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Whose Q Center Is It Anyway?

BY BYRON BECK



It isn't every day I go to a gay soiree and feel *completely* left out. But that's the sentiment I came away with after attending last week's super successful "Spooktacular" event.

But, what should I have expected? This knife-wielding, pumpkin-carving contest wasn't for me. This party was for queers—drumroll, please—with *kids*.

Yes, *REAL, LIVE CHILDREN!*

So instead of leering at dragged-out "club kids" spinning blissfully on the dance floor, I spent my Sunday afternoon watching actual infants, covered in god-knows-what, crawl all over the floor of Studio

Ten-Fifty—a cool-looking warehouse space in Southeast

Portland—while ultra-attentive lesbian moms and gay daddies made goo-goo eyes at them. Oh...my...GOD! What has become of my queer life?

But, as I said, I should've expected this. After all, this wasn't just any old Halloween party. This was the very first public outing for the "Q Center." That's the yet-to-be-realized local community center that would be a dedicated space for gay, lesbian, bi and transgendered people—a pet project of queer City Commissioner Sam Adams for the past couple of years now. And it's something I hadn't paid much attention to for a while, until my partner, Juan Martinez, became a member of the Q Center's board.

Juan's working hard to help make this place a reality, so it wasn't a surprise that he would ask me to help out. And since it's so very hard to say no to Juan, I ended up, alongside Mayor Tom Potter, County Commissioner Maria Rojo de Steffey and some drag queen, as one of the event's so-called celebrity judges. Our job was to assess gourd-shaped works of art assembled by an apple-cheeked group of cider-fueled rugrats. As I tried my best to steer clear of tiny tots bearing sharp kitchen implements, I couldn't help but think about how I got myself here.

After all, wasn't it just two years ago when I said we didn't need a queer community center (see QW, July 23, 2003)? Back in '03, when this space first popped up in a GLBT community survey called "Out With It!," I thought Adams was using the queer-centric center as a way to get his cute ass elected to City Council (it worked). At that time, I didn't see a need for a space like this since Portland had so many outlets for queer expression already.

But two years (and one party) later, I'm starting to see the light. Well, it was actually Trisha Todd who helped me see the light. A local high-school drama teacher and lesbian icon (she played Claire Jabrowski in the classic queer film *Claire of the Moon*), I saw Todd and her pregnant partner playing with their child at the Spooktacular. When I asked why she, of all people, was there, she told me matter-of-factly, "There just wasn't very many places for queer families." And that's when I finally realized, damn, this queer center *really* isn't for me. I had already begun to come to that conclusion when I saw that the initial survey's results skewed heavily in favor of a community center that would help give families, seniors and other fringe members of Portland's queer group a place to hang out. But last Sunday was the first time I saw it in living color: a real, live space where queers could interface in a positive way that didn't include a smoky bar or a pride parade. You see, I didn't expect anyone to show up, and witnessing a multi-ethnic and multi-aged crowd of more than 150 queers and their families enjoying all this was an eye-opener for me.

But it wasn't for everybody.

A couple of days after the party, I read on a local blog, [privilegejudo.org](#), how the event was "oh so Middle Class" and how "there weren't many folks my age there" (read: young, politically radical queerfolk). The blogger went on a fairly typical anti-assimilation rant and concluded by saying: "The concept of community is great, it's too bad it involves people."

Profound shit, man, but way off the mark. Maybe it's time we realized that a queer center can't and shouldn't be a space for everybody. The best we can hope for is that, if this place ever does get built, it will be a place where all people feel welcome, at least some of the time. If we just get that, like it or not, it would be a lot more than we've ever had before.

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