which is not exactly accepting toward gay families” said

Sara. “People were outright unkind and hurtful and we knew we had to move.” Sara and Tracie found a vintage home in Floral Park on Zillow, and while that house didn’t work out, they fell in love with the neighborhood and eventually moved into another home on Heliotrope Drive.

“Here, our son, who is also gay, is welcome to be whoever he is,” said Sara. “I remember going to our first neighborhood mixer thinking ‘wow I’ve never seen so many gay people all in one place in OC in my life,’” she joked. “But it’s not just that, it’s also the allies who love us and are here for us. We couldn’t have asked for more! It feels like home and that’s the only way to describe it.”



L to R: Spouses Carlos Dias & Jarred Hobbins on Bonnie Brae; and Mona Konstan and her wife Jill Brumett (19th Street) with her brother Jeffrey Brumett and his partner Marc LaFont (Heliotrope Drive).

opportunities for individuals to live full, rich and authentic lives. Over a period of one hundred years, Floral Park has grown from a “restricted community” in the 1920s to Orange County’s most inclusive neighborhood, a supportive community where residents embrace all people irrespective of race, gender, age, disability or sexual orientation.

“Together, we strive to build a legacy where neighbors experience inclusion, meaningful connection, and true joy in their everyday life,” said Floral Park Neighborhood Association president Jeffrey Katz. “Community inclusion allows purpose and meaningful contributions to thrive. This is what we stand for in the Floral Park Historic District.” And that’s certainly something to show pride in!

What is Pride?



by Jeffrey Katz

Pride is a celebration of people coming together in love and friendship, to show how far LGBTQ+ rights have come and how in some places there’s still work to be done. Pride month is about acceptance, equality, and celebrating the work of LGBTQ+ people and the community.

Pride is the opposite of shame. Throughout history, LGBTQ+ people have had to live their lives in the shadows for fear of harassment,

discrimination, prosecution and even physical violence. Pride month was founded in a protest for civil rights and a fight for visibility. It traces its roots back to the 1969 Stonewall riots. The first Pride marches started the following year to commemorate the multi-day riots and eventually evolved into a full month of LGBTQ+ pride.

The original Pride flag was designed during the AIDS epidemic after the assassination of gay San Francisco City Supervisor Harvey Milk in 1978. Much has changed since those turbulent times, but as the saying goes, “the more things change, the more they stay the same.” The ACLU is currently tracking 515 anti-LGBTQ+ bills in the US legislature. Flying a PRIDE flag shows support for equal rights and inclusion.

LGBTQ+ young people are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide than their peers. A 2023 national survey by The Trevor Project found that 41% of LGBTQ+ young people seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year. They went on to add that LGBTQ+ young people are not inherently prone to suicide risk because of their sexual orientation or gender identity but rather placed at higher risk because of how they are mistreated and stigmatized in society.

“Having a visibly supportive and inclusive community is important for young people struggling with their identity,” added Dr. Frank Patti, a gender affirming psychotherapist. “When you display flags and other visual symbols of support, it’s a way of saying, ‘Hey, we see you, we’re with you, we celebrate you, you matter to us, you’re not alone,’ and that’s really an important way of sending signals to young people that help them feel accepted, safe and included.”

Non-gay allies are some of the most effective and powerful voices for LGBTQ+ people. An ally can be defined as someone who stands up for the equal and fair treatment of people different than themselves. Given that LGBTQ+ people do not make up a majority of the population, allies are critical in creating a welcoming and inclusive neighborhood.

By being an ally, and showing support, you help end ignorance leading to issues and actions that adversely impact the daily lives and livelihoods of LGBTQ+ people. Not only do allies help foster safety in the coming-out process, they also help others understand the importance of equality, fairness, acceptance, and mutual respect. It has been asserted that the majority of pride flags in Historic Floral Park are flown by allies.

There are many versions of the Pride flag and Floral Park has designed its own to show support for equality and inclusivity. The 3’x5’ nylon flag is printed on both sides. The colors represent the wide diversity within the community. The flags are available for \$35 at floralpark.com/shop.

In addition, Kevin Shuler is distributing smaller 19”x12” flags that can be placed in lawns for free. To get your, contact Kevin at kevinshuler@gmail.com.



Kevin Shuler is offering free 12”x19” pride flags to the neighborhood.