

## The SPI Blog

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### 'Seattle Pride' alive and well in Downtown



A shared kiss beneath the water jets at International Fountain Sunday at the 2008 PrideFest. Cliff DesPeaux/Seattle P-I

After hours of steadily baking in 90 degree heat today at the Seattle Center for Seattle PrideFest 2008, I stepped into the Center House for a little restroom relief. I couldn't help but smile as I waded through a swirling sea of thousands of sweaty bodies, all covered in varying quantities of dress and rainbows of all magnitudes. People everywhere were friendly, pleasant, and very welcoming to everyone, no matter their sexual orientations or gender identities.

The openness and lack of barriers didn't really hit me until I got to the line in the men's room and two women stepped out of the stalls. I shared a double take with the gay gentleman in front of me and we both shrugged.

"That's new," he said. "[But] I guess it's only fair since we use theirs."



(from left to right) Erika and Julia, two Seattle drag queens, enjoy the festivities at the Seattle Pride Parade. Cliff DesPeaux/Seattle P-I

It was like that everywhere I went. Neither gender nor age got in the way of celebrating community and having fun. It was a relief to see the events flowing so well, as last year's PrideFest and Parade had [some very public organizational issues](#).

"Last year they were kind of disjointed ... this year it seems to be flowing quite well," said Julia, a local drag queen who has been in the community for 30 years. During her time in Seattle, the attitude toward gays has "gone through a dramatic change," she said, but it's headed in a good direction.

"We've gone from being scared to walk the streets to being Downtown," she said. "...Hostility is going away."

She was there with her friends, drag queens Erika and Jackie. The three of them regularly hold drag shows to raise money for Rise N' Shine and other local non-profit organizations, Julia said.

Erika, who wore an Egyptian-themed outfit for the day's festivities, was originally from Austin, Texas. When she left 13 years ago, Seattle was more intolerant than her home in Austin. "It's more equal now," she said.

I've personally only lived in Seattle for a few years, this was my first year attending the Pride events, and I'm straight, so this was all new to me. But I could see that Julia and Erika's sentiments about Seattle Pride were shared by LGBT people everywhere I went today.

Starbucks Coffee employees Bronwyn Olsen and Lisa Dailey, her partner of almost three years (both currently from

Eugene, Ore.), said it was a "great day of support" with "no hate." [The two marched with the Starbucks group in the parade.](#)

Olsen said it was nice to be able to hold hands with Dailey without being the target of discrimination. She also said the event was "more family oriented than I thought it was going to be."

I noticed the same thing. Gay and straight families brought their children out to see the bright colors, experience the warm weather, and just have fun. Elaine and Sara, a lesbian couple from Tacoma, played on the Fisher Green with their 20-month-old daughter Kailee. Elaine said this year's events were "more family oriented than in previous years" and more crowded.

Unlike last week's [Fremont Solstice Parade](#), I didn't notice any protesters anywhere. Everyone was delightfully laid back.

"Compared to the [Seafair] Torchlight Parade, it's a totally different atmosphere," said Patrick, a four-time Pride Parade volunteer. "People seem to be a hell of a lot more relaxed" about everything.

"It brings out everybody: gay, straight, bi, purple, blue, whatever."

While most everyone I talked to was very pleased with the 2008 festivities, some missed the [Capitol Hill-centric days of the past](#). Patrick said he thought the parade should have stayed up on the Hill. "It's an institution" up there, he said.

Chad Schafer and his partner Matt Huber, both of whom are actively involved in [The Imperial Sovereign Court of Seattle & The Olympic and Rainier Empire](#) (which was represented in a float in the parade), have been in the parade in previous years. Huber said he thinks some people were angry about the move from Capitol Hill to Downtown, but that he thinks it's going great.

Festival Director Egan Orion, who has been directing the [Seattle Out and Proud](#)-run events since last year, took over after the move was already in place.

"It was Downtown when I took it over [in 2007] and it wasn't like I was going to move it back to the Hill," he said. Orion said he has a lot of respect for the old Capitol Hill parade, but being Downtown is "a very important statement and I'm glad to carry on the new tradition."

And carry it he has. The [music at PrideFest was loud and rockin'](#), the [dancing was wild](#), and most everything official was clearly organized. It was just like any good Downtown festival should be. If [Seattle Out and Proud](#) can keep this up, the future of Pride Parade and PrideFest are in good hands.

Posted by [Paul Comrie](#) at June 29, 2008 5:48 p.m.

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