

Belvedere cop's nonprofit fills void for LGBTQ+ community

By NAOMI FRIEDLAND

nfriedland@thearknewspaper.com ——— It was Christmastime about six years ago when Belvedere police Sgt. Tom Sabido and wife Barbara visited their oldest son, Dominic, at his job at Lookout, a gay bar in San Francisco's Castro district. Dominic, who is gay, had invited them to attend a drag brunch, a new experience for both his parents.

During the show, the couple says, they were approached by an older man who held out his hand.

"Thank you for loving your son," they recall the man saying. "I lost my parents when I came out."

The interaction gave Barbara an idea. On the ride home to San Rafael, she explained to Tom that she wanted to create a nonprofit geared toward providing support to members of the LGBTQ+ community who may lack a relationship with their own parents.

Tom was immediately on board and came up with the name and motto: (ap)Parent Love.

"We want to provide a parent's love, and we want that love to be apparent," he says.

They launched the nonprofit in 2022 ——— See NONPROFIT, *page 17*

Above, Belvedere police Sgt. Tom Sabido (right) and wife Barbara are seen with son Dominic (fourth right) and other 'family members' of their nonprofit, (ap)Parent Love. They started the group to support those in the queer community who lack relationships with their parents. PROVIDED BY THE SABIDOS

———— and through their work aim to provide a family- type connection to the

dozens of members of the queer community who are currently a part of their group. That includes hosting gatherings, supporting individuals in their hobbies and passions and spending one-on-one time with individuals or small groups.

Tom, 60, and Barbara, 59, both grew up in Southern California and met at a bar nearly four decades ago. They moved to Northern California in 1997.

Tom established a career as a chiropractor and transitioned to law enforcement in his early 30s, joining the San Rafael Police Department. While there, aided by his Spanish fluency from living in Mexico as a teenager, he worked numerous criminal investigations and was on the city's hostage negotiation team. He also earned a master's degree in psychology with the intention of taking over the role of mental-health liaison officer, but the program was cut in the 2008 recession before he could take the job.

He retired in 2018 after 21 years with the department, but was recruited to join the Tiburon force the same year by then-Chief Michael Cronin, who knew Sabido from when Cronin was police chief in San Rafael. He joined the Belvedere department as a sergeant in 2020.

Barbara has worked as the events coordinator at BayMarin Community Church, as the coordinator of the Marin Teen Girl Conference and as the director of operations for the Marin Girls Chorus. In addition, she has served as the co-instructor of the introduction to foster and foster-adopt parenting class at the College of Marin's Indian Valley Campus and as the executive director of the Marin Foster Care Association.

She currently works part-time as the operations coordinator for BayMarin Community Church. Starting (ap)Parent Love was in many ways a natural step for the Sabidos. The couple had four sons together and also fostered 17 children as their sons were growing up. Prior to establishing (ap)Parent Love, they had frequently invited Dominic's gay friends to holiday gatherings, noting some lived too far from their parents or didn't have anywhere to go because the family they grew up with no longer accepted them.

The organization is volunteer-led by the two of them, with help from a contracted employee that runs the organization's social media. The

organization is funded through donations and has a board that aids in decision making. Eventually, the Sabidos say, they would like to raise enough money to have a place where they can host (ap)Parent Love gatherings. Currently, the Sabidos say, there are between two and three dozen “family members,” as they call them, who participate in (ap)Parent Love. Most are men between the ages of 20 and 50.

The nonprofit hosts three types of programs: “Family Time,” gatherings that range from home-cooked meals to game nights; “Go There,” in which the Sabidos support hobbies or attend events the “family members” are interested in, such as sporting events, birthday parties or even exercise classes; and “Real Time,” in which the Sabidos go on walks with individuals or small groups. Typically, these walks are not planned but occur when the Sabidos run into a “family member” in the Castro or are walking from place to place with them.

“When you walk with someone, it provides a different path to a conversation,” Tom says.

Barbara notes that (ap)Parent Love is designed to show up for members of the queer community, both physically and emotionally.

“We are finding that there are so many members of the LGBTQ community that don’t have family members that want to hear about their entire lives,” she says, adding that she and her husband want to fill that gap.

