

PRIDE OF PLACE

In conversation with Diana Rodriguez
Pride Live co-founder and CEO





Q&A with Diana Rodriguez

The grand opening of the Stonewall National Monument Visitor Center (SNMVC) in New York on June 28 marks the 55th anniversary of the Stonewall Rebellion and the culmination of a remarkable six-year journey for Pride Live co-founder and CEO Diana Rodriguez.

The BCLP team in New York and London has been an invaluable partner from the very beginning, playing a significant role in the realisation of this once-in-a-lifetime project of international historic significance. We caught up with Diana to discover the incredible story behind the Visitor Center and her vision to inspire support for the LGBTQ+ community and the ongoing fight for equality.

Can you tell us about the driving force behind your career?

Service has always been a fundamental part of my family's heritage, with over four generations serving in the military. This instilled in me a deep sense of the importance of service and a desire to give back to others. My work in the not-for-profit world for the past 32 years has been my way of contributing to causes I believe in.

I attended Georgetown University on scholarship and that experience greatly impacted me and my time there truly changed my life. Knowing I had the opportunity to go to college because of the generosity and kindness of others, always stuck with me. And I realized how much I wanted to pay it forward by making a difference for others in a similar way.

What led you to start Pride Live and what did you want to achieve?

When I was at the Clinton Foundation, I had a conversation with my spouse Ann about branching out and doing my own thing. She asked me what that would look like, and I honestly didn't know. But, I knew I wanted to focus my efforts back on the LGBTQ+ community and if possible, through an organization of my own. I had been in the not-for-profit world for so long and enjoyed everywhere I had been. Particularly, my time at GLAAD influenced me: I was able to go there every day as I am, and that inspired me to create a space that offered that accepting atmosphere for other individuals or organizations.

This is what led me to Pride Live. But, if you had told me we would be where we are today, I would have said you're crazy. The launch of the Stonewall National Monument Visitor Center was never part of the initial plan. When the opportunity arose, we knew we had to make it happen, especially given everything that has transpired over the last six years on a global scale... the Visitor Center is more important now than ever.

How did you first get involved in the Stonewall National Monument project?

In 2015, I had the chance opportunity to attend a meeting discussing the



potential establishment of the Stonewall National Monument. I was honored to be invited by the National Conservation Association and be amongst individuals from the Obama administration and the National Park Service, who were focused on making this project with President Obama happen before leaving office. The thought of a monument for the community located at Christopher Park touched me, and after walking around and introducing myself, I was asked to be part of the effort.

How did you get started?

I raised money for the monument with the support of various celebrities and influencers who helped us organize an auction with the proceeds directly benefiting the Stonewall National Monument fund. This ultimately launched our journey.

The designation ceremony for the Stonewall National Monument was overwhelming, yet amazing and beautiful and memorable in so many ways. I met Valerie Jarrett there and she jokingly said, "Hey Diana, the next thing we need is a visitor center." From there, I was determined. Looking back now, there were probably a number of red flags as to why I shouldn't move forward, but when you are committed to something, all you see are green lights. Then, the sky opened up when 51 Christopher Street became available. Ann and I took that as a sign to get started.

Was there ever a time you thought this incredible project would not come to fruition?

I always maintained a positive front publicly, but privately, there were days when I doubted myself and questioned my sanity. It can be daunting when you're trying to create something new—establishing a point of sale, building installations, testing activations, hiring employees for various positions. There's so much going on at once. But, we have

such a strong group of people involved in this project. When you have a great team around you, their unwavering support is invaluable. It's because of everyone that came together on this project that we are incorporating the Visitor Center.

Was it a persistent battle to turn the vision into a reality?

Like any project on this scale and size, there are always issues. We approached the endeavor with the intention of creating something enduring that would represent the community forever. Once we had the groundbreaking two years ago, we put up a sign letting everyone know we would be opening on June 28, 2024. Everyone around me, from my spouse to my board to the National Park Service to Google, said "Diana, put 'Summer 2024.'" But no one could sway me. In my heart I knew that if we were going to do this, then we were going to open on the 55th anniversary. The fact that we are doing just that after only two years is special.

Were there detractors?

With anything this public, there are always detractors. But the good thing is I'm 58 and gay, Puerto Rican, and, admittedly, stubborn. Surprisingly, some of the most vocal opposition came from our very own community and individuals who had strong opinions. And we respected those differing opinions without letting them impede our progress. We all made our point, but we can still go to dinner together after disagreeing.

What advice would you give your younger self?

The fact of the matter is that I'd probably do it all over again, still knowing everything I know today. I'd tell myself to try not to dwell on it, to take a step back every now and then. Six years in the making, this incredible journey has required countless hours and sleepless nights to bring this to fruition. I'd probably tell myself to hire staff earlier.





How did the collaboration with BCLP come about?

The initial conversations surrounding the Visitor Center convened at BCLP offices, where I first crossed paths with James Colgate and Kurt Steinhouse. After sharing my passion for this project, James offered his support immediately and said, "let me know what you need." From that moment, BCLP was fully committed to the cause.

What matters were BCLP able to help with?

The complexities of the space, from its historical significance as a landmark building to preservation guidelines, there were numerous challenges and layers. James and Kurt were instrumental in taking the lead on those conversations. We never had any unanswered questions after a call with BCLP and to have that level of support was crucial, particularly given the unique circumstances of our project. That's how it started and now, we are weeks away from the opening of the first LGBTQ+ visitor center within the National Park Service, and that is because of the pivotal working relationship we had with BCLP.

What are the BCLP team like to work with?

Kurt, James and Daisy Reeves in London have been on speed dial for six years.

They have become some of my best friends.

From day one, they grasped the spirit of our project without needing much explanation. They see things from different perspectives and proactively anticipate challenges I would have never seen coming. They instantly understood the vision; the fact that we're leading this historic moment together and creating a legacy for the community. The manner in which they interact with the client is exceptional; they have a patient, caring ear; they have the attention to detail and the confidence to make decisions in the moment. Every time I had an interaction with them, I knew I was heard and that everything was moving forward. While legal aspects of any project are rarely in the spotlight, their contributions have been fundamental to our success. Their pro-bono work has laid the groundwork for our project, setting us on the right path.

What are your hopes for the future of the Visitor Centre?

First and foremost, I'm excited we're opening and welcoming the public into this space, where they can experience our community and share their feedback with us. Our hope is that visitors walk in and immerse themselves in the exhibits, taking in the history and connecting

with the significance of the space they're standing in. I hope they feel the impact... that they are compelled to do something... to support the community, to support the ongoing fight for equality. For me, our success is how we impact people to take action.

My dream for the Visitor Center is that it sparks a ripple effect of change. Even the smallest actions can create meaningful impact, and I hope our visitors leave with a sense of empowerment, ready to make a difference in the world around them.

With the doors opening on June 28, what is your one message regarding the significance of the visitor centre?

My message is two-fold. One, while the Visitor Center's importance was clear six years ago when we started, in the midst of recent events both here and abroad, its significance has only grown. Now more than ever, it stands as a beacon of resilience and a testament to the ongoing fight for equality. Secondly, the Visitor Center serves as a reminder that the fight is ongoing and there is still much work to be done. The pursuit of equality is always worth it, and the Visitor Center represents our continued progress on the shoulders of those who fought for change 55 years ago.



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Diana Rodriguez



**Stonewall
National Monument**
Visitor Center

A Program of Pride Live

Getting in touch

When you need a practical legal solution for your next business opportunity or challenge, please get in touch.

Read more about how we helped Diana make the Stonewall National Monument Visitor Center a reality.

Read the story 

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