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For Creation, the Rose Court's relevance can be seen not only in its extensive fund-raising work. "I hate to sound pompous about it, but [ISRC] is like the 'mom' of Portland's gay scene." In fact, Creation is not being pompous by any means. The Rose Court existed before Portland had bear events or the perennial youth favorite, the Rosebud and Thorn pageant. Coronation itself is, for Creation, more than just a chance for the city's top drag queens to show off their wigs and makeup skills. In addition to the courts of other cities that come to Portland to observe, Creation sets her sights on another contingent that she feels benefits most from the pageant itself: "Younger people will be able to look at it and say, 'Wow.' It gives them ideas and opens the door for new possibilities."

Creation is particularly interested in the queer youth of Portland. When asked about her proudest moment as Rose Empress, she gives a speculative answer that reveals a lot about where her reign oriented its energy: "Maybe I inspired someone to be Emperor or Empress someday. Then I'm continuing the tradition."

Tradition is, in large part, what Coronation is about. The 40-plus drag queens who have held titles have all had basically a standard, classic look. They could easily be working at Darcelle's. Entirely absent from the roster is the unconventional look that has made Sissyboy as successful as it has been.

A telling fact? Even though the Rosebud pageant is known for selecting drag queens with an "edgier" look—such as reigning Rosebud XXX Jackie Daniels, known for her massive pink wigs and '80s-style clothing—only two of the 31 Rosebuds (Rose Empress XXIX Lady Elaine Peacock and Rose Empress XLIV Poison Waters) have ever graduated to the title of Empress.

Pictures of the lion's share of titleholders are online at the Rose Court's Web site. Take a peek at the ghosts of Emperesses past and you'll find a pretty narrow aesthetic of naturalistic—albeit glammed up like Vegas showgirls—looking women not dissimilar from a straight beauty pageant. There is no pink and black zebra print, no garish blue bee-hive wigs, and Emperesses' makeup more resembles a Southern Baptist preacher's wife than anything you're going to find in the trans community.

But Coronation does stand out in one impor-



**Rose Emperor XXXIII Don Hood and Rose Empress XLVIII Dawna Creation help raise money for breast cancer research, scholarships funds and HIV/AIDS charities.**

tant respect. In a state that had a Board of Eugenics (later renamed as the friendlier-sounding Board of Social Protection) in 1983, the Rose Court is distinguished by not shying away from giving the tiara to queens of color.

Rose Emperor XXXIII Don Hood is noticeably different from Creation; however, he complements her in a way that makes these differences difficult to tease out. Like an old couple who have been living together for decades, it's easy to imagine that the two monarchs are capable of finishing each other's sentences. While Creation was made into a monarch one fateful, boring night, Hood is purebred royalty. He has all the trappings of a queer aristocrat. It would not be the least bit surprising to find his bookshelf filled with poetry from the Romantic era and his basement stocked with fine vintage wines. On the rare occasion when he does drag (such as at Turnabout, a special event where men who do not normally dress as women do so and vice versa), it's genderfuck drag—meaning that he does not really bother to look like a woman, he just looks like himself in women's clothing.

However, Hood's interest in ISRC has less to do with a passing interest in drag and more to do with that ubiquitous community. He comes out of the leather and bear communities. The leather community is among the biggest supporters of the court. Hood knew a lot of people in the court because of the overlap, and after slowly working his way into its good graces, he decided to run for Emperor. He had previously been Mr. Oregon State Leather 1998-1999, a title with a larger geographical scope than the Rose Empress but with just as much responsibility.

Hood's reasons for wanting to be Emperor are similar to Creation's. He ran because he already believed strongly in what the court was doing with its fund raising. While he concedes that he could have raised money without the title, he adds that



"the title certainly helps" with his efforts. Without the slightest trace of irony or duplicity, Hood states that Emperor "was a way for me to give back a little of myself."

But what does the pageant itself accomplish? In other words, why not just do queer fund raising minus what some queers of the younger generation consider an essentially conservative and ghettoizing event? Again, Hood falls back on the same explanations offered by Creation. The connections that are made between communities cannot be overvalued. But Hood makes an excellent point about accountability: "The audiences are going to be there to hold those people accountable."

While ISRC styles itself as a monarchy, it certainly is a constitutional monarchy—titleholders have been stripped of the crown. Taking the constitutional monarchist analogy further, Hood describes the job itself as being "the ambassadors for the city of Portland and the gay community...it's a community outreach base for telling people about Portland and about the community." In a sense, if you aren't involved in these communities, it's hard to complain that you aren't being represented. ISRC's membership is open to anyone living in the area older than 21.

Beyond the community outreach aspect of the court, Hood considers his title a great opportunity for personal growth. When asked about his best moment as Emperor, he doesn't have a specific answer. Instead, he talks about the intimate friendship he has developed with the Empress—he refers to Creation as his "title wife for the rest of my life."

Hood was also happy to shed light on the enigmatic positions of Prince and Princess. These are unelected positions chosen by the reigning monarchs. But even at ISRC's Web site, the whys and wherefores are not terribly clear. Hood is straightforward about why he chose his rather


impressively titled His Most Imperial Highness Imperial Prince XXXII Heather DeVore (who, as his name would imply, is genetically female): "Because they were one of my best friends."

But what makes a good Prince or Princess generally? "The commitment that they give to their Emperor or Empress. Are they going to be there in the drop of a hat when you say, 'Hey, we have a function—get dressed, let's go?'"

This kind of total commitment is absolutely required by the court. Creation said the worst part of holding the title was the time that she had to spend away from her lover. ISRC is definitely not a place for the lazy.

In the final analysis, maybe the Rose Court isn't groundbreaking. Maybe it no longer transgresses boundaries and smashes taboos like it did 50 years ago when it first started. But maybe even those questions betray a particular bias. It doesn't seem much to matter if the court does any of these things that seem of rather dubious utility. More important is the fund raising and community work that it does—things that can be viewed, verified, quantified and talked about in terms other than one's own opinions.

Further, the Rose Court represents tradition in an ever-changing world. It provides a link to a collective past that still stands at the genesis of any number of queer subcultures that have emerged during the past 10 to 20 years.

It's also a damn good time. And that has a value all its own. Put on a vintage suit, order yourself a Tom Collins, and check out a noble throwback to the very beginnings of contemporary queer culture. Don't forget to bring your checkbook to make a donation to one of the many great charities that ISRC is committed to supporting. 

*The Imperial Sovereign Rose Court presents CORONATION 2007 5 p.m. Oct. 20 at Crystal Ballroom, 1332 W. Burnside St. This year's theme is "Once Upon a Mattress: A Night in the Monarch's Bordello." Tickets are \$45-\$50 from Ticketmaster. For a complete schedule of related events, visit [www.rosecourt.org](http://www.rosecourt.org).*

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