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COMMUNITY

Gay business group losing members

GLBA recovering from difficult period: chair

Nathaniel Christopher

ON JUNE 30, THE GAY AND LESBIAN Business Association of British Columbia (GLBA) held its annual general meeting, with seven out of a possible 326 members in attendance.

GLBA board chair Brad McPhee summarized the current fiscal year as a period of stability and a continuation of the previous year, which he said was characterized by organization and restraint.

"For the most part, we were able to build upon the structure and design of the previous year, but the board was not particularly well focused, and the results show this," he said in his management report. "There were many absences from meetings; the sub-committees were slow to form and slow to achieve. The board had had some excellent ideas, but the implementation was weak and the board recognized this issue late in the year."

McPhee attributed this to the board's efforts to "clean up" the GLBA from previous years and the number of new board members who joined after the board set out its priorities and work plans. "Most of the cleanup was done by the last AGM," he noted. "Everything was completely cleaned up last year because we couldn't submit clear financials. There were no records of financials without a forensic accounting being done."

McPhee attributes the need for cleanup to frequent staff changes in the past. "It was fiscal year 2008/2009: there had been three employees at the office; the office had moved twice. It was a whole series of issues, and all of a sudden I become chair, I am on the board, and we cleaned up over a period of two years. Today the GLBA has completely accurate accounting methods, so anyone can look at the books."

Still, McPhee acknowledges that membership in the organization is declining and the board is having



Brad McPhee (second from right, with board members Meera Thakrar, Isabelle Swiderski and Ryan McKinley) says the GLBA is still recovering from frequent staff changes and two office moves in 2008/09. NATHANIEL CHRISTOPHER PHOTO

difficulty meeting some of its goals. "I don't think the board delivered strong performance on its three Rs: revenues, referrals and reach."

The GLBA currently stands at about 61 percent of last year's total of approximately 533 members. It hopes to add 125 paid memberships by the end of July.

McPhee attributes the membership decline to competition from another business directory coupled with an economic downturn. In his report, he said the GLBA's annual directory does not seem to be regarded as highly now because of competition from another directory produced by Pink Triangle Press, which also publishes *Xtra Vancouver*. "The economic malaise seems to have tightened up the GLBT marketing dollars, and owners/entrepreneurs and managers are asking what is the ROI [return on investment] for this expenditure," he said.

However, McPhee reported that the GLBA's finances are "completely in hand."

According to its 2010 profit-and-loss report, the GLBA reported a deficit of \$3,996.25, with \$89,230.48 in

income and \$93,226.73 in expenses.

"The operating budget continues to be at about \$89,000 a year," said McPhee. "Now we can see a path to \$72,000 a year. We know how to get there. We need to close that gap. We need to raise more money to do things like the website and increase the marketing effort for Gala next year and other events. The board will accomplish that at the visioning meeting."

On May 26, the GLBA's philanthropic arm, known as the Leadership, Opportunity, Unity, Diversity (LOUD) Foundation, hosted its third annual Scholarship Gala, which awarded four scholarships to "future leaders of the Canadian LGBT community."

"Aside from the fact that we didn't reach our fundraising goals due to lower ticket sales — and we blame it all on hockey — we did achieve success if we look at the number of people who attended and money that was money raised," said board member and LOUD president Isabelle Swiderski. "We do believe it was a positive event. We managed to give away three \$2,000 scholarships and one \$1,000 Little Sister's award."

>global briefs

Queer film in Beijing

THE FIFTH BEIJING QUEER FILM Festival wrapped up June 19 after five days of guerrilla-style screenings around the city.

Three days before the opening, authorities ordered the festival's cancellation and threatened "harsh consequences" if the order was ignored.

The Beijing Xicheng District Public Security Bureau, the Culture Bureau and the Bureau of Industry and Trade were involved in halting the festival, said organizers, who quickly lined up alternate locations and successfully kept authorities in the dark about screening times and venues.

More than 500 people, including 23 Chinese and foreign queer filmmakers, attended 30 screenings plus filmmaker talks and discussions.

"Despite, and perhaps even thanks to, the ban imposed by the authorities, the Beijing Queer Film Festival

succeeded in what it set out to do: celebrate queer film and celebrate the necessity of showing queer films in a society where non-mainstream voices are stifled all too often," festival organizers said.

"Our ultimate goal as a queer film festival is to challenge and oppose this mainstream ideology," festival chairwoman Yang Yang said.

St Petersburg Pride put down

POLICE TOOK 14 ACTIVISTS INTO custody after breaking up the second gay pride march in St Petersburg, Russia, just two minutes after it started June 25.

Detainees were fined for organizing an illegal public action and face an additional charge of disobeying police orders, which can carry a penalty of up to 15 days in jail.

The crackdown follows a similar one on Moscow's sixth gay pride

attempt in May, violating a recent ruling by the European Court of Human Rights that Russia cannot ban gay pride events. European gay activists are now calling on the Council of Europe to suspend Russia's voting rights in the association.

Gays march in Havana

FOR THE FIRST TIME, QUEERS marched in Havana, Cuba, without government approval or affiliation.

Previous gay marches have been staged through CENESEX, the National Center for Sex Education run by President Raúl Castro's daughter Mariela.

An independent group called LGBT Observatory of Cuba organized the June 28 march down Paseo del Prado. A group spokeswoman told reporters CENESEX does not speak for all Cuban queers.

— Rex Wockner