

culture



Tickets are going fast for the seventh annual Red Dress Party.



1,200 Red Dresses Can't Be Wrong

"Velvet Rope" evokes the glamour of 1940s Hollywood

by Tony LeTigre • Photos by Marty Davis

If red is the boldest color, then the boldest party of the year is coming to a Southeast Portland warehouse April 14.

Seven years ago, it started out as a modest house party at a basement in North Portland. About 75 people came—a successful party, yet hardly a glimmer of what would come. The next year 150 people attended, 325 the year after that and so on and up. Last year's party, "Red Planet," held in a warehouse on Northeast 10th Avenue and Flanders Street, was attended by 1,600 people. After expenses, the event raised approximately \$23,000 for Our House of Portland, Camp Starlight and Q Center. It's the biggest, reddest, dressiest party of the year and an inspiring example of the sort of magic that can happen, here in our fabulous little city, when an idea that starts small takes flight and grows into something exceeding all expectations.

This year's party, "Velvet Rope," will touch down at AudioCinema, a self-described "factory for art, music and dreams" located in a converted warehouse in the industrial waterfront area of Southeast Portland.

Event chairman Reid Decker says the party would have stayed put in last year's warehouse, but

it was already rented to another company. "That caused a bit of a panic, so we looked all over the city for a suitable alternative."

He says the party planning board eyed venues in the Rose Quarter and the Northwest industrial district, the new Disjecta on East Burnside Street and elsewhere and initially balked at AudioCinema, thinking it a little too small. "We've had 250 to 400 additional people attend the party each year since its inception, so we could potentially be having a 2,000-person event this year."

But after hearing that the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art used the venue for a successful 1,200-person event in summer of 2006, they cast aside their objections and settled on the spot.

"Velvet Rope" is intended to evoke the glamour of 1940s Hollywood—lots of glitz and glam—and on the big night a plush red carpet will be unfurled on the steps of the loading dock to enhance the mood. Vintage attire and accessories are encouraged, though the only requirement, as always, is that all attendees, male and female alike, must wear a red dress. (Kilts don't count.) The \$35 ticket earns attendees all-night access to an open bar serving up beer and (red) vodka cocktails, plus munchables and a bilevel dance floor. DJs

Harmonix, Paula B, Brian Gorr and Gregarious will keep the dance floor vital throughout the venue and deep into the night, and there will be a covered outdoor party area on Madison Street with an additional bar, giving it something of the feel of a block party. The front area, including the coat check, will be administered by the ever-fabulous Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, 17 members of whom will fly their nun's-habit-sporting selves in from Seattle, Los Angeles and San Francisco for the occasion.

"After everyone has a drink or two, the party really changes," says Brent Echols, vice president of the Red Dress board.

A limited number of VIP tickets are also available for \$75 a pop, treating socialites to a special pre-party and their own private upper-level perch overlooking the festivities. Pre-party attendees get high-end alcohol and gourmet snacks catered by Chameleon Restaurant, as well as jugglers, fire dancers and performers from celebrated Portland dance troupe BodyVox.

Hopefully you've already bought your tickets, because by the time you read this, there won't be many left. Only 1,200 are available this year because of the new venue's capacity constraints, and at the time of this writing, according to Decker,

all the VIP tickets and half the regular tickets are sold. "We've never had advance tickets sell this fast before," he says.

Decker and the other members of the party board won't need to go rummaging through the racks of vintage clothing stores: Their frocks are being designed by students of The Art Institute of Portland. An on-stage contest on party night will showcase the winning designs, with gift checks doled out for the winning students.

In keeping with the tradition of supporting worthy charities, the proceeds from "Velvet Rope" will be donated to Swan House, Q Center and the Friends of People with AIDS Foundation. **10**

The seventh annual RED DRESS PARTY starts 9 p.m. April 14 at AudioCinema, 226 S.E. Madison St. Tickets are \$35 from www.reddresspdx.com. Several pre-party fund-raisers are planned, including a dinner party at Bernie's Southern Bistro, a cocktail party at Boxxes and red dress swaps at Crush and Muddy Waters Coffeehouse. Visit the Web site for details.

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