

Pussy power

Boston's 12th annual Dyke March attracts 700

by Laura Kiritsy
associate editor

Nothing screams Dyke March like signs emblazoned with the slogan "Pussy Power," the proud proclamation "Muff Diver" (complete with an illustration of a scuba mask) or the self-esteem enhancing "Fat Dykes Are Beautiful."

The eye-catching signage, hoisted by dozens within the rag tag band of about 700 dykes, trannies, assorted queers and the people who love them that turned out for the annual Boston Dyke March on June 9, stopped many curious bystanders in their tracks as marchers made their way from the Boston Common's Parkman Bandstand through the streets of the Back Bay. And though the noisy horde didn't distract a male parking attendant from his duties, so engrossed was he in ticketing a green mini-van parked on Beacon Street, we couldn't help but notice that his middle-aged female co-worker took the opportunity to reapply her lipstick as the Dyke March passed her by. Pussy power? You decide.

This year's Boston Dyke March also saw the first-time participation of a gubernatorial candidate. Green Party nominee Grace Ross took to the streets with marchers, though her presence likely had more to do with the fact that she's a lesbian than with her campaign. "How surprising," Ross responded with a smile when it was pointed out that she was the only candidate for the corner office at the march. "It's an obvious answer," she explained of her presence at the event. "These are my people."

"At this point most of us feel like outsiders in the political process," Ross also said. "And there's something to be said for those of us who know that we're outsiders in various ways modeling and being part of showing folks that we still fight for our rights and we can win. And so I'm here for all of those reasons."

Now in its 12th year, the Boston Dyke March — which was spared the torrential downpours that had been predicted earlier in the day — continues to draw a spirited crowd that spans generations and genders for a non-commercial, grassroots celebration of female empowerment and women-lovin' women that combines politics and playfulness. "I think everybody should be open to who they are," explained Ali Coe, who took the train from Easton to attend the march. "For one day, you know, we can all have fun and be happy, [we] don't have to care what people think," said the 23-year-old, who wore a green t-shirt that said "Kiss Girls."

Coe's companion, 23-year-old Kristin Albee of Mansfield, indicated that she was drawn to the Dyke March because her prospects for hooking up were a little higher than at traditional gay pride parades, where, she observed, "you run into a lot of what people call 'fag hags.' So, at least here you know pretty much everyone's gay so it's not too bad to hit on someone."

Despite the event's emphasis on, well, dykes obviously, in recent years the Boston Dyke March committee, an all-volun-

teer, consensus-driven body, has gone out of its way to make the march as inclusive as possible. The trans community has long been a strong presence in the march, onstage at the post-march rally and in the entertainment lineup. This year's Boston Dyke March, for instance, included trans-identified slam poet Kit Yan.

But not everyone believes that the march's gender diversity is appropriate for the event. Deb Kennedy, a 45-year-old lesbian from Milton, expressed disappointment that transmen have been featured speakers at the last three dyke marches she's attended in Boston. "Not that I'm not pro-tran; I just think, this is a dyke march, why are they having transsexual men speaking?" said Kennedy. "There's an awful lot of tranny boys here that are claiming the space. And I was around when the dyke march started and it was started by the Lesbian Avengers and the Lesbian Avengers was started because there was no space for lesbians in the gay and lesbian community. And now once again, there's no space for the lesbians, in my opinion, in the gay and lesbian community."

This year's keynote speaker Letta Neely, a poet, playwright and executive director of Boston GLASS (Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services), called for the Boston Dyke March crowd to defy the current social and political systems rather than begging for entry into them at the expense of their humanity. "In our struggle for entry into this house we've been taunted and harassed, given 'Fear Factor' challenges couched

in legitimacy. We've had men ram at and tear and strategically rip our vaginas, our noses, our cheekbones away from us. They've stripped our very ... dreams and our determinations."

"I think that there's some things that we need to do to get back to ourselves," Neely advised. "One is we got to start being honest with each other," said Neely, particularly around matters of lesbian health and the transmission of human papilloma virus (HPV), a sexually transmitted disease that leads to cervical cancer. The disease "is one of the serious things that's part of our community," she said. "We have to take care of ourselves. We have to be real. So if you want to get down and get busy, go on about your business but go on and protect yourself a little bit too."

Neely also called for more honest discussions in the ways

in which gender identity can impact LGBT people of color. "It is a very difficult predicament ... as a black dyke, when there have been white lesbians ... and then they turn out to be white men," Neely explained. "It's not an easy transition to say, 'Let's be allies and let's be all hunky dory.' And I think that that's a hard thing to say but it's a real thing. You can not just walk up to black women or women of color and be like, 'All right, I'm down with sisters, I'm down with the power.' You got to prove that shit. And I don't know how we go about that except by continuing to be real with each other."

Neely closed by asking that people "keep being real with each other." To that end she proposed that on the Saturday following the Boston Pride Parade folks show up on Boston Common "and let's do it like we used to — let's talk to all our peoples. I don't give a care if you're rich you're broke, black, white, Latino, Asian, transgender ... every woman, every man, let's show up here and show this bullshit government that we're not down for this shit. Bring your tent, whatever. Be prepared to stay."

"What time?" called a voice from somewhere in the crowd.

"Whatever the fuck time you get here, yo," Neely responded. "Just be here."



DYKE MARCHERS come in all sizes. Photo: Richard Chase.