

Independent Perspective #1913

Disability Pride Festival Speaker Series with Todd Vaarwerk and Mike Rembis

Transcript

00:00:00 Speaker 1

Welcome to Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of Western New York Independent Living.

00:00:04 Speaker 1

I'm your host, Todd Vaarwerk, Chief Policy Officer at Western New York Independent Living.

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The 2026 Disability Pride Festival is taking place on Friday, July 24th at Buffalo River Works.

00:00:14 Speaker 1

Among the many activities taking place that day, the festival will feature a speaker series.

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Joining us today to talk about the speaker series and the activities taking place during the festival is the series committee chairperson, Mike Rembis.

00:00:26 Speaker 1

Welcome to the show, Mike.

00:00:28 Speaker 2

Hi, Todd.

00:00:28 Speaker 2

I'm glad to be here.

00:00:29 Speaker 2

Thanks for inviting me.

00:00:31 Speaker 1

Mike, let's start with a brief discussion of the lightning talks and the regular talks.

00:00:35 Speaker 1

What's the difference between the two?

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And what are some of the topics that might be covered?

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Sure, yeah.

00:00:41 Speaker 2

We decided as a committee to take a slightly different approach this year in organizing the speaker's tent, which has been part of the event as long as I can remember.

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But we decided to have different formats,

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and expand our reach in the community to get other folks to join in.

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And, so we created what we're calling lightning talks, which are-- if folks just want to come in and do a quick two or three minute, three or four minute max talk, if they want to announce something, if they want to talk about something that's really near and dear to them, they can do that in a very quick and easy format.

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And then we have longer talks that we're just calling talks that are--

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10 to 12 minutes.

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And so that's if people want to educate folks on something.

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If they have something that they're really interested in, that they want to share with the community, they can spend more time on it and use that longer format.

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And then we also have posters as well, where people can make a poster about a particular topic and potentially, and they'll be on display the day of the event on July 24th, and they have the potential to win a

00:01:50 Speaker 2

prize if their poster is selected as the best one.

00:01:53 Speaker 1

So, election season is coming up soon.

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So, another of the activities in the speaker's area features a mock debate and an accessible voting machine.

00:02:00 Speaker 1

Why don't you tell me a little bit about that?

00:02:03 Speaker 2

Yeah, well, this is something that we've done in the past as well and at other events and other times as well, not just this event, but it's a mock debate and vote to get people excited and interested in voting and to maybe learn how to vote if they don't have experience voting.

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And so, we'll do a mock debate, usually between bologna and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, which one is better, who's the better candidate, and then folks will,

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so, they'll hear people speak, one representing bologna, the other peanut butter and jelly, and then folks will be able to vote throughout the day.

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And at the end of the day, we'll tally up the votes and see who won.

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And this is just a really fun way of getting people interested

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In voting, and if they haven't voted, learning how to vote, which is super important all the time, but it's especially important this year.

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Absolutely.

00:02:57 Speaker 1

And of course, we'll be using the accessible ballot marking devices, right, the Automark.

00:03:02 Speaker 2

Yes, yeah, we'll have the voting machine there for people to practice on, and we'll be using, yeah, the accessible voting machines.

00:03:09 Speaker 2

Yep.

00:03:09 Speaker 1

I want to go back and talk a little bit about the poster contest for the speaker's area.

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Sure.

00:03:16 Speaker 1

I know that we might not necessarily know a lot about the submissions until right before the event, but not a lot of people might know, you know, what a poster is from your academic background.

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Can you talk a little bit about the difference between, say, a poster and a speech?

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Sure, yeah.

00:03:35 Speaker 2

And I can say that we have a pretty good turnout so far, but we're always excited to receive more submissions and folks can e-mail me or contact you to submit

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something that they want to present at the speaker's tent.

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We're taking submission still.

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We have two posters and we have 10, or I'm sorry, eight talks.

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And so, a poster is just, it's something that's used in school a lot, especially at the university level.

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It's just a way for people to share ideas, share a project that they're working on, share a message to the community,

00:04:08 Speaker 2

and not necessarily have to talk.

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Some people might be shy, they might not want to talk, but they might be a really terrific artist, and they might really enjoy making a poster.

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And so, they can make a poster, and we'll display it on an easel, and we'll have the community judge the posters and the best one will receive a prize.

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And so, they can be about anything, any topic that folks want to share with the community,

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as long as it relates to the themes of the event.

00:04:34 Speaker 1

Excellent.

00:04:34 Speaker 1

And if somebody wanted to do a speaking or a poster, how would they get a hold of you?

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They can e-mail me at M-A-R-E-M-B-I-S at buffalo.edu.

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And I'll give them the, I can send them the flyer and give them instructions on how to apply.

00:04:57 Speaker 1

Absolutely.

00:04:58 Speaker 1

Thank you so much for coming in.

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That's all the time we've got this week, Mike.

00:05:01 Speaker 1

And thank you for joining us at Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of Western New York Independent Living.

00:05:06 Speaker 1

Today's guest was Mike Rembis, chairman of the speaker series for this year's Disability Pride Festival.

00:05:11 Speaker 1

And I've been your host, Todd Vaarwerk.