



Photos by Becky Young

Four princesses were in the spotlight of the... Debutante Ball

By JOCK HATFIELD
Of the Emerald

They were dressed in fake wigs, pancake make-up and dresses. It was the debutante drag. Four gay debutantes were coming out at Pearl Street Station.

"And now princess Julie..." A man dressed in a mink coat and feathers marched up the aisle to coronation music. Around the room other gays, wearing more sequins, wigs and feathers, clapped wildly. The smell of chap perfume floated about.

The four princesses, Julie, Didi, Darlene and Sandy were in drag for the first time. It was their night, and they were nervous. For the first time they had donned woman's clothes. If they did well they would come closer to the coveted title of Empress of the Emerald Empire's Imperial Court.

The crowd cheered them on. Debutante No. 7 came out dressed in blue chiffon, mouthing the words to a taped recording. "I never wanted to touch a man, the way that I want to touch you," he sang, looking out into the audience. Debutante No. 2, Didi came out dressed in a drum major's outfit singing "Everything I've Got Belongs To You."

Backstage, chaperon "Cherisse," Danny Cook, watched the debutantes with a close eye. "Make sure you walk like a lady," he warned in a matronly Carol Channing voice. "You must be every inch a woman."

"The debutantes are trying to refine themselves," he explained. "They're preparing for being Empress. Here we can laugh at each other, they're among friends. But they will have to prepare themselves for the judges."

Six years ago, Cherisse was himself elected Empress. Tonight he sat dressed in a black gown, with black eyelashes the length of toothpicks. Like other members of the Lane County chapter of the Imperial Court, Cook seldom goes drag. Outside the court he works as an aerial photographer.

"I first went drag 20 years ago," Cook recalls. "A friend in San Francisco told me I could make \$125 a week as a female impersonator. 'Oh! My God,' I said, 'I could use that.'"

He began an act called "Cookie Crumbles" in which he rode a tricycle while wearing a dress. For the last six years he used his act to bring gays together. With other members of the gay Imperial Court he says he tours the country holding balls and gatherings.

Imperial districts exist up and down the West Coast, according to Cook. Some have been established in

Arizona, Kansas and Minnesota. Elections to the Empress post are made through the general public within the districts. After candidates are screened by the Imperial Board, voters make their choice. Anyone can vote, gays and straights alike.

This year's Lane County Empress also sees his performance as an act. "It's only for show," said the Empress Alexandra, who preferred to remain otherwise anonymous. "Transvestites get off on wearing women's clothes, and they can often be straight. For me, going drag is a drag."

The Empress, a professional actor, dislikes the pancake makeup, the dresses and the high heels.

Sunday evening was officially titled "The Way We Were." In the name of nostalgia, all visitors wore their first dresses.

"It's hard to find guys that have not worn a dress," claims Cook. "These four debutantes are very virginal."

Out on the stage one of the debutantes was mouthing the words to "I Enjoy Being A Girl," and zeroing in on a member of the audience.

"Sure this is burlesque," laughs Cook, shaking his black wig, "but the Imperial Ball has a lot of pomp and circumstance. I've spent \$1,500 on my ball dress. You can't call that burlesque."

California oil

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sources," he said.

There are also provisions in the House of Representatives' version of the coastal management legislation that would ban drilling within 15 miles of Point Reyes and allow Congress to exempt tracts from leasing.

House and Senate versions of the bill are before a two-house conference committee, according to Hal Gross, Cranston's legislative assistant on energy policy.

Much of the northern coastline could be eliminated from the leasing program by an environmental review process that will begin after nominations are submitted. The review is expected to take about two years, Grant said.

In four recent lease sales, 12 to 43 percent of the tracts were withdrawn by federal officials because of environmental considerations, according to Department of Interior figures.

"When people see tract selection they think that's a solid go-ahead for a lease sale," said Mike Fergus, a BLM public affairs officer. "That's not the case at all."

Wright said geological formations at some points along the northern coast indicate that oil may be present. But that can be misleading. "You never know until you drill," he said.

Other factors that could hold up or discourage Northern California drilling include another possible lease sale next year in Southern California and the federal legisla-

tion, Wright said. "There are a lot of changes coming that we can foresee," he said. "Changes in the law trigger volumes of new regulations. Whether these changes will make it as attractive as it is today isn't known."

Included among those possible changes is a provision that would

include the outer continental shelf under the Clean Air Act, Wright said. "That is a barrel of worms in that you have got to know what kind of emissions would come from your operations, which way the wind is going to take it, what it is going to do to air quality in those coastal basins."

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