

Section of Bank Street becoming **gay village**, decree or no decree

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It may not be by official decree, but rainbow flags and decals are going up at businesses along a six-block stretch of Bank Street, the efforts of a non-profit group committed to having the area gain visibility as a **gay village**.

"It's exciting to have real, tangible results now," said Glenn Crawford, who last year spearheaded a campaign to have the city officially recognize Bank Street between Nepean and James streets as a **gay village**.

Two rainbow flags, measuring one by two metres, went up outside the Bridgehead coffee shop at Bank and Gilmour streets on June 24 and 25. Rainbow window decals went up at the Second Cup at the corner of Bank and Somerset streets earlier in June. On July 6, window decals went up at After Stonewall, a gay and lesbian bookstore on Bank Street just north of James Street. And the effort is continuing.

Crawford has formed a non-profit organization and seven-person committee called The Village.

The new group is working to develop visibility for a gay-, lesbian-, bisexual- and transgender-friendly village in the city's downtown core.

The rough goal is to have flags or decals in two to three businesses on each of the six blocks.

"We recognize that we'll have more credibility, more authority, when we create that visibility," Crawford said. "It's going to be a lot more difficult to say we don't have a village when we have 30 flags in the air."

More rainbows are on the way: A men's drop-in centre run by the Youth Services Bureau in the area will be getting flags, with an event to mark them scheduled for Aug. 25, during the Capital Pride festival, Crawford said. Merchants at Venus Envy sex shop and bookstore approached him Thursday about getting flags installed outside of their shop, too.

About a year ago, Crawford's efforts to have the stretch of Bank Street from Nepean to James streets officially designated as Ottawa's **gay village** hit a roadblock when the Bank Street Promenade Business Improvement Area polled its members on the idea of an official designation.

The BIA's board decided last August against supporting the **gay-village** designation, and opted instead for a "bottom up" policy of branding for the neighbourhood, whereby individual businesses could choose to identify themselves as gay-oriented or gay-friendly. That's what seems to be happening now.

"That is precisely what we were talking about with respect to bottom-up branding," Gerry LePage, executive director of the Bank Street BIA. "We support that type of effort absolutely."