

"Coming Out Week" coming to SIUE

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - October 9-13 is Coming Out Week across the nation.

The week is built around National Coming Out Day Oct. 11, and celebrates the gender identities and sexual orientations of everyone. SIUE Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) President Bryon Pierson said the event allows people to know they are safe and celebrated in their identities by a community of people who care deeply for them.

The SIUE GSA is hosting this year's week of events, and Pierson said this year, the group is aiming toward addressing less conventional stories and conditions of coming out and revealing one's personal identity and preferences to the world at large.

Day one of the event, Oct. 9, will feature the theme of "Coming Out as an Everyday Thing." Speakers will include Curtis Galloway, an Illinois activist who successfully fought to defeat the use of "conversion therapy" on gay youth as a method to force them into heterosexuality.

"Coming out everyday is realizing that everyday you come out to the world somehow," he said.

Pierson will also be speaking at that event, which lasts from 4-5:30 p.m. alongside fellow SIUE GSA members Webster Dyer and Beau Lewis.

Tuesday, Oct. 10, will feature "Coming Out as Christian and Gay." The event will celebrate students of faith who are also LBGQTQ. Speakers will include Reverend Lillie Brock of the Metropolitan Community Church of Greater St. Louis, which is an LBGQTQ-embracing Christian Church whose mission is bringing God's love to all.

That day will also feature faculty safe space training from 10 a.m. - noon.

Wednesday, Oct. 11, which is National Coming Out Day, will feature doors at the Goshen Lounge for students to come out of as gay, straight, trans, non-binary and pansexual from 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Later that day from 4-5:30 p.m. the SIUE GSA will feature a talk about coming out as bisexual and pansexual led by Kayla Summy and Natasha Wright.

That day will also feature bracelets on sale for \$3 to support the SIUE GSA as well as a special at Sugo's Italian restaurant in Edwardsville featuring 10 percent of profits going to the SIUE GSA.

Trans awareness will be the topic of Thursday, Oct. 12. That day will culminate with a balloon release with each balloon featuring the name of a trans person who has taken their own life. That release will occur at 5:30 p.m. at The Rock following stories and discussions about coming out as trans with Gabe Smith and Cheyenne Harbison.

Friday, Oct. 13, will be a fun "dare day" in which people may purchase dares for \$1. One of the dares is to throw water balloons at Pierson as he makes his way across campus the entire day. Dare day will take place at The Rock from 11 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Pierson said the purpose of the SIUE GSA is to champion the rights and causes of all students. Currently, he said, they are raising awareness and resources to have spectrum housing added to the campus. Such housing would allow a more comfortable residence hall to students who identify as gay, bisexual, transgender or having a non-binary gender.

"These places are some of the most popular halls where they have them," Pierson said. "With enrollment declining last year, I think it would be beneficial if we had them at one of the gayest schools in the country."

SIUE is ranked as in the top 20 universities in the country in regards to students identifying in the spectrum of LBGTQ.

