

culture

Meeting a Need

Groups offer events for queers of color

by Jaymee R. Cuti

Many sexual minorities have no trouble finding space and activities that are welcoming and appeal to their interests. But for queers of color, a minority within a minority, Portland's social scene and activism network leaves something to be desired.

Rather than waiting to become a market group to savvy event planners, two organizations have formed to meet the needs of their communities, and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people of color have answered their calls.

LaTonya Terrell, who is bisexual and African American, has been a fixture in Portland's clubbing scene and music venues since she was a teen. Today she is planning her own events through Green Panther Productions, her company that hosts The Life, a night for lesbians of color every first and third Friday at H2O, a chic downtown club.

Terrell modeled The Life after posh, upscale lesbian bars of other cities, which she says Portland is lacking. She also wanted to counter the smokiness of local venues and dearth of dance music she wanted to hear.

"I've been traveling out of town to party to try to find people like me," says Terrell. "I started this club because I was able to see what other cities have that we didn't have here."

Terrell's first event was held just last month, but judging from the 100 or so people in attendance, she feels she is definitely meeting a need.

Going strong for a year is another company centered around queers of color: Happy Ours Productions. Led by Amara Perez and Maléka Ingram, Happy Ours is a social, networking and organizing group that hosts a gathering for gays and lesbians of color every first Friday at Cup and Saucer in Northeast Portland.

But Happy Ours is actually an umbrella company that plans everything from political study groups to parties to a lesbians of color softball team.

"We were the only team in the Rose City Softball league for women of color. We made her-story, basically," says Ingram.

While some events are open to the broader community, the group mainly focuses on creating space for queers of color. "We don't exclude anyone, but our commitment and interest is to build bridges in LGBT communities of color," says Perez, who is a Latina lesbian.

Happy Ours is also responsible for Portland's first lesbians of color calendar, *GendHer and DesiHer Expressions*, which is on sale for \$10 through its Web site and at Reflections Coffee and Bookstore, 446 N.E. Killingsworth St.

Coinciding with the launch of the calendar in



Amara Perez (left) and Maléka Ingram lead Happy Ours Productions, a networking organization for queers of color.

December was a documentary about gender expression that screened at Hollywood Theatre. "People felt empowered to express how they really felt inside," says Ingram, who is a lesbian and black American.

Ingram and Terrell agree about a current lack of space for sexual minorities of color.

"We started this, first, because there's a need for our own space," Ingram says. "In mainstream society, we don't have space. Sometimes there's a need to be in an atmosphere that is comfortable for you and that embraces you and does not make you feel as an other or insignificant or devalued."

Ingram and Perez will begin working on a new documentary about female identity in the spring,



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and they have plans to shoot a 2007 calendar this summer. The group also plans to resurrect The PlayHers Club, a side project that will host monthly parties.

In line with its goal for community building, Happy Ours' Web site contains a community calendar, with listings from other organizations as well as its own. "We're organizing in a community we're a part of," says Perez, "sharing political space, social space, romantic space, even neighborhood space." **io**

HAPPY OURS PRODUCTIONS hosts a social and networking gathering for gays and lesbians of color from 5 to 8 p.m. every first Friday at Cup and Saucer Northeast, 3000 N.E. Killingsworth St. For more information visit www.happyoursproductions.com. GREEN PANTHER PRODUCTIONS hosts The Life, a lesbian night for people of color featuring DJ Prince, 9 p.m. every first and third Friday at H2O, 204 S.W. Yamhill St. Admission is \$6. For more information e-mail greenidpnrh@comcast.net.

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