

Scrappy Dyke March refines rough edges

Transgender Warrior
Leslie Feinberg
headlines decade old
Dyke March

by **R.J. Grubb**
Staff Reporter

On June 11, the Boston Dyke March turns the Big Ten. You'd think it would mark a significant milestone. But for a small core of low-profile organizers who have endeavored to carry its torch, the anniversary doesn't register a blip.

"If this is the 10-year anniversary, then we haven't been emphasizing it in our meetings," said organizer Jo Trigilio during an interview at Diesel Cafe. "We've been emphasizing, let's make it bigger and better."

Bigger and better has been the charge since Trigilio joined the fledgling committee four years ago. She assumed a high task considering how change is never smooth. But helping her achieve that goal has been a handful of committee regulars who have forged new stability. No longer starting from scratch, the march's most significant achievement this year is not age — but continuity.

For no matter how scruffy, the backbone of any dyke march is effective cre-

ativity. So as organizers prepare for its annual night of street theater and community solidarity on Friday June 11, it looks like the Boston Dyke March has found comfortable ground. "We're getting better at what we're doing," said Trigilio. "With our experience, we can continue to grow and expand."

Experience is the key word. No longer reinventing the wheel, veteran members with the activism know-how have begun to mentor younger members who bring the needed energy and enthusiasm but don't always have the skills. Retaining members has been the march's missing critical link since the annual event began in 1994 and nearly folded in 1998. "The only reason we have been able to grow in the last four years is that there is this continuity on the committee," said Trigilio. "It makes all the difference in the world."

With the increased efficiency, it appears as if the march has finally hit its stride. For this year, they booked Leslie Feinberg as

their keynote speaker. A national celebrity, Feinberg is a huge coup who will speak to the march's theme: "Stop the War at Home and Abroad." Joining Feinberg is Kashish Chopra, the outspoken lesbian beauty who took home a Miss Congeniality award at the 2003 Miss India U.S.A. pageant. Dyke Night Productions' Kristen Porter will em-

cee the event, which includes performances by local rockers Nice and Easy, while attendees march to the beat of Zili Roots. Given the array of talent, a new stage and sound system, the march has come a long way from the days when people just



Dyke March organizers (back row) Scout Herzig, Jo Trigilio, Jen Starr, Molly Butterworth. Front row Supernova Geyer, Laurie McIntosh, Amy Eiferman, Stephanie Lowitt, Nathalie Degenhardt.

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showed up and hoofed down Boylston Street. Organizers credit the dynamic lineup to their unique resourcefulness. "We're scrappy," explained second-year organizer Stephanie Lowitt, "We make things happen through creativity."

As scrappy social innovators, Dyke March organizers rely on the work of energetic, entrepreneurial individuals like any grassroots community group. But perhaps more important than its core ingenuity, the march also continues to grow because it has made a concerted effort to chip away at its persistent image as an exclusionist group of misguided women out to rattle Pride. "Some people still think we're anti-Pride but we are really not," said Trigilio. "We're not even an alternative."

Despite its roots as a vehicle to protest male-dominated and corporate-sponsored Prides, the march has evolved as a complement to Boston Pride rather than its adversary. As organizers emphasize, it is still fundamentally important to show the public that queer women and their allies have a voice and that the queer community isn't just men. But at poster party nights, organizers typically make signs

that run a gamut of themes from disapproving of President Bush ("The Only Bush I Trust is My Own") to questioning gender ("Think Queer, Question Gender") as well as overall feminist and anti-racist messages.

Members have also increased outreach efforts by regularly advertising their meetings on queer listservs, like The List, noting that "all" are welcome. As in previous years, becoming more inclusive and increasing its community platforms remains a goal. "Some people feel like it's a march just for politically active people and some people feel like it's a march for people who are only there to socialize or as a singles opportunity," said Lowitt. "I want people to know that the march is there for everybody's agenda. It's for anybody who wants to come for any reason."

All told, organizers predict it's going to be a great march this June, potentially it's best and biggest. Still, success eventually breeds credibility problems. So when asked if she lamented losing some of the march's rough edges, Trigilio shot back a big grin and laughed at the idea.

"We're very, very, very, very far from not being grassroots," she said. "We're so grassroots. There is still no leader, everything goes by consensus, and it's still just show up and you're in."

Plus, as far as fundraising goes, it's

still a cheap "dollar a dyke" night. Though this year, organizers said they might have to up it to "two dollars a dyke" since the committee plans to double last year's budget and spend \$3,000.

Despite the inflation, it's still a ridiculously small budget that forces organizers to nickel and dime it and pay for expenses out of pocket with the hope that attendees will be generous when the committee passes around the fundraising plate (usually a hat or a drum) before the march. After all these years, the tactic remains the most lucrative method to raise money. Plus it ensures the march's grassroots integrity, as the people who participate in the march are the ones who pay for it.

Now, the only looming thorn in the committee's side is rain. Last year, a chilly, rainy Friday night put a damper on high anticipated turnout, which peaked at the 1,500 mark. Though they didn't meet their expectations in number, organizers still met their aims in spirit.

"It was really mind-boggling," remembered Trigilio. "It was raining so hard but so many people were there and devoted to marching and listening to speakers in the rain. It was really amazing."

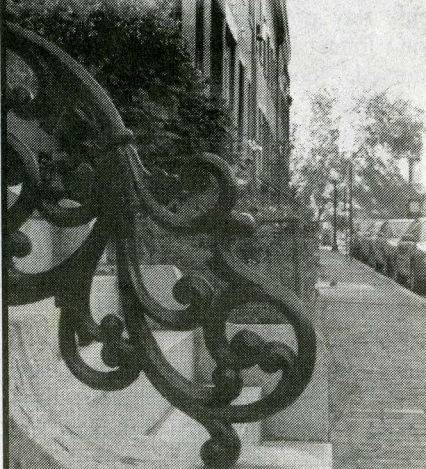
The Boston Dyke March convenes on the Boston Common at 7 p.m. on Friday, June 11.

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