

Buyer Beware

Best way to show your "pride"? Skip Pride.

As bleak as a Bergman film and as joyless as a trip to Lloyd Center, the throng of perma-smiled paraders strode slowly past, posters and placards in hand: a very solemn street procession. From my sidewalk perch I strained to read the flurry of messages jutting out in front and above, on block-wide banners and atop stickied signs, all screaming at me in an impossible cacophony:

"Wells Fargo: Proud of our Community!" and "Celebrate Pride with Bank of America!" They shouted: "New Seasons: Healthy, Diverse, Queer-Friendly Workforce" and "PGE Powers Pride 2008!" Ah yes, of course: It's time for our city's annual Gay Pride festival and parade.

I exaggerate, but only a little.

Although I haven't yet seen the thick stack of signs that await the crowds at this year's major Pride fests, my stomach is already turning as I recall last year's Portland Pride parade, and previous big-money Prides in Boston and Chicago, all chockablock with the typical "Pride" parade elements: thong-bedecked gyrating dancers in glitter body paint, PFLAG parents in khakis, politicians-of-the-moment, gay-friendly church groups touting inclusive Scripture verse and—drum roll—corporate sponsors. Lots and lots (and lots) of corporate sponsors, literally miles of corporate sponsors, all of them waving banners, hawking pamphlets and oh-so-subtly attaching a price tag

to each of our queer bodies as they march right by, all broad smiles at so much business to be had.

Let me put it plainly: Don't think for a minute that Pride Northwest, or any of the cookie-cutter U.S. big-city "Pride fest" models from New York to Los Angeles, are attempting to do anything more in these festivals than sell you a product, at worst, and sell you a bottled-product-like queer experience known as "Pride," at best. I have some advice for you as we enter into another "Pride" season this June: Buyer beware.

To their credit, most "Pride" organizations in charge of these festivals/parades hardly bother hiding behind any sort of altruistic or activist mask; they've simply given up the ghost. Instead, they've turned themselves into sleek moneymaking machines, pumping out product to community-

as among the worthy first for a fresh round of audits. Surely if their work is beyond scrutiny, they would open themselves up to such investigation. Last year's Pride Northwest ended not with a balanced budget, but with nearly \$30,000 in surplus funds from overabundant sponsorships—companies are dying to shell out big cash to Pride fests for just this type of hands-off, feel-good philanthropy. Great—now where's the community payback?

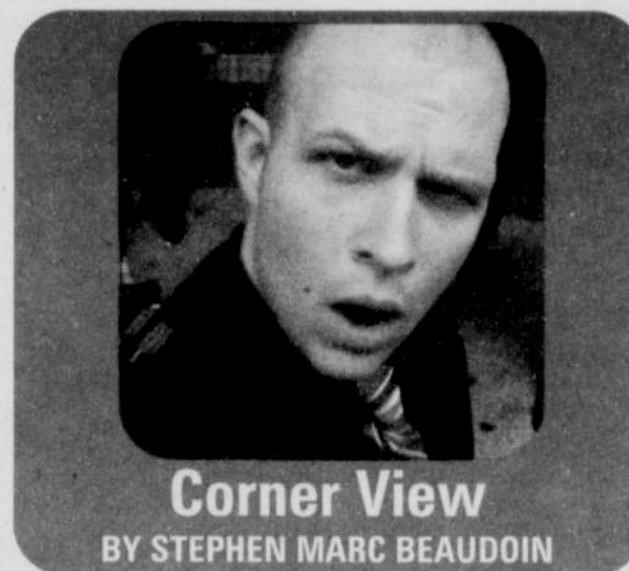
This national trend in prepackaged, corporate-controlled "Pride" festivals for the queer community is deeply troubling, and I probably don't need

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craving queers hungry for authentic experience. Does "Pride" offer authentic experience? Of course not, but the generic feel-good atmosphere sure is a sugar-sweet substitute.

At a time when the Internal Revenue Service is increasing its scrutiny of nonprofit organizations with questionably low community reinvestment, allow me to recommend Gay Pride organizations

to remind anyone here that it runs against the very spirit of our community's first Pride festivals in the '60s and '70s: activist, radical gatherings where queers gathered for community, for action, for purpose. Show up for a big-city Pride today and your most useful function will be as a rabid queer consumer—how else do you think most Pride fests secure their corporate patrons?



Corner View

BY STEPHEN MARC BEAUDOIN

The organizers of Pride Northwest have come up with a cutely titled theme for this year's festival and parade: "Pride: Bring It." Although I have no earthly idea what that might really mean, it

does seem to hearken back to earlier days of activism and engagement.

The grand marshal for this year's Pride Northwest parade is our state's flagship queer advocacy and education organization, Basic Rights Oregon. How many of you attended BRO's equality rally downtown in January, when our state's domestic partnership law was in dangerous limbo? Do you recall the bulging mass of queer and straight bodies choking Terry Shrunken Plaza in a rain-soaked early evening? Did you see the tear-streaked faces from queer parents, tykes in tow, wondering what might happen next? Did you hear the roar from downtown as a few thousand people called out for fairness and equality in each of our lives?

Now that's what I fucking call pride. Guess what? It's already been brought. 

Staff Writer STEPHEN MARC BEAUDOIN writes about Portland arts and queer culture at fromeverycorner.blogspot.com. He welcomes feedback at stephen@justout.com.

PROUD TO BE GAY, PROUD TO BE NIKE,
PROUD TO BE MYSELF, PROUD TO BE
LESBIAN, PROUD TO BE STRAIGHT,
PROUD TO BE MARRIED, PROUD TO
BE TRANSGENDER, PROUD TO BE
BISEXUAL, PROUD TO BE ACCEPTING,
PROUD TO BE AN ALLY, PROUD TO BE
RESPECTED, PROUD TO BE OUT,
PROUD TO BE FAMILY, **PROUD TO BE**



**PROUD TO
BE**

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