

CULTURE

Lock up your daughters

It's time for Oregon's biggest leather event of the year

BY LISA BRADSHAW

What do you think, dear, shall we take the open weave sling or the solid? Do you like this studded wrist restraint or this one? Oh, where did I put that zip hood...

Get yourselves ready, Portland. Oregon Leather Pride Week is Aug. 2 to 11.

Sponsored by Blackout Leather Productions, who started it up six years ago, and Portland Leather Alliance, who came on board a couple of years later, the list of activities during this annual nine-day affair is exhaustive. Each organization has its own slew of events, which *Bad Girls*, *In Uniform* magazine, Portland Leather Men and the Imperial Sovereign Rose Court all add to with black-clad abandon. The week's diversions draw people from around the state.

Why a Leather Pride Week? "Because members of the leather and B/D/S/M community want to celebrate who they are," says alliance president Ruth Thomas (aka Dyke Daddy),



"just as members of other communities want to celebrate who they are."

The groups hope this event fosters not just stability and encouragement among members themselves but in those outside the leather community as well. "We call it a Pride celebration," Thomas explains, "because we are often treated as less equal than other human beings and sometimes as monsters, so we want to remind ourselves and the broader community that we are proud of ourselves, of each other and of the community that we have built."

The alliance's biggest event of the season is *Leathers, Feathers and Fur*, a 21-and-over fetish ball Aug. 2 at the Fez Ballroom, which kicks the week into gear. "It's an opportunity for members of our community and our friends to dress up, socialize, dance and enjoy some great entertainment," Thomas says. The ball includes a costume contest, no-host Moroccan buffet and dancing with DJ Lauren. It seems there are other forms of dancing, too: Snake, belly and fire are all included on the bill.

Blackout Leather Productions, the only leather nonprofit in the state, donates all proceeds from its events to Portland-area charities. This year the recipient is Camp Starlight,

a summer camp for children affected by HIV/AIDS.

"Leather Pride is another way for the leather community to all come together at once besides during Gay Pride," Blackout president Don Hood says, "but it's also a way for us to show our...fund-raising efforts for the community because this is always a fund-raising week."

Blackout's showcase event is the Mr. and Ms. Oregon State Leather Contest, which this year for the first time will also include Leather Community Awards. Lest you think you can show up Aug. 10 at Embers as Best Dressed and win, think again. This thing is tougher than Miss America: Contestants are asked about their community involvement, knowledge of leather history and fund-raising abilities. They have to perform a fantasy entertainment selection, offer a "street look," endure a question-and-answer session and give a speech.

Last year's winners were Tobin Britton and Rob Hathaway. Earlier this year Britton went on to win American Leatherwoman 2002, the only specifically gay and lesbian national leather competition.



Portland Leather Alliance bounds from a Spirit of Pride Award right into Oregon Leather Pride Week

Winners are busy all year long fulfilling their obligations to represent the leather community at various functions and to raise money. "It's an all-volunteer organization," Hood emphasizes. "Nobody gets paid; everything that we do goes right back into our community."

Other highlights include a Kink Auction, S/M demonstrations at Leather Tastings, a Leather Family Barbecue, a Leather and Lace Show, an Erotica Show and a smattering of play parties. ☐

See Pages 28 and 29 for complete OREGON LEATHER PRIDE WEEK events and activities.

LISA BRADSHAW is the Arts and Culture Editor at Just Out.

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