

## CULTURE

## Devil in a red dress

From humble beginnings sprouts one of the hottest annual tickets in town

BY MICHAEL E BARRETT

Ever wanted to be a drag queen but couldn't be bothered with the whole makeup, wig and high heels thing? Well, put on your happy face because the fourth annual Red Dress Party is March 27.

Actually, drag isn't really what this party is about, but show up in anything other than a red dress and you'll spend your evening outside the front door.

This is the now notorious yearly 21-and-over party where the dress code is self-explanatory. You don't have to wear makeup, a wig or heels, though you can bet some will. You do have to wear a red dress. Not a skirt. Not a kilt. And for god's sake not pants. A dress. And it has to be red.

Party co-founder Kyle Sheeley reminds us that "the first year was just silly and frumpy—\$5 muumuus, feather boas and combat boots" were the couture du jour—but as partygoers have discovered the joy of accessorizing through the years, they've gone "all-out to look as sexy or as butch as they can in a red dress."

As one who went the sexy route last year, I can tell you the fashion ranged indeed from femme to butch to downright scary. Which brings me to the part where I mention you don't even have to wear underwear. I might have noticed some who didn't last year. Not that I was looking.

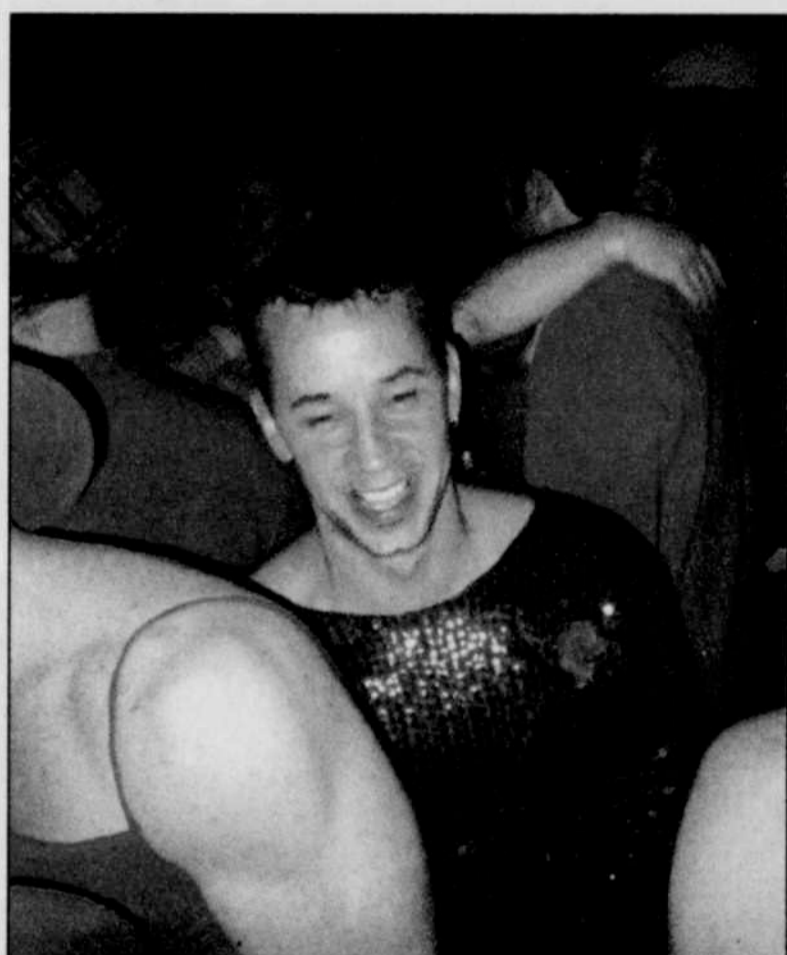
And lest you think there will only be cocks under those frocks, organizers say this party's for real girls, too. Says party organizer Bill Soderberg, "It's just a bunch of guys and a bunch of girls having fun in red dresses and raising money for a good cause."

Two good causes, in fact. Proceeds from this year's party will go to Cascade AIDS Project's Kids' Connection program, which serves children infected with HIV and delivers age-appropriate HIV prevention information, and the Sexual Minority Youth Resource Center, which provides a safe haven for queer and questioning kids.

