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## Egg Roll Madness Ensues

By Kerry Eleveld

Thousands of kids are running amok today on the south lawn of the White House for the annual Easter Egg Roll, and among them will be the rainbow lei-clad kids of about 110 LGBT-led families who have traveled from states like Minnesota, South Carolina, New York, and California.

"We told our rabbi we're not going as Jews, we're going as lesbians," said Kim Bergman, who came from the Golden State with her partner, Natalie Bergman, and their kids Abby and Jenna, who are 13 and 10. "It's not about Easter for us. It's about being in the shadow of the White House as an invited guest."

The White House Office of Public Liaison reached out to Jennifer Chrisler, executive director of the Family Equality Council, several weeks ago to indicate they were interested in "making sure there was a diverse representation at the Egg Roll," according to Chrisler. FEC was issued 10 tickets, and sources say at least 5 other LGBT equality organizations received 10 tickets each, though a White House spokesperson would not confirm the actual number.

Bergman said the invitation from the White House was a welcome treat for her kids, who were old enough to understand the implications of the Proposition 8 vote banning same-sex marriage in their state.

On election night, her kids had stayed up long enough to see Barack Obama get elected and then went to bed. "My eldest woke up the next morning, and the first thing out of her mouth was, 'Prop. 8?'" Bergman said, adding that Abby had actively tracked the issue and phone-banked for defeat of the measure. "It's great, especially in light of Prop. 8, to have my kids feel a renewed affirmation."

Tommy Starling and Jeff Littlefield (pictured, top) of South Carolina are simply enjoying the opportunity to be around other LGBT-led families.

"The closest gay couple with kids we know is in Charleston, about one and a half hours away," said Starling, who lives on Pawleys Island with Littlefield and their 2-year-old daughter, Carrigan.

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Jennifer Chrisler (left) of Family Equality Council, her wife Cheryl Jacques, and their sons Tim and Tom.

Although the couple does not have a circle of gay families around them, they have formed a strong support network with straight families on the island who stood firmly behind Starling's successful bid last year to win a seat on the school board. Prior to the election, an anonymous "concerned parent" circulated a letter warning other parents not to vote for Starling because of his sexuality and questionable morals. "It caused a backlash," he said. "A number of parents contacted me to say they were supportive. It was really surprising. We weren't expecting that."

Perhaps the biggest difference in this year's Egg Roll from past years' events is the lack of controversy surrounding the inclusion of LGBT-led families.



An unidentified male couple with Colleen Gillespie (middle) and Alisa Surkis (right) and the their daughters Zelda (being held) and Ella.

"In 2006 a lot of people were really questioning what we were going to be doing there -- whether we were there to protest, whether we would be holding up signs, whether we were going to borrow kids to get in," says Alisa Surkis, who along with her partner, Colleen Gillespie, first hatched the idea of organizing a gay migration to the annual White House event three years

ago. "That doesn't really seem to be a question now. I think everyone understands that we're families and we just want to go and have fun with our kids."

The Brooklyn couple embarked on the journey this year with their two daughters -- Ella, 6, and Zelda, 2 -- along with a certain sense of satisfaction in having accomplished their original mission.

"We just wanted our families to be seen," Surkis said, "and for the Administration now to be reaching out to our families feels pretty good."



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