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Knocke tells commission Pride events are inappropriate

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News Leader

The head of the local branch of a political group told the Fernandina Beach City Commission he believes events should not be held in the city in conjunction with Pride, a movement that traditionally celebrates and commemorates the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

Jack Knocke is the executive director of Nassau County Citizens Defending Freedom (CCDF). The group calls itself "an organization that empowers and equips American citizens to defend their freedoms and liberties at the local level."

CCDF has been involved in efforts



Knocke

to remove books from school libraries in Travis County, Texas, and a lawsuit questioning the results of a local referendum election in Montgomery County, Texas. In Collin County, Texas, CCDF worked to have churches in each of the county's school districts to start their own "Community Impact Ministry" in order to "bring back biblical values by participating in civic duties within their communities." CCDF spoke out during Gov. Ron DeSantis'

legal battle with Disney, saying, "No longer will they spend entire paychecks on subscriptions, park passes, admission fees, or merchandise, only to find their hard-earned money is being used to fund the indoctrination of vulnerable children to accept radical ideological agendas."

Locally, Nassau CCDF was part of a movement that resulted in the ousting of former Fernandina Beach City Manager Dale Martin.

There will be a Fernandina Beach Pride Family Picnic Day held April 22 at the Fir Street pavilion behind the MLK Center. The third annual Fernandina Beach Pride Parade and Festival is scheduled for Saturday, June 10. The



FILE PHOTO

Fernandina Beach Pride parade 2022.

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city has issued permits for both events.

On Monday, March 27, Knocke emailed the city commission regarding events scheduled to take place in the city.

"This is hugely inappropriate to expose our children in public places to," Knocke's email to the commissioners said. He did not elaborate on the matter.

The News-Leader reached out to Knocke to ask what he believes is inappropriate about the events. He did not respond to that request for comment. The newspaper also reached out to the city commission to ask if they believe the city should prohibit the picnic and parade.

Commissioner Chip Ross was the only commissioner who

responded to the paper's questions of whether they believe the events should be stopped. "No," Ross said. "Freedom of assembly is one of the bedrock principles of the U.S. Constitution, which I will continue to support."

Genece Minshew, president of Fernandina Beach chapter of Pride, an advocacy group for the LGBTQ community, said she had spoken to Mayor Bradley Bean about the matter.

"Mayor Bean said that he spoke with Mr. Knocke and explained to him that we are an approved event and we have the same right to use facilities as any other group," Minshew said in an email to Commissioner Ross. "Mayor Bean agreed with me that he does not want this to go any further. He seemed to think that, as long as we did not have a kids

zone (we don't), all was well. Seemed odd, but I did not pursue."

Former Fernandina Beach Police Chief Mark Foxworth and Captain David Bishop said there have been no arrests in conjunction with prior Pride events in the city.

"We had an incident at the end of last year's event," Bishop said. "A couple of individuals created a minor scene and were spoken to by officers. They even-

ually left without incident. The first year, prior to COVID, there were some protesters holding signs outside of the event area and debated with people attending the event."

Minshew said the events will go on, although Pride believes it is a target for potential violence.

"This is why we are spending money for police protection at every event," she said. "We will not be deterred by hate."

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

Baskets filled with donations to benefit struggling Nassau County families this Easter.

Ballroom
On
Amelia