

# Two new gay bars open in Victoria

'We're marketing to gay men' but won't exclude anybody: Gary Penny



ANDREA KUCHERAWY PHOTO

**GEARED TO THE GAY MAN.** "I really believe it's a time where men have their own space to have male dancers and things that relate to men," says Gary Penny who opened a new gay bar, the Copper Club, in Victoria, Feb 10.

## GAY SPACE

Nathaniel Christopher

**VICTORIA BARTENDER** Terry Jacques and gay rights pioneer Gary Penny each opened new gay bars in Victoria, Feb 10.

Penny says his new bar, the Copper Club, located in Paul's Motor Inn, targets a male clientele.

"I really believe it's a time where men have their own space to have male dancers and things that relate to men on the TV and so forth," says Penny. "It's not that we're against lesbians or anything like that, but we're gearing towards men. Gay bars all used to be like that," Penny notes, adding that the new space will resemble a Las Vegas lounge where conversation and not dance music takes centre stage.

In February 2007, Penny sold Prism, the only gay bar in Victoria, to long-time customers Terry Bex and Attila Bassett, on condition they keep the space gay.

"They have not lived up to that commitment," says Penny, who feels that Prism, renamed Paparazzi after extensive renovations in 2008, caters more to a "mixed crowd," leaving a vacuum for a dedicated queer space.

Bassett says Paparazzi acts as a bridge between the gay community and straight people.

"This is the 21st century," Bassett says. "Why do we now want to segregate everyone?"

"We welcome everybody at the nightclub, but it is still advertised as Victoria's only gay bar," Bex adds. "We still have drag shows, we still sponsor Victoria Pride, and we still host the Mr and Mrs Gay Vancouver Island pageant."

Bex questions how Penny will keep the Copper Club focused on gay men without excluding others.

"You can't refuse admission to anyone on sexuality," says Bex.

"We're not going to refuse entry, we're marketing to gay men," Penny counters.

This is welcome news to Barrie Chamberlin, president of Prime

Timers Victoria, a group for gay and bisexual men over 40.

"I know that in our Prime Timers group, if we're together the language and jokes and stories are not something you'd get in a mixed crowd," he says. Chamberlin is confident the Copper Club will be well received in the community.

Copper Club co-owner George Dowse says the club has been "jam packed" the last few weekends, but not all of his patrons are from the targeted demographic.

"Fifty percent of our crowd has been under 30," Dowse notes. "We ended up with a lot of university students coming, which we didn't think there would be in the beginning, as there are so many venues for them to go. We had to tap dance pretty quickly. We brought in DJs in the last two weekends after 11, so it really doesn't impact on the older crowd, other than the older people like myself who want to party until 1am."

Bassett has noticed an increase in traffic at Paparazzi too. "Business is doing good, really good. We're seeing different faces. New faces that would have not generally come out to our club and now are."

Meanwhile, former Paparazzi/Prism employee Terry Jacques also opened his own bar, the Ledge, named for its proximity to the Legislative Assembly.

Thus far, the crowd at the Ledge has been "all over the board," Jacques says. "One night we're full of women and another we'll be full of guys. Hopefully in a month we'll see a bit more where we're headed."

While he is clear that it's a gay bar, Jacques hopes the Ledge will appeal to a wide demographic.

"I'm not going to cater to a straight crowd but I'm not going to turn them away at the door," he says.

**THE COPPER CLUB.**  
1900 Douglas Street, Victoria.

**THE LEDGE.**  
1140 Government Street, Victoria.

**PAPARAZZI NIGHTCLUB.**  
642 Johnson Street, Victoria.

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is going on here

?"

● ACT 1; SCENE 4

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