

CULTURE

So you think the pride celebrations end in June for Oregon residents? Think again.

This month, the various leather and fetish organizations in the Portland area are sponsoring the fourth annual Leather Pride Week. The clubs have put together a wide range of activities centering on three agendas: education, fund raising and fun.

Although often marginalized by the queer community at large—and vilified by the religious right—the leather community is a thriving part of the Portland scene. Those who are members of the “scene” aren’t always easy to categorize. Some wear leather as a fashion statement or because it looks good. Some enjoy the dynamics of power exchange or role playing in their relationships, whether long-term or more fleeting. Some engage in B/D/S/M

(bondage/domination/sadism/masochism) practices, always staying mindful of the community motto: “Safe, Sane and Consensual.” Some in the leather community don’t wear much leather at all, opting instead for other fetish clothing such as uniforms, latex or lace.

In the 1970s, the leather scene was concentrated mainly on men, who congregated at JR’s Cell and private parties. With the 1987 founding of the Seattle-based National Leather Association—and, shortly thereafter, a Portland chapter—and the 1989 founding of the Oregon Guild Activists of S/M (ORGASM), the movement became much more engineered toward both educational functions and pansexual activities, which allowed men and women of any sexual orientation to interact and participate in activities together.

“When I first wore leather out to the bars, most of the gay community would avoid anyone in leather,” says Paul Tucker, one of the leaders of the social group Portland Leather Men. “Over time, the separation between men and women and leather and nonleather has lessened. Today, anyone can wear leather without having it assumed they are into heavy S/M. In some ways, I miss the clear distinction of leather, but in many other ways, I enjoy the more inclusive atmosphere of today.”

KT Chase, Blackout Leather Productions president, has held the titles International Master 1992 and Ms. National Leather Association-International 1992-93. She notes that in the past decade, she has “seen many improvements in education and information directed towards the leather community. There are vast improvements in organizing and formation of specific groups that meet the needs of our diverse community. Acceptance of heterosexuals and transgenders has also improved. We still have a long way to go, but some things are definitely better than they were in the past.”

One of Portland’s two most visible groups, **Blackout Leather Productions** is a nonprofit “organized exclusively for charitable, religious, educational and scientific purposes,” Chase says. “We produce events that benefit organizations throughout the community. Blackout’s participation in Oregon Leather Pride Week is part of this effort to raise such funds.”

Although many of Blackout’s past functions have benefited causes as diverse as breast cancer research, battered women’s shelters and AIDS hospices, Chase says: “This year, our selected charity for Leather Pride Week is HAAP (the

Darklady (right) flails around with Marlene Kendrick

Basic black

Oregon’s leather community celebrates pride with heart and education **BY ANDY MANGELS**

HIV/AIDS Awareness Program out of the Oregon State Penitentiary). HAAP educates inmates about the spread of HIV and AIDS. Inmates who graduate from this program, upon their release, go out into the general community and do outreach to educate other members of our society.”

The other main sponsor of Leather Pride Week is the **Portland Leather Alliance**, a group formed after political battles led to a split-up with the National Leather Association in late 1998. Another not-for-profit corporation, the alliance is “the largest pansexual organization in the Northwest offering support, outreach and education for the B/D/S/M-leather-fetish community,” secretary Michael Marks says. “Straight society often sends

negative images of B/D/S/M and related activities and makes out the practice of B/D/S/M as some sort of sinister endeavor. PLA, along with groups such as the Rose City Discussion Club, provides a welcoming climate for practitioners of alternative sexual activities and introduces them to other people who validate their inclination that what they do in their bedrooms is not sick, deviant or dangerous to society at large.”

According to Marks, the alliance “provides outreach not only to members of the B/D/S/M-leather-fetish community but also to other sexual minorities and individuals who are marginalized from the straight world. In the past, the PLA has raised funds and donations for Esther’s Pantry, the Sexual Minorities Youth Resource Center and the Bradley-Angle House, among other local charitable organizations.” In addition, the alliance maintains regular contact with groups

The PLA board gets happy

including the Imperial Sovereign Rose Court, the Portland Bisexual Alliance, Pride Northwest, the Lesbian Community Project, the Northwest Gender Alliance and, recently, the Portland Police Bureau’s Sexual Minorities Roundtable “to make sure that all alternative sexual communities are represented in efforts to create a safe climate in which members of sexual minorities can live their lives.”

Education and technique are the main goals of the pansexual **Rose City Discussion Club**, which welcomes men and women older than 18, no matter what their sexual orientation or skill level. Founded in 1993, it plays host to workshops with titles such as “Spanking Good Time,” “Dungeon Etiquette,” “Role Play” and “Switching Sides,” with guest speakers and experts offering resources in a friendly, social atmosphere.

According to its mission statement, the club offers “an informal neutral forum and a supportive environment to diverse alternative interests.” Stressing education, resources and a social atmosphere, it “promotes the encouragement of people in their acceptance of themselves as normal, productive individuals

that also have unique preferences. Different is the norm here.”

For those who want a more hands-on approach to the leather world, Portland has several monthly pansexual parties as well as men-only and women-only play parties. Marks is one of the organizers of Portland’s **Men-Only Play Party**, which meets the second Saturday of each month at a lavishly decorated home “dungeon.” The gathering is not only a place for men to engage in fetish activities, it is yet another chance for men to socialize and learn about their different interests and techniques.

The same night as the Men’s Party—at a different location—Ruth plays host to **Lulu’s Pervy Playhouse**. Also known as “Dyke Daddy,” she has been active in the B/D/S/M community for more than 20 years. The organizer of “Leather Tastings” during Leather Pride Week each year, Ruth says she “co-hosts three B/D/S/M play parties a month, including Lulu’s Pervy Playhouse, a social/play-oriented B/D/S/M group for self-identified women only.”

A more social group is **Portland Leather Men**, which has been meeting for almost two decades. Tucker explains the group originally started meeting in a restaurant, then switched to monthly potlucks in members’ homes.

“The group has never had officers, bylaws, dues or any formality,” he said. “We just meet the second Saturday of the month at a home to share food and leather news and to socialize and meet old and new leather friends.”

He grins and adds: “Several marriages have resulted over a good plate of food. We welcome any man who is interested in leather, be he a novice or an old pro who bought his first set of chaps when Oregon was a territory.”

Two years ago, after Leather Pride Week, Dustin Posner organized a twice-monthly set of leather socials at the Dirty Duck. On the first and third Friday evenings of each month, he encourages everyone in leather to show up for socializing and fun.

“I was dissatisfied when I would go out and I didn’t see friends and peers,” Posner says. “This gave us a way of being organized and coming out at a time when you know you’ll see your friends.”

Posner says for him, the leather community represents “a sense of tribe, identity and family in a way I hadn’t experienced before.”

■ See Page 24 for details on most LEATHER PRIDE WEEK events.

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Dustin Posner poses