San Francisco resident Zach Smolsky, one of (ap)Parent Love’s “family members,” notes he has not always had the best relationship with his family due to his queer identity.

“I think a lot of people will probably share my sentiment that being around family can sometimes be extremely stressful,” he says. “You might not always feel that you could be your authentic self or that you have to kind of be a more reserved version of that just to kind of keep the peace. Whereas being around (ap)Parent Love, it’s wonderful because there’s never any expectation of you hiding or modifying who you are. It’s home, maybe away from home, if home is a complicated place.”

Christopher Niles of San Francisco, who identifies as gay and was friends with Dominic Sabido prior to the founding of (ap)Parent Love, says attending the Sabidos' family events have allowed him to heal some of his family-related wounds from childhood.

He notes one of his favorite (ap)Parent Love events was a brownie bake-off, where participants tried each other's culinary creations and voted for their favorite. He says he has always loved baking, but it was considered a feminine activity when he was growing up. Now, Niles says, he feels comfortable partaking in activities that as a child were not seen as stereotypically masculine.

"You would think that baking brownies was trivial, but it does stir up emotions from childhood," he says. "You think, 'This is something I would love to do,' but I was ashamed of in terms of conforming to gender norms."

Participating in events like the bake-off with (ap)Parent Love "brings out childlike experiences that maybe we didn't get to have but in a new safe fun space."

Dominic Sabido says that many parents offer their support to the queer community, noting he's seen parents holding signs at Pride events that say "Hugs from a mom" or "Hugs from a dad." But what his parents are building with (ap)Parent Love is different.

"It is more than just a hug in that they are inviting (queer people) into their home and showing how the queer umbrella should all just be there for each other," he says.

Another "family member," Brendan McBride, notes that the concept of "chosen families" "are just a really important part of the queer community and queer identities in general."

"Not all of us get to hold onto all our familial relationships when we come out, and that leaves a hole in our queer community," he says.

He calls (ap)Parent Love "a really beautiful endeavor" and "something that a

lot of people don't generally think about in the queer community."

While he loves his chosen family, he says there is something about having a maternal or paternal figure that is important for him — "a person who has had life experiences and has a different perspective due to being a parent but also the perspective of time."

"I think it is really great that Barbara and Tom do that as a passion project," he says.

The Sabidos say they are constantly learning as they do their best to support the queer community. Son Jack Sabido, who also identifies as a member of the queer community and serves on the (ap)Parent Love board, says his parents were raised somewhat conservatively, but he has seen them learn more about the queer community over time. Dominic notes that when interacting with members of the queer community, his parents are open-minded and quick to correct any slip-ups in their interactions.

"The fact that they're always willing to learn is really fun to see because not a lot of people in generations older than mine are willing to do that," he says.

Barbara says she's learned a lot through (ap)Parent Love, not only about the ins and outs of starting a nonprofit or cooking dinner for 30, but about identifying and addressing her own biases.

"I learned that pronouns matter a great deal, and when I make a mistake, quickly correcting myself and saying, 'I'm sorry' has a great impact," she says.

Dominic notes his parents also serve as role models for other parents of queer adults, adding that sometimes (ap)Parent Love "family members" bring their parents to their gatherings when they visit from out of town.

"I know that there have been parents who have said that they wanted to try and start something like that where they live," Dominic says.

Barbara says the nonprofit has had a great impact on her family, as she's enjoyed "watching Tom be a dad to a whole new group of humans," calling him "a great listener, a great coach and just a lot of fun." She notes seeing

how their sons value the nonprofit's work, offer ideas and talk about (ap)Parent Love with their friends and coworkers "is a wonderful feeling."

Tom says the most rewarding part of the effort is "receiving and experiencing a depth of love from those who need love."

The most rewarding part for Barbara, she says, is the relationships they've developed.

"This community, despite the hurts and disappointments they've experienced, is incredibly welcoming and loving," she says. "It still surprises us that our 'family' wants to hang out with two 60-year-olds. And that they keep telling more people about us, keep greeting us with big hugs and keep inviting others to come to our family gatherings." *Reach Belvedere, Strawberry and publicsafety reporter Naomi Friedland at 415944- 4627.*