



GIVING WITH GLITTER

OQSL's Drag and Balls raises awareness and funds for Bruce House

The Ottawa Queer Softball League's (OQSL) ninth annual Pride event, Drag and Balls, sashays onto the diamond at Riverrain Park August 25 with all proceeds of the colourful celebration benefitting Bruce House (BH).

Marking 30 years of operation in October, BH is a community-based, non-profit organization that provides housing, compassionate care and support for people living with and impacted by HIV/AIDS.

Last year, BH made the difficult decision to close their iconic Transition House Program due to lack of funding. However, BH's Manager of Client Programs and Services, Doug Cooper, says the organization's three major programs in operation "work collaboratively to ensure a continuum of care for each client's needs and current challenges."

Access to safe and affordable housing can be a significant hurdle for those living with or impacted by HIV/AIDS. BH's Supported Independent Living Program strives to provide stability for families, couples and singles in up to 40 subsidized apartments.

"BH supports these residents in activities of daily living and counselling, as well as access to other agencies and services in the community," Cooper explains, including "wellness checks, referrals and innovative programming such as the Community Kitchen and Buddy Program,"

The REST Program acts as a bridge to safe and healthy living when becoming independent or when faced with illness that affects daily activities.



“[REST] provides the opportunity for clients to receive support during episodic crisis, the development of short and long-term goals to manage health and the opportunity for respite for friends or family members who are providing care,” Cooper says.

Cooper highlights BH’s Volunteer Program as a crucial part of their operations as it provides essential services and support to both clients and staff of each of their programs.

“Without our volunteers, our programs and services could not exist,” Cooper, who has worked with BH for 27 years, maintains.

It is the “heart” of his work with BH that has continued his partnership with the organisation for nearly three decades, Cooper divulges.



“I’m surrounded by amazing people here, my co-workers, my friends; family in a way. I have learned so much from clients, I have so many heroes. Their bravery, grace, shining moments. I think one of the greatest gifts is being with someone when they take their last breath. We come into this world with someone grabbing at us, we should exit it with someone holding us. I have had the honour and privilege of holding someone’s hand when they took their last breath.”

Steve Pageau and Dave Sabourin have organised Drag and Balls for five years. This year’s organising committee also includes Andre Proulx, Bobby Dagenais, Bryan McSorley, Ethan McAlear, Fatima Matar, Greg Perry, Jeremy Cheff and Kat Vallance.

Originally entitled Divas vs. Dykes, Pageau saw an opportunity to capitalise on drag’s mainstream success and re-branded the event as Drag and Balls in 2015.

“If you don’t think that watching six-foot tall guys in six-inch stilettos running around and hitting home runs is not hilarious then I don’t know what is,” OQSL captain Chantalle Northwood laughs.

This year’s theme of Nightmares vs. Fairytales ensures a unique Capital Pride spectacle. You could see Maleficent make a play or watch the Babadook run the bases.

Perry emceed last year’s prom-themed competition.

“Everybody comes with great energy. That makes it a great day for spectators and participants. It’s a dragulicious afternoon,” Perry says, adding he still occasionally finds glitter in his crevices from last year’s elaborate costume stylised as Carrie White’s gay best friend who saved the Stephen King heroine from a bucket full of glistening pig blood.



Derek Brown has participated for four years and cites his Judy Garland look as his favourite.

Drag and Balls has grown since its inception, Brown notes, with more food, drink, sponsors, attractions and games with “whacked out” rules each year.

Through all the beat faces, faux-shade and pageantry you’ll see at Drag and Balls, Brown notes that it is important that, as the league has given so much to its members, OQSL gives back to our community and to those less fortunate who are facing challenges.

“BH is a place where people who don’t have government insurance, who are low income, have a resource so they can get good health care as well,” Brown says. “It is important to remember these people in our community because that is what we started out as; fighting for ourselves, fighting for our rights and embracing everybody. BH is a significant organisation that continues that tradition.”

While HIV/AIDS diagnoses have declined over the years, it remains a reality that directly affects the LGBT community.

“This is what makes Bruce House so special,” Pageau says. “They are on the front lines and directly help the most vulnerable members of our community. This is why our event is so important.”

- By Bradley Turcotte, OQSL member

Drag and Balls

August 25, 1pm-5pm

Riverrain Park, 400 North River Road

Visit <http://brucehouse.ca/donate/> to donate directly to Bruce House

**Photos courtesy of Bruce Wheeler*