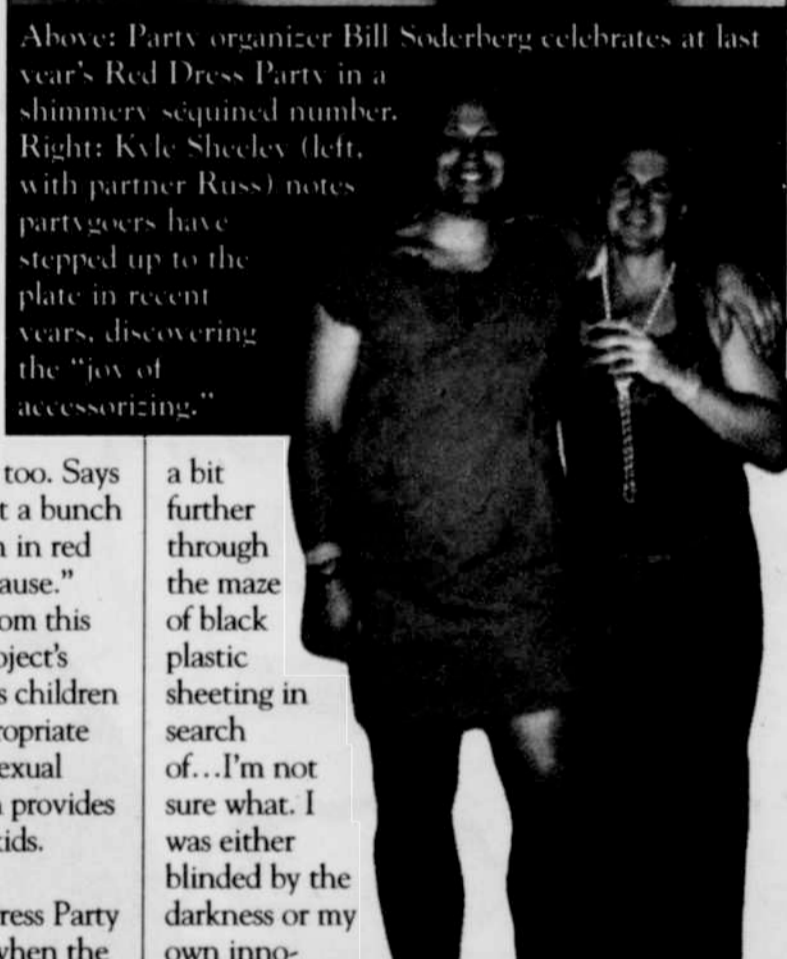
The philanthropic side of the Red Dress Party is a new component that evolved when the event moved out of a North Portland basement and into a vacant grain silo loft behind Portland Public Schools headquarters. Thanks to Barry Pilip and Jim Feild, founders of the summertime Alley Productions events, Red Dress has grown from a house party of about 75 friends to more than 325 guests. The number is expected to top 500 this year and will include out-of-towners from places like New York, Los Angeles and Vancouver, British Columbia, based on advance ticket sales.

Tempted, but not yet convinced? Consult your inner party animal because for 25 bucks, you get live entertainment, dancing to music by DJs Stormy and Puppet, a midnight fashion contest and hosted beer, cocktails and hors d'oeuvres. You read it correctly—hosted alcohol. You can leave your cash—and your purse—at home.

Oh yes, and there are the "lounges." Tired feet find an oasis of relaxation in a semi-enclosed area away from the dance floor (simply follow the trail of detached sequins). Here you can sit with friends and enjoy a drink, get a foot massage (just ask, someone will do it) or wander



Above: Party organizer Bill Soderberg celebrates at last year's Red Dress Party in a shimmering sequined number. Right: Kyle Sheeley (left, with partner Russ) notes partygoers have stepped up to the plate in recent years, discovering the "joy of accessorizing."



a bit further through the maze of black plastic sheeting in search of...I'm not sure what. I was either blinded by the darkness or my own innocence, so I really don't know what was going on back there.

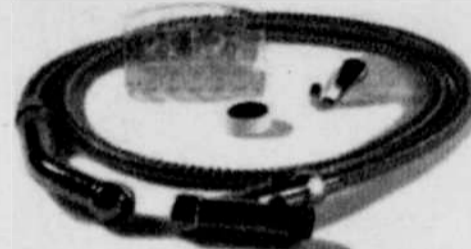
Don't own a red dress? Ask your mom to make you one; she's probably been dying to. Better yet, make a day out of it on a shopping tour of Portland's numerous vintage and otherwise secondhand clothing stores (you can take your mom along or not, up to you). My suggestions: Magpie on Southwest Ninth Avenue, Lady Luck on Southeast 28th Avenue or any Goodwill outlet.

For something a little more ready-to-wear, hit the women's department at the downtown Meier and Frank store, where there's always a sale and plenty of red. [E]

The fourth annual RED DRESS PARTY starts at 9 p.m. March 27 in the Warehouse at Kerby Alley, 2119 N. Kerby St. Tickets are \$25 from Balloons on Broadway or Gai-Pied. Visit [www.reddresspdx.com](http://www.reddresspdx.com).

MICHAEL E BARRETT is a free-lance writer who will again go the sexy route this year.

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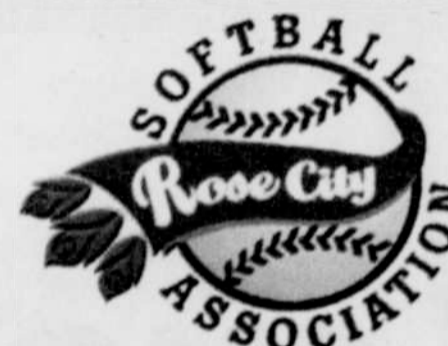
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Bid-A-Babe

- at Embers
- Bid for a date with your favorite player! •
- Doors open at 6:00 • Auction Starts at 7:00

March 26th Meet-n-Greet for New Players

- at Hobos 7-9pm

April 17th Opening Ceremonies

- at Panorama 7-9pm
- Come and Meet a Sexy Player! •

April 18th Opening Day

- George Faber Sports Complex, Hillsboro
- Cheer on your favorite team



Check out the Rose City Softball Association website at [rosecitysoftball.org](http://rosecitysoftball.org) or [portlandgaysoftball.com](http://portlandgaysoftball.com)

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