

Gearing up for the Dyke March

Expect a combo of tattoos, pasties and baby strollers

By [Laura Kiritsy](#)

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To understand the combination of grassroots spirit and playful edginess that has long made Boston's 11-year-old Dyke March the place to be on the eve of the city's Gay Pride parade, look no further than the list of chores that awaits potential Dyke March volunteers: While trash collectors, stage managers, and crowd management personnel are vital ingredients to a successful march, equal weight is given to those willing to "fly panties on a stick," spread the word on the after-party (it's at Somerville's Toast), bang a drum, blow a whistle, or simply "be a super-dyke!" Clearly, whatever your talents are, there's room for you at the Boston Dyke March.

If there's anything march organizers want to make clear it's that there's no one too dykey or not quite dykey enough to take to the streets when the march takes off from the Parkman Bandstand on Boston Common June 10. "The underlying theme of the Dyke March in Boston since I've been a participant in it has been that the dyke march is for everyone," says Jo Trigilio, a Simmons College philosophy and women's studies professor who has helped organize the past five marches. "It's an inclusive dyke march. Anyone can march - trans people, allies, straight allies, bi allies - we don't identify people. It doesn't matter."

"I think the image of the Dyke March is that it's a bunch of 19-year-old punk rock lesbians," says fellow march organizer Amy Eiferman, a 29-year old Jamaica Plain resident. "And we're really working to change that so that everyone feels welcome at the Dyke March." That's not to say that pierced and dyed rock chicks won't be well-represented among the expected throng of 1500 marchers. But they'll likely find themselves hoofing it down Boylston Street alongside a pair of lesbian mothers pushing a baby stroller, a contingent from Femme Pride, or a baseball-capped softball dyke.

The burgeoning numbers and ever-increasing diversity of dyke marchers is the result of several years of concerted outreach efforts to communities of color, the trans community and more mainstream GLBT social and political organizations, say march organiz-



Media Credit: Marilyn Humphries
last year's march

ers. The organizing committee has further boosted the march's visibility in the larger GLBT community with fundraisers at venues like Toast, the Midway Café and Tribe, in April and May. On June 5, scenester Aliza Shapiro's Truth Serum productions is throwing a Boston Dyke March benefit at the Milky Way (see Pride Calendar, p. 23).

Of course the money also helps. In recent years a \$3,000 annual budget, which includes grants from the New England Leather Alliance, has enabled organizers to beef up its sound system build a stage, rent an accessibility van and hire a sign-language interpreter, all of which makes the makes the march and its accompanying rally more enjoyable for more people.

It's a long way from Trigilio's first Boston Dyke March six years ago. Having lived in California and attended the San Francisco Dyke March - which regularly draws tens of thousands of marchers - it was a bit of a culture shock. "The first march I went to here was kind of small, it was like 350 people," she recalls. "And I didn't feel it was very diverse."

Following the inaugural Dyke March at the 1993 March on Washington, similar demonstrations sprang up in large cities across the country, borne out of the desire of lesbian activists to better address women's issues in what they charged was a male-dominated gay subculture and because of their dissatisfaction with the de-politicization in recent years of traditional gay pride parades. Though the Boston Dyke March has steadily grown over the years, it has not sacrificed its political edge. Trigilio attributes that constant to the roster of politically-minded speakers organizers have invited to the march. Over the years that roster has included trans firebrand Leslie Feinberg, lesbian former Cambridge City Councilor Katherine Triantafillou and this year's guests, lesbian cartoonist Alison Bechdel and Arline Isaacson of the Massachusetts Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus.

Dyke March organizer Stephanie Lowitt adds that Boston's inherent political nature, particularly around GLBT activism also fosters the march's political consciousness. "Boston has a lot of high points around queer issues and a lot of low points around queer issues," she observes. "Take the marriage amendment stuff. It's very exciting that Massachusetts is the first state to be doing ... legal marriage, but you also have an amendment coming up for a vote. So that's both positive and negative and things like that in the state keep the fire burning."

That's what makes the Boston Dyke March an attractive event for Isaacson, who has been on the forefront of the state's equal marriage movement. From the sound of it, she's looking to recruit, so to speak, at the march. "In my mind," says Isaacson, "Fifteen hundred women is an army, or potential army, of activists."

All this talk of politics is not to say that the Boston Dyke March isn't sexy. Marchers are as likely to hear local poet and playwright Letta Neely doing her very own vagina monologue, a poem called "8 ways of looking at pussy," as they are Feinberg raging against racism, sexism and homophobia.

Despite that, you're unlikely to see many topless chicks at Boston's Dyke March, though it's a widespread tradition at marches in San Francisco and

New York City. "Yes there are more bare breasts there," Lowitt concedes. "True.

"You know, we in Boston, we do the best we can," adds the 27-year-old JP resident. "People with pasties and suspenders strategically placed are always welcome, tattoos, you know, that kind of thing. So I wouldn't say the spirit of the bare breast is dampened in Boston, it's just legal technicality. We welcome people to show up as they will as long as they understand they could catch a cold and there are risks."

Trigilio notes that at her first Boston Dyke March police officers turned their heads to the handful of women who dared to go bare that year. Still, she's more blunt about the risks to flaunting the goods than Lowitt: "There's a law against toplessness in Boston."

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Comments, criticism or praise regarding this article or writer -- or just about any other subject of interest to the lesbian and gay community -- are always welcome.

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