



# **Riverbend Rainbow Community hopes to connect LGBTQIA youth to events and opportunities**

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
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BRIGHTON – One organization in the Riverbend is hoping to help people in the LGBTQIA community find social events, support groups, educational forums and general networking in the Riverbend area (described from Granite City to Grafton).

The Riverbend Rainbow Community is an organization, which describes itself as non-religious, but has the support of some members of local clergy. In a message to Riverbender.com, representatives of the Riverbend Rainbow Community said to think of them as “a bulletin board that people can access to find or promote social events, support groups, educational forums and general networking for the Southern Illinois Riverbend Area.” The majority of their meetings have been held at St. John's United Christian Church in Brighton, but the group is expanding across the area.

A panel discussion with the mission of advocating for the community as a whole is set to take place on Feb. 26 at 216 North St. in Brighton. A previous event hosted by the (relatively-new) group had around 35 people, and more than 100 people have interacted with the group on Facebook.

“We have hosted two events so far,” a representative from the Riverbend Rainbow Community said on Facebook. “At the first meeting, we really just gathered to find how much interest there might be and to have an open dialogue about how to strengthen community connections for Riverbend people on this side of the river. Any people shared frustrations that the majority of events were held in St. Louis.

“The second gathering was focused on how to support younger people,” they continued. “We heard from a number of teens and young adults about their experiences.”

The group is organized by Reverends Laurie Crelly and Amy Brooks, who are a married couple. Crelly is the pastor of St. John's United Christian Church in Brighton and Brooks is the pastor of the First Unitarian Church in Alton. While the group is not described as religious, they do acknowledge their faith playing a role in their daily lives.

“On the topic of religion, we find no compelling arguments from the Bible to condemn or exclude any person from living a full life of faith,” they said. “We are fully affirmed by our own faith traditions and uphold the inherent worth and dignity of every person.”

Outside of holding further events to assist LGBTQIA youth within the Riverbend area, the Riverbend Rainbow Community hopes to compile a list of local businesses with LGBTQIA owners they can support as a part of a greater community celebration.

More information can be found at the Riverbend Rainbow Community's Facebook page as well as by attending the Feb. 26 event.