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Strutting their stuff in Pride Parade

By Marsha King

Seattle Times staff reporter

The Pride Parade — that almost wasn't this year — sashayed and strutted its way through downtown Sunday, proving yet again to be a dazzling celebration of Seattle's gay and lesbian culture.

Before thousands of cheering onlookers, Dykes on Bikes led the way, roaring and honking down Fourth Avenue to Denny Way in leather jackets and jeans and, sometimes, fishnet stockings.

The SQREAM Scooter Club and Ethyl Forever Car Club were right behind.

"Come. Come. Show us your vehicles," pleaded parade announcer Mark "Mom" Finley, looking only a tiny bit lumpy in a sparkling, long, slim-fitting gown and high heels.

Soon after came Mr. Deaf Leather communicating with the crowd in sign language.

And somewhere behind was bank-loan officer Sister Charity Case, wearing "the schoolgirl look." That would be a short skirt, lace-up platform shoes, shirt and tie. Her drawn-on eyebrows accentuated by glittery orange and gold eye shadow floated in a face painted white above a thick black goatee.

The two-hour parade in its 33rd year had 150 entries and gave no obvious hint of the behind-the-scene financial troubles that threatened to shut it down.

Earlier this year, the Pride Parade's sponsor Seattle Out & Proud said it would have to cancel the event. The group didn't want to incur any more debt, given that it still owed approximately \$100,000 to the city of Seattle for last year's Pride Celebration at Seattle Center.

But the decision was reversed within hours.

Meanwhile, another group — Seattle's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center — staged its QueerFest and march on Saturday on Capitol Hill, the gay community's historical heart.



DEAN RUTZ / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Mark Herron snuggles "LaVage" as they make their way by motorcycle down Fourth Avenue in Sunday's Pride Parade. The duo rode as part of a contingent of gay and lesbian scooter riders called SQREAM.

On Sunday, the crowd's preferences were all over the map — some favored a parade on Capitol Hill, as a more intimate, homey setting. Others liked the ambience of downtown skyscrapers as a more in-your-face location.

Sister Charity Case said: "I feel proud to know I'm a voice in the community. ... It doesn't matter whether it's on Capitol Hill or downtown."

In the end, the result for Seattle was an entire weekend bursting with Pride.

"This weekend has been an amazing event," said Troy Campbell, spokesperson for Seattle Out and Proud. "This city can support it all."

Sunday's events included a PrideFest at Seattle Center with food, booths and music, presented by One Degree Events. The Pride celebration, like others held at this time of year nationwide, marks the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York that launched the gay-rights movement in the United States.

In the first years after, gay parades were small, protected and protested, one observer said. By contrast Sunday's event felt almost mainstream with some participants from Macy's, Starbucks, Seattle Public Utilities and politicians running for office.

"I was around during Stonewall. I like seeing the difference over the years," said Mariann Crow, 54, who used to live in New York.

The parade is also a great way to show the younger generation of gays that "they can be out and proud," another onlooker said.

David and Nan Miller, from Rockford, Ill., were visiting Seattle to celebrate the birth of their straight son's child. And they came to Sunday's parade at the invitation of their other son, who is gay and also lives in Seattle with his partner.

"We've gone to the gay parades in Chicago," Nan Miller said. "It was a lot more fun here."

Not everyone liked what they saw.

A man, who happened to be walking by with his family, stopped and stared. "I am not from a big town," he said. "This is a little over the edge."

Protesters, who identified themselves as Christians, shouted about scriptures and God's will.

Among them was a man who stood on an upside-down crate waving a sign that read "The wicked will not inherit the Kingdom," and yelled out "Shame on You. Adam and Eve. Not Adam and Steve."

His sentiments were overpowered by the noise.

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