

## It takes a village

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If the section of Bank Street between Nepean and James Streets becomes Ottawa's official **gay village**, it would be good for tourism, for the gay community and for the vitality of downtown Ottawa. But the district is not quite ready for its coming out party.

The area already includes several gay businesses, such as Wilde's and After Stonewall. Even some generic stores and coffee houses on Bank display rainbow-flag decals in windows. There are gay-friendly bed-and-breakfasts not too far away.

All of that has been great for the life of Bank Street. Anything that draws people is good for a street that's suffered through construction and had to fight against the centrifugal force that pulls retail and restaurants to the suburbs.

It's difficult to say, though, whether there are enough pink triangles and rainbows on Bank to constitute a village. Districts work best when they evolve naturally. The city can put up as many banners as it likes proclaiming that Rideau Street is a "theatre district", but that doesn't make it so. Over-zealous branding attempts are more embarrassing than useful.

Bank Street has the beginnings of a **gay village**. Critical mass isn't far away: all it would take is another business or two and a little more public recognition by the existing stores, bars and restaurants in the area. The whole neighbourhood could get more involved in events such as the Wilde About Sappho literature festival.

This is a diverse city, which makes it an attractive one. Another colour in the tapestry of Ottawa is always welcome.