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Huge crowds take in downtown's Pride parade

By Sasha London

About 400,000 spectators turned out downtown on Sunday, June 29, for the annual Gay Pride Parade held for the third time in downtown Seattle rather than its traditional home on Capitol Hill, which, according to some estimates, was roughly 170,000 more than attended last year's parade. Participants included the Leather and Fetish Pride Contingent, the Rainbow City Band, the Rat City Rollergirls and King County Executive Ron Sims. The Seattle Out and Proud (SOAP) organized event featured 169 contingents and had a volunteer staff of about 100. "The volunteer turnout was much better this year," said SOAP volunteer Tracy Watson. "This is a year-round thing," said SOAP spokesperson Troy Campbell. "We've been working since last fall through the winter. We've made a lot of changes in some of our back-end processes and we've brought on a new parade coordinator this year." Campbell said SOAP received a lot of positive feedback on how better organized the parade is this year. Financial problems nearly cancelled last year's parade. While many were excited about the parade's move to the larger downtown venue, there was still a sense of Capitol Hill nostalgia. "I don't think the parade should have moved from a place where they



Taking part in the Pride parade. Photo/Sasha London

celebrate gay pride every day," said Steven Jones, who marched for the Woodland Park Zoo. "Moving the parade downtown makes it more inclusive to more straight people, but I'm expecting it to be a lot less of a party atmosphere than on the Hill." This was the zoo's first representation in the parade, and Jones' third consecutive year. Jones and Layla Raynor-Allwein accompanied the zoo's float, which featured plastic flamingos to acknowledge the zoo's new exhibit. Wendell Joost has been marching in the Pride Parade since 1990 and represents the Seattle leather community. "It's nice not to have to do two parades in a weekend. It's great to expose our message of leather pride to a wider audience," Joost said. Campbell feels the move from Capitol Hill was necessary and important to create an inclusive community. "The mission of Seattle Out and Proud is, in part, to achieve equal human rights throughout our region. The ideology of moving the parade is in line with that mission because to achieve rights you need to keep pushing the envelope," Campbell said. The Capitol Hill-based team Seattle Quake Rugby Football Club marched for its sixth consecutive year

and could be seen rucking, scrumming and simulating plays while making their way down Fourth Avenue. Paul McGee, who plays for the team, feels it's important for the gay community to be aware of the alternative activities that are available to them. McGee was in Dublin, Ireland, last week for its parade but had never marched in Seattle before. "There's more of a community atmosphere involved here than in Dublin," he said. "It was like they were coming out to look at people that were different than them. It's not like that here." Jeremy Dunn, president of the Foundation for Sex Positive Culture, wants more people to be aware of safer sex options. Moving the parade downtown provided a larger audience. Sex and social acceptance were continuous themes in this year's parade. Walt Menzlo, also known as "Sugar Bear," is an original member of the Seattle chapter of Northwest Bears. He said their organization provides a place for "big hairy guys." "A lot of people are shy about being bigger," he said. The NW Bears marched with beaming smiles and were dressed in foil-like costumes. They held signs that read "Feed the Bears." Menzlo said the "bear movement" started about 16 years ago and now has chapters and events all over the country. Pride events were also held in San Francisco, Toronto, Chicago, New York and other cities. There were also parades held in Calcutta, Bangalore and New Delhi, India, where, notably, homosexuality is illegal. While New York City's attendance of an estimated one million spectators makes Seattle's parade seem small, the support from Seattleites has been growing every year. Participants attracted the audience with their wild and colorful costumes as well as signs that conveyed their organizations' messages. The Capitol Hill gay nightclub R Place entertained with a float full of provocative techno dancers wearing Speedo-like attire. The Leather and Fetish Pride Contingent featured men wearing not much more than chaps, ropes and chains. The parade was held on the same day as the Seafair Marathon, which shut down the eastbound lanes of the SR-520 bridge until about 9 a.m. This was the first time the bridge was closed for a sporting event since 1984, but it did not prevent the masses from coming downtown to check out the parade. Sasha London is a student in the University of Washington Department of Communication News Laboratory and can be reached at editor@capitolhilltimes.com.

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