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## NORTHWEST NEWS

# All Leathered Up

Groups Unite for Oregon Leather Pride 2009

By ANDY MANGELS

As with the gay community at large, categorizing the leather community can be difficult. It includes not just gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans members, but also heterosexual and pansexual members. Its members may be into wearing leather, vinyl, latex, corsets, boots or other costumes. They may be into motorcycle riding, SM, individual fetishes or simply intense physical bonding or sexual experiences.

In June 1989, the National Leather Association: Portland Chapter and ORGASM (Oregon Guild Activists of SM) teamed up to bring together the various factions of the Leather and Fetish scenes for a common purpose and celebration. The inaugural Leather Pride Weekend featured only two days of events. In 1991, the weekend became Leather Pride Week, and by 2003, the schedule had grown so significantly that the two organizations formed a joint committee to make the events more successful and united.

Running July 31-August 9, this year's Oregon Leather Pride Week (OLPW) will showcase over twenty events from groups including Bad Girls, Blackout Leather Productions, In Uniform, Oregon Bears, The Conservatory, Pride Northwest, Gender (Free) for All, Portland Leather Alliance and Whipper Snappers. A cornerstone of the event is the Mr. & Ms. Oregon State Leather Contest on August 8, when titleholders are chosen for duty as representatives, ambassadors, leaders or leaders-in-training, or "bottoms for the community" — depending on whom one asks.

Dominic Chevalier, Mr. Oregon State Leather 2008, notes that his tenure has been "a year full of growth and eye-opening experiences. I've had the opportunity to meet the most wonderful people across the United States." Chevalier traveled to other cities during his reign, and held regular social events and fundraisers in Portland. "It opened doors for me," he says. "And I learned that I have a voice, and I learned how to use it. That was my most important lesson of this year."

Val Vititow, Ms. Oregon State Leather 2008, says that for her, "the most important thing I learned in my title year has been humility and listening to everybody and not making judgment... letting people raise their likes and dislikes. I have also learned that I have a wonderful 'sash husband' in Dominic, and a leather family, and absolutely wonderful friends in the leather community."

That sense of family and communion is important to many involved in presenting Leather Pride Week. Alycyn Britton, Ms. Oregon Leather 2003, says the event "is a celebration of who we are as a community, our unity, our diversity and our rich history." Ben Brown Jr., Mr. Oregon State Leather 2007 and a board member of Pride NW, calls OLPW "an opportunity for those in our



Blackout Leather Productions showed a lot of Pride and cowhide in this year's parade. Thom Butts, president of Blackout and current NW Leather Sir 2009, thinks "having the whole community come together to break bread is great. It reminds us that for all of our differences, we are part of a large family."

## OLPW Highlights

- **FRI., JULY 31**  
Fetish Ball and Kinky Auction:  
8 pm-midnight. Melody Ballroom
- **SAT., AUGUST 1**  
Portland Trans and Ally March:  
7 pm. Unthank Park
- **SUN., AUGUST 2**  
Sunday School Seminars with Bad  
Girls: 10:30 am- 4:30 pm.  
The Conservatory
- **TUES., AUGUST 4**  
Kinky Women's Welcoming Munch:  
7-9 pm. Egyptian Room
- **THURS., AUGUST 6**  
Leather Family BBQ: 6-9 pm.  
Peninsula Park
- **FRI., AUGUST 7**  
Tangible Vandalism — Fetish  
Community Graphic Design Show.  
6-9 pm. Q-Center
- **SAT., AUGUST 8**  
Mr. & Ms. Oregon State Leather  
Contest: 6 pm. Embers Avenue
- **SUN., AUGUST 9**  
Victory Brunch/Rose & Thorn  
Awards: 11 am-2 pm. My Father's  
Place  
Bears In Leather Bust/Meet the  
New Mr. & Ms. Oregon State Leather:  
4-8 pm. Eagle Portland

community who do not necessarily represent the 'gaystream' to shine, be out, be proud, and connect with others."

Tommie, current chair of Bad Girls and vice president of Boys in Leather Service adds, "I believe our community is extremely welcoming considering how much we believe in protecting ourselves. What we do is inherently risky; knowing this makes us all the more aware and careful of how we do it and with whom we do it."

Connecting with others — mentally, emotionally, and sometimes physically — is the foundation of many OLPW events. Chief among those is the Leather Family BBQ at Peninsula Park on Thursday, August 6. Al-

most everyone *Just Out* spoke with listed it as a favorite event.

Thom Butts, president of Blackout Leather Productions and current NW Leather Sir 2009, thinks "having the whole community come together to break bread is great. It reminds us that for all of our differences, we are part of a large family." Chevalier agrees: "It's a casual event, people come together, we eat and converse and play games. It's fun and lighthearted." Brown notes, "Even with the breezy weather, everyone has a great time: no drunks, no drama, just fun."

Embracing first-timers and those with questions and teaching safety skills are part of the package at Leather Pride Week. Britton says, "The community is very welcoming and not just in a 'oh, check out the fresh meat' kind of way. Just because Portland has a strong Leather (kink/fetish) community does not mean everyone has found it."

"There are many opportunities during Leather Pride Week and all year to get involved whether someone is ready to embrace their kinkiness or is just curious about how kinky they might be." Brown jokes, "There are no outsiders, only those who have not yet found their inner kink, whatever it may be."

As for what to wear, Butts admits he's heard that question before: "I was talking with some members of the community, and they said they've never attended because they weren't invited and they didn't have any leather to wear. I told them that they are now officially invited — it doesn't matter what they wear, it's about the community coming together!" JO

A full schedule of OLPW events and locations can be found at [www.oregonleatherpride.org](http://www.oregonleatherpride.org), and in our *Out & About* this issue, pages 21-24.

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