

Winter Party Festival: It's going to be a throwback to the gay '08s

BY STEVE ROTH AUS
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The 2009 economy is tanking and tourism has taken a hit, but gay men and women are poised to party in South Florida like it's 2008.

Winter Party Festival advance ticket sales are nearly the same this year as last, according to Michael Bath, special events manager for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

"In terms of ticket sales, we are neck and neck with last year," Bath said. "We are within \$5,000 of last year. We're closing in on \$200,000 in advance ticket sales."

About 10,000 visitors from all over the globe are expected at the 2009 festival, which runs Wednesday to March 2, in venues from South Beach to Fort Lauderdale. The big 16th annual dance party will be March 1 at 12th Street and Ocean Drive in Miami Beach.

"We are a very unique festival," Bath said. "It is March and you can dance on the beach when it's cold everywhere else."

Entertainment throughout the week will be provided by star DJs including Tracy Young, Tony Moran, Chus and Ceballos, Oren Nizri, Maximus 3000, Dezrock and Miss Flava.

Winter Party also draws a large number of locals. The main reason: Two-thirds of all net profits go to gay organizations in South Florida. Past beneficiaries include the Miami Gay & Lesbian Film Festival, Pridelines Youth Services and Aqua Foundation for Women.

"We get support not just from people who support the Task Force, but all the sister organizations. You can't understate that," Bath said.

The festival began in Miami Beach in 1994 with a one-day beach dance party off Ocean Drive. Winter Party helped finance a new foundation to benefit local gay groups. The Task Force bought the event, as well as the foundation's annual autumn recognition dinner, after the fund-raising group went under in 2004.

The Task Force agreed to keep two-thirds of all net profits from the events in Miami-Dade County, giving the money to the Dade Community Foundation's GLBT Community Project Fund.

Festival chairman Chad Richter, a member of Miami Beach's gay business council, became involved with planning about five years ago.

"For a long time, I was someone who lived in Miami Beach and went to these events to have fun with my friends," said Richter, Southeast retail sales manager for Kiehl's Since 1851 cosmetics.

“A lot of people might think that's it's a circuit party with shirts off. But there's much more substance behind it.”

About 80 local volunteers work year-round to plan Winter Party Festival. Eight festival directors take responsibility for tasks including finance, operations and volunteers.

“It's a very broad network of people that comes together with different talents,” Richter said.

Each Winter Party Festival, new events are scheduled to bring in different people with varied interests, Richter said.

This year, for instance, Pridelines is sponsoring a youth skate night on Tuesday in Fort Lauderdale.

“Because it's a volunteer festival, it has the potential to grow into anything the community wants,” he said.

IF YOU GO

SUNDAY

- Noon-4 p.m.: LGBT Family Picnic, Topeekeegee Yugnee (TY Park), Pavillion 8, 3300 N. Park Rd., Hollywood. Co-hosted by Winter Party Festival and South Florida Family Pride.

TUESDAY

- 6-8 p.m.: Pridelines Mardi Gras Youth Skate, Gold Coast Roller Rink, 2604 S. Federal Hwy., Fort Lauderdale. Presented by Pridelines Youth Services for LGBTQ youth ages 13-20. \$10, includes admission, skate rental and round-trip transportation for Miami-Dade youth. For more information, www.Pridelines.org.

WEDNESDAY

- 7-9:30 p.m., Winter Welcome Reception, Doubletree Surfcomber, 1717 Collins Ave., Miami Beach. Poolside reception with music of DJ Sayho and a special appearance by *The L Word's* Daniela Sea. Sponsored by Showtime Networks.

THURSDAY

- 7-9 p.m.: What It Would Feel Like To Be Free: Third annual Interfaith Service of Winter Party Festival, Trinity Cathedral, 464 NE 16th St., Miami.

- 7-10 p.m.: Women's Art Exhibit, Fache Arts & Amy Alonso Gallery, 750 NE 124th St., Suite 2, North Miami.

