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What Happens in Vegas

Reputation follows Pride Northwest board member

by Jaymee R. Cuti

Josh Ryan rolled into Portland in late 2005, boasting a résumé that included being an Emmy-nominated performer and writer, former award-winning nightclub owner and Las Vegas showgirl. Shortly after arriving on the scene, he began investing time and energy in the Portland queer community. Ryan wrote freelance articles for *Just Out*, volunteered for Pride Northwest and was crowned Miss Gay Pride 2006. This year he is Pride Northwest's entertainment coordinator and member of the sponsorship and media committee.

Few knew that Ryan, whose drag name is Sasha Scarlett, left his home in Las Vegas in 2003 amid allegations of mismanagement of tens of thousands of dollars by the Las Vegas Pride organizers and some event sponsors. In May 2003, under legal advisement, the Vegas Pride board voted him off the board, where he had been serving as president.

"Watch your back," Bill Schafer, publisher of the gay newspaper *Las Vegas Night Beat*, told *Just Out*. "Don't let him get a hold of the checkbook, and have somebody else negotiate any contracts."

As was reported in both *Night Beat* and *The Las Vegas Bugle*, now called *Q Vegas*, Ryan was voted off the board after producing a spectacular Pride event that left the organization between \$30,000 and \$40,000 in debt, according to reports from the board's 2003 treasurer, Craig Dalebout. Few dispute the quality of the event that Ryan and his board produced in May 2003, which was moved to an indoor sports center and expanded from a "picnic in the park" to five days of parties and events surrounding the parade.

"There were definite things management-wise that we should have done differently, but the fact is that if you make those kinds of changes, you risk losing money, and we lost it," said Ryan. "The result, though, was once we experienced the deficit, the board chose not to shoulder the responsibility collectively, but to blame me for it."

Ryan was accused of a number of serious violations by Dalebout and logistics committee chairman Jere Keys, who was also editor of the *Bugle*. The major allegations centered around a lack of financial oversight, including overspending, underbudgeting and disregard for the organization's bylaws.

"There is significant evidence that, at the very least, money was handled inappropriately," said Keys of Ryan/Scarlett. "She was the president of the organization, and ultimately she was the one responsible for the budgetary oversight. She kept records of finances close to her chest and did not share them

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—Bill Schafer

until it was too late. She was directly responsible for a great deal of the crisis that occurred."

Kelly McFarlane-Smith, publisher of *Q Vegas*, also expressed distrust of Ryan.

"The problem with Josh is he makes everybody believe everything is OK, and then he takes on everything," McFarlane-Smith told *Just Out*. "He's a really good talker."

According to a June 2003 *Night Beat* editorial, "Trouble Inside the Oasis," Schafer wrote: "The approved budget seems to have been completely ignored. Checks were apparently written inappropriately. Contracts were executed without board approval, charges the treasurer. At least one sponsor was more than likely misled regarding the attendance. The organization's bylaws were trampled. In my book, this represents a complete mismanagement by [Pride] board president Josh Ryan."

According to Ryan, Pride Northwest has checks



**"None of us have spent
[our] time to...hurt
the festival or its' [sic]
reputation....
And, anyone
who says
differently
is wrong."**

—Josh Ryan

Josh Ryan, aka Miss Gay Pride 2006 Sasha Scarlett, faced criticism and allegations of mismanagement for his work with the Las Vegas Pride Association in 2003.