



Over the years court members have raised an estimated half-million dollars— or about \$20,000 per year— for innumerable charities.

Above: reigning Princess XXV Poison Waters/Kevin Cook lays the foundation for glamor; Below: Poison's friend, Greg Senn, helps with the zipper

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FAMILY

It's a cloudy Monday night two weeks before the 1995 coronation. I'm sitting in the Embers, a popular gay bar in Old Town, where Imperial Sovereign Rose Court members are meeting to put the final organizational touches on the upcoming festivities.

In front of me sit Maria Council and David Hamilton. She is nearly 30 years younger than he, they are different genders, he is white, she is black.

In a country ripped apart over such differences, the two provide inspiration and hope. Their love and commitment to one another is more than obvious—it's dripping on my toes.

"I remember a time when we were in San Francisco [for a coronation event] and I was really nervous because I didn't know how people there would deal with a female empress," says the 31-year-old Council, who works in administrative services for one of the region's most powerful law firms, Stoel Rives Boley Jones & Grey.

That was back in 1993-94 when Council was enjoying her reign as Rose Empress XXXVI Maria. She candidly admits: "I was scared."

Hamilton, who had a good friend (who was also a florist) in San Francisco, was determined to put Empress Maria at ease.

"I told my friend that I had to have every rose—you know, since Maria was from the Rose City," he says.

Unbeknownst to Council, Hamilton purchased 100 dozen roses. He scattered a few on the sidewalk outside a popular drag haunt where he knew she would soon be making an appearance.

"I remember walking toward [the bar] and seeing a rose on the sidewalk. I thought, 'That's strange, someone must have dropped it there.' As I got closer and closer there were more roses, and when I walked in [to the bar], there were roses everywhere—absolutely everywhere. Can you

imagine?"

Needless to say, Maria was knocked off her feet and nervous no more.

"I love this woman," gushes Hamilton. "And I love you," Council gushes back.

"We are family," adds the Empress Mame, a

declaration the Empress Maria affirms with an enthusiastic nod.

There are many who will undoubtedly agree.

The public is welcome to attend Imperial Sovereign Rose Court meetings, which are

held the first Monday of the month at 7:30 pm, usually at the Embers, 110 NW Broadway in Portland. Anyone interested in attending the 1995 coronation or related activities should call 255-9330 for further information.



PHOTO BY LINDA KLEVER