- 10 p.m. to 5 a.m.: Blast Off!, Score, 727 Lincoln Rd., Miami Beach. DJ Brett Henrichsen joins DJ Pride.

FRIDAY, FEB. 27

- 8-9 a.m.: Sunrise Yoga on the Beach with instructor Steven Herbst, Doubletree Surfcomber, 1717 Collins Ave., Miami Beach.

- 5-7 p.m.: Diesel Shopping Spree, Diesel, 933 Lincoln Rd., Miami Beach.
- 6-9 p.m.: Halo's Winter Party Happy Hour, 1625 Michigan Ave., Miami Beach.
- 8-10 p.m.: Kiehl's Gives 20/20, Kiehl's Since 1851, 832 Lincoln Rd., Miami Beach.
- 8:30-11 p.m.: Women's Cocktail Reception, Townhouse, 150 20th St., Miami Beach. Special appearance by *The L Word's* Daniela Sea.
- 9 p.m.-6 a.m.: Johnny Chisholm and JustCircuit Present Five-Ring Circuit, Discotekka @ Area 51, 950 NE Second Ave., Miami. 11 DJs in five rooms.
- 10 p.m.-4 a.m.: Pandora Events Present Industry, Pearl Restaurant & Ultra Lounge, 1 Ocean Dr., Miami Beach. Women's dance party with DJs Irene Pardo and Alex H.

SATURDAY, FEB. 28

- 8-9 a.m.: Sunrise Yoga on the Beach with instructor Steven Herbst, Doubletree Surfcomber, 1717 Collins Ave., Miami Beach.
- 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m.: Queen for a Day, The Standard Spa, 40 Island Ave., Miami Beach.
- Noon-6 p.m.: Under One Sun Pool Party, Doubletree Surfcomber Hotel, 1717 Collins Ave., Miami Beach. DJ Roland Belmares.
- 7-10 p.m.: VIP Cocktail Reception, Spa at Icon Brickell, 475 Brickell Ave., Miami. Hosted by Miami's TV Judge David Young. Appearance by Task Force Executive Director Rea Carey.
- 10 p.m.-3 a.m.: WHIP: A Leather Fantasy, Jackhammer, 1951 NW Ninth Ave. (Powerline Road), Fort Lauderdale. Chicago DJ Ted Eiel. Leather and fetish gear are preferred attire.
- 10 p.m. to 4 a.m.: Icandee Events Presents The Copa, The Fifth, 1045 Fifth St., Miami Beach. DJs Dezrock & Miss Flava at the first Winter Party Latin dance event for women.
- 10 p.m.-6 a.m.: Mercury Rising, parkwest Nightclub, 30 NE 11th St., Miami. DJs Alyson Calagna and Eddie X.

SUNDAY, MARCH 1

- 8-9 a.m.: Sunrise Yoga on the Beach with instructor Steven Herbst, Doubletree Surfcomber, 1717 Collins Ave., Miami Beach.
- 11 a.m.-1:30 p.m.: Women's Jazz Brunch, Van Dyke Café, 846 Lincoln Rd., Miami Beach.
- 11 a.m.-3 p.m.: Brunchic at the Palace Food Bar, The Palace, 1200 Ocean Dr., Miami Beach. Winter Party price fixe menu.
- Noon-6 p.m.: Winter Party Beach Party, 12th Street Beach, 12th Street and Ocean Drive, Miami Beach. DJ Tracy Young.
- 6-8 p.m.: Sunset Madness: Preparing to Orbit, The Palace, 1200 Ocean Dr., Miami Beach.

- 8 p.m.-5 a.m.: Orbit, Cameo, 1445 Washington Ave., Miami Beach. DJs Tony Moran and Chus and Ceballo. Open bar from 8-10 p.m.

MONDAY, MARCH 2

- 5 a.m.-5 p.m.: Red Eye, Nocturnal, 50 NE 11th St., Miami
- 7 p.m.-3 a.m.: Touchdown: The Closing Lounge Event, Halo, 1625 Michigan Ave., Miami Beach.