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In Orlando shooting's aftermath, Hampton Roads businesses offer support

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Bill Tiernan | The Virginian-Pilot

Small pride flags were at each table Monday afternoon, June 13, 2016, at Brick Anchor Brew House on Granby Street in Norfolk for Pridefest. The restaurant is also donating a portion of its proceeds this week to charity in remembrance of the Orlando shooting victims.



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Signs were placed in the window Monday, June 13, 2016, at Brick Anchor Brew House on Granby Street in Norfolk in remembrance of the Orlando shooting victims.

NORFOLK

When the miniature rainbow flags arrived at his restaurant Friday, Phil Smith was still figuring out all the ways he would show his support for the upcoming PrideFest.

His staff at Brick Anchor Brew House placed a flag at every table, and Smith debated something special for the menu – like rainbow trout – as a nod to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender customers.

Three days later, Smith added new decorations in the windows of the Granby Street business.

“In remembrance of those lost in Orlando,” the signs said on rainbow flag backgrounds, “The Brick Anchor Brew House stands with you.”

Smith and other business owners began this week with the sobering challenge of responding to a tragedy 750 miles south of Hampton Roads.

The shooting rampage Sunday at a gay nightclub in Orlando, an event labeled the worst mass shooting in U.S. history, has shaken the nation. In the days leading up to PrideFest on Saturday, restaurants and clubs are reckoning with how to balance celebration and grief.

Some proprietors have taken steps to beef up security at their establishments. Others have scrambled to raise money for the Orlando victims or LGBT causes.

Smith plans to donate 5 percent of Brick Anchor’s net sales from this week to an organization of Hampton Roads Business Outreach’s choosing. The outreach is an affiliate of the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce. He anticipates a donation of \$1,200 to \$1,500.

Annette Stone, who owns The Green Onion, 37th and Zen and Hershee Bar in Norfolk, is also raising money in the aftermath of the shooting. At all three businesses this week, Stone is setting aside 20 percent of her sales for the crowd-funding campaign to support the Orlando victims’ families.

Spearheaded by Equality Florida, the GoFundMe page surpassed \$2 million in donations Monday.

Stone, whose Hershee Bar has been a lesbian hangout since 1983, said the Orlando shooting is a sad reminder that prejudice against gay and lesbian people continues.

Though turnout was low Sunday, Stone spent \$15 an hour for extra peace of mind. She hired a guard to keep watch and will continue to

have security for the rest of the week.

“If anybody needs to talk or if they need a hug just to feel safe, or just to be heard, I want to be there for them,” Stone said.

Alan Phillips, a co-owner of The Rainbow Cactus, said the gay club will be raising money for Orlando Pride for the rest of June. The Virginia Beach club, which raises money for different causes each month with a weekly “wet-n-wild” event, collected \$1,400 Sunday.

Originally Phillips and his business partner, Krisha Loftus, intended June’s focus to be on a diabetes charity. After the Orlando shooting, they immediately switched gears.

The wet-n-wild events are held every Sunday night. These adult auctions involve a kiddie pool, scantily-clothed volunteers and an opportunity for bidders to throw buckets of water.

Phillips and Loftus plan to match the donations they receive. Like Hershee Bar, Rainbow Cactus was slow Sunday night. Gay bars are safe havens for people to express themselves without fear of judgment or danger, Phillips said; he hopes people who stayed home were processing their emotions, but not fearful.

“If I didn’t have a business to run,” Phillips said, “I could have seen myself sitting in a chair staring at CNN all day.”