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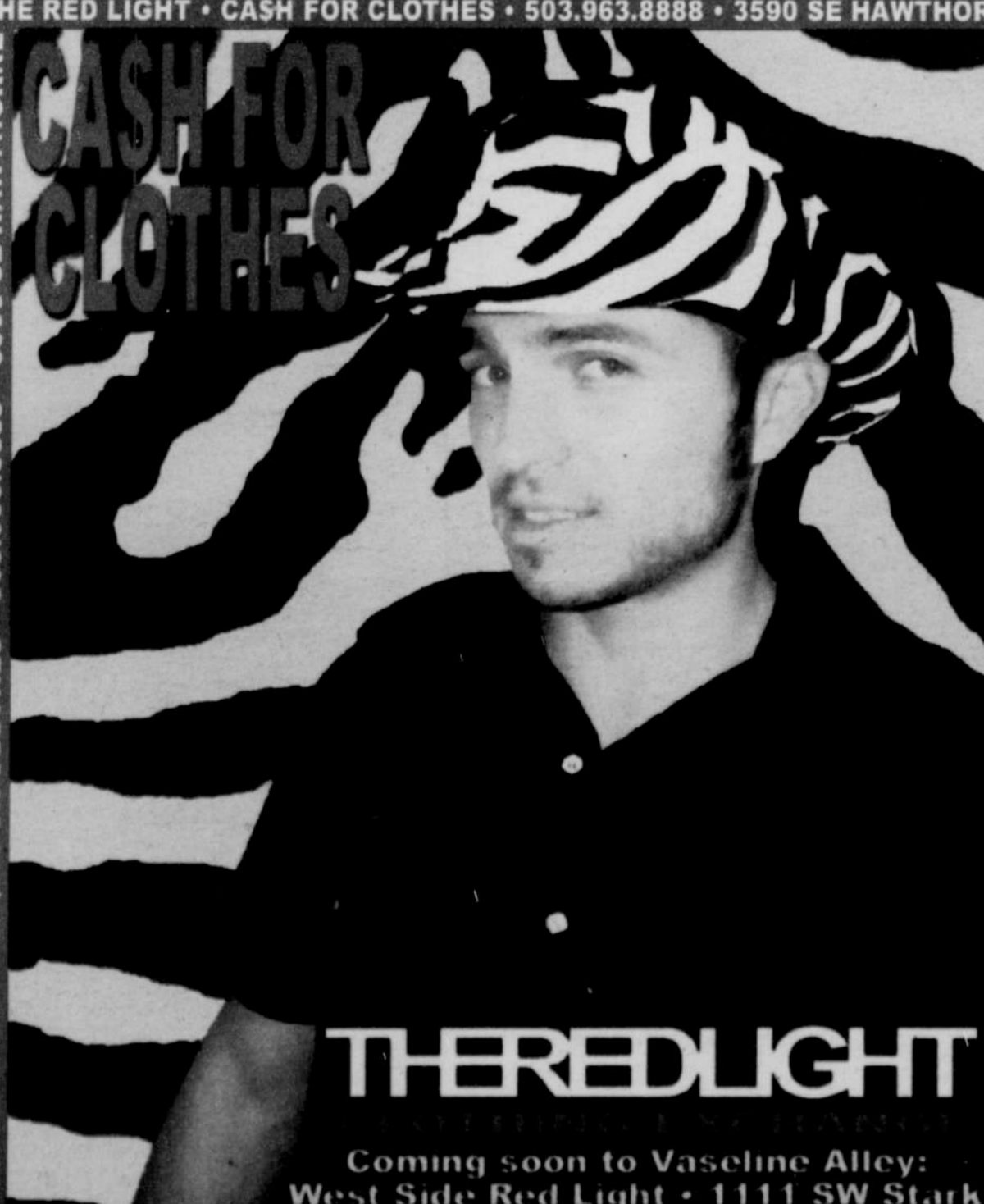
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CULTURE

Leather Power, Leather Pride

Community comes together
for a weeklong festival
of party, charity and play

BY GLENN SCOFIELD WILLIAMS

"A h...what does leather do for me?" Cheryl Spector of Blackout Leather Productions thinks a moment before continuing. "Leather is a way of life for me that is rooted in honor, integrity and family. Leather allows me to express my masochistic and sadistic tendencies in a healthy way."

Spector is a queer Portlander whose experience in the leather community spans 20 years.

"I appreciate the level of communication that I am able to achieve with other members of the community," she says. "I have learned what true trust is. I have also learned some hard lessons about who I am and what I am capable of."

Spector smiles. "Plus, it's just plain hot."

When I got my first leather wristband a few months ago—black carved leather with silver studs—something instantly changed in me. I tightened it onto my wrist, and there was a definite attitude shift. The cool smooth against my skin, the hair on my arm rising, the tight grip of the band—next thing I knew, my Inner Daddy took possession of me and I found myself cockstrutting around the house. One leather wristband released something from deep inside—something I liked having around.

What is it about leather?

"Leather is natural," says Andy Mangels, "so it feels good on the skin and smells good. Leather is protective."

Mangels is ubiquitous in the leather community, being the editor of *In Uniform* magazine as well as holding the title of Mr. Oregon State Leather 2004.

"Leather folk have an immense imagination and capacity for trying new things," he says, "and there's a reason that we tend to call leather scenes 'play.' At its heart, leather is not about darkness and pain, but about exploring limits and finding new ways to have fun."

Leather is far more than what is worn. The leather scene includes everything from the leather/rubber/spandex fetish to uniform cul-

ture, from B/D/S/M to kink.

"My personal attitude about leather," says Kirk Wagner, aka DJ ChaotiQueer, "is that it's an attitude, not a dress style."

Wagner is a regular in the leather scene—



According to Cheryl Spector of Blackout Leather Productions, local organizations are putting aside their differences and working together to produce Portland Leather Pride Week.

an unpredictable, radical DJ with the propensity to spin nude when he's "really feeling the groove."

"The media has always portrayed people in leather as rebels," Mangels says, "so leather provides an aura or a mystique." It is this mystique—played between inquisitive, consenting individuals—that really describes what the leather scene is about.

In Portland, the leather community has been bubbling and boiling for decades. A few years ago, representatives from the various leather organizations united to create Portland's very own Leather Pride Week—a week-long festival of party, charity and play. It hasn't taken much time, but Portland's pride week has become a major event in the nation's leather calendar.

"Portland is a great place for leather!" Wagner says. "The leather community here in Portland is very open and accepting of new people into their ranks, and they go out of their way to be inclusive of all types, genders and sexual orientations."

Spector adds: "I think that one of the unique aspects of the Portland leather scene is that it seems very pansexual. In the past two years we have also been...putting our differences aside and working together to produce this entire event."

This is saying a lot. There are very few venues that mix straight, queer and trans scenes as does Portland Leather Pride. "I can say that I truly feel proud," says Spector, "about the Leather Pride Week committee and the commitment to collaboration that we all share. It is important to come together and celebrate."

It can also lead to some



Kirk Wagner, aka DJ ChaotiQueer, appreciates the Portland leather community's inclusion of all types, genders and sexual orientations.