

EDITORIAL

Let Pridefest move to Chelsea

It appears that part of this year's Gay Pride celebration has just been stuffed back into the closet. On April 27, the Community Assistance Unit (CAU) of the mayor's office unexpectedly denied an application by the group Heritage of Pride (HOP) to move its annual LGBT street fair, Pridefest, from the West Village to Chelsea to make room for a chunk of the estimated 400,000 people who will descend on New York City the weekend of June 23-24. CAU also refused to let HOP move the fair from Sunday to Saturday to free up volunteers to help keep the event safe and orderly.

With its swelling crowds, HOP had argued that Pridefest has grown patently unsafe amid the narrow, winding, potholed streets of the Village after a 15-year run there, a fact that the NYPD's Sixth Precinct has confirmed. Chelsea, a neighborhood with wide avenues and a huge LGBT presence, was the obvious choice for Pridefest, as was separating the fair from Sunday's Pride March and Dance.

But CAU denied the request anyway, saying the move constituted a "new application," not a transfer of locations on its old permit, and was therefore in violation of a 2003 moratorium on new multi-block street permits meant to free up police resources and stem the growth of commercial street fairs that now dominate the city. Oddly, HOP, Community Board 4 and local elected officials got word to the contrary from CAU back in December and began to act on the belief that the application would go through. HOP then spent months gaining the support of C.B. 4, the Chelsea Cultural Partnership, more than 150 local businesses and three local precincts to move the street fair to Eighth Avenue between 14th and 23rd Streets this year, and has done significant logistical planning around the new location. The apparent miscommunication has left HOP in the lurch, with only a few weeks remaining before Pride Weekend.

Pridefest is not just another commercial street fair. It is an important, long-established annual event that helps organizations and LGBT-friendly businesses gain access to the LGBT community. It is also a critical fundraising component of HOP's annual budget, enabling it to operate and put on free events like its annual Pride Rally in Bryant Park and New York's world-famous Pride March. This year's Pridefest was to include elements not previously possible in the Village location, including dedicated spaces for children, youth and seniors, and increased space for HIV and STD screening and testing performed by healthcare organizations in collaboration with the city's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

As of press time, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn has lobbied Mayor Bloomberg and Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly to reconsider their position, to no avail. Numerous elected officials, including Congressman Jