

# **Pride in Places: Midwest city shows Pride with a new Rainbow Crosswalk**

By Jamie Valentino May 30, 2023 at 7:05pm



Photo courtesy of Ian DeGraff, photographed for Our Lives Magazine.

Don't let a dated reputation about the Midwest stop you from getting to know [Madison](#) and its queer community, including crossing its latest tribute to them.

In September 2022, Wisconsin's second-largest city joined dozens of other US cities to [implement a permanent rainbow crosswalk](#). The nonprofit The Friends of the Madison Arts Commission (FoMAC) raised funds for the Progress Pride Flag crosswalk. Organization chair Kia Karlen said in a press release that the rainbow crosswalk tradition serves as an affirming symbol to their surrounding local LGBTQIA+ communities and allies.

Gays tend to seek refuge in metropolises lying on the edges of the map, but history shows that queer leaders broke ground across the nation. This is especially true in a swing state like Wisconsin, where visibility can inspire the most palpable change.



Madison's Rainbow Crosswalk ribbon-cutting ceremony featuring Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway. (Photo: Ian DeGraff)

But despite Wisconsin's bipartisan demographic, activism and solidarity can be traced through its history, including in 1982 [when then-governor Lee Dreyfus made it the first State to provide legal protections for queer people](#) in work and housing.

The occasion marked Wisconsin as a leader in the equal rights movement.

For this reason, queer visibility manifests beyond Madison's colorful new crosswalk at the top of State Street. At the ribbon-cutting ceremony, it made it all the more appropriate that Mayor Satya Rhodes-

Conway was there to help do the honors; she is Wisconsin's first out lesbian elected as a mayor and only the second woman to hold the position.

Surely, inclusivity and diversity must have been brewing for some time in a city with the mayor wearing her title on a rainbow satchel and shouting "Pride!" at the end of a countdown. Madison is known for its pro-gay rights political ideology.



Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway giving remarks at the Madison Rainbow Crosswalk ribbon-cutting ceremony. (Photo: Ian DeGraff)

"This is a symbol, but we need to be worthy of that symbol. So I hope it can inspire people when they see it to really live it," said Madison Arts Program Administrator Karin Wolf to local press at the scene. "It's a cultural signifier that Madison is a welcoming and inclusive city, not only for our LGBTQIA residents but for visitors as well," Wolf added.

Once upon a time, the only buildings with rainbow flags were gay bars like [Shamrock Bar & Grille](#), [FIVE Nightclub](#), and [Wolf's](#). But the tradition of the Rainbow Crosswalk creates a unique geographic landmark of queerness that unites different municipalities in solidarity. You can find them in [San Francisco](#), [Key West](#), [Philadelphia](#), [Seattle](#), and less suspecting places, like Madison.



We love to see representation in Google Maps. (Photo: City of Madison)

A city's infrastructure reflects its past generations of residents; public parks are decorated with fountains, engravings, and statues paying homage to hometown heroes. However, public landmarks are also created to honor the strength and resilience of people wronged by society. They can be seen as much as a sign of validation as they are an apology for not getting there sooner.

Ultimately, Madison stands as the most LGBTQ+ friendly city in Wisconsin, and its newfound Rainbow Crosswalk echoes that the streets are built by a city that welcomes all to drive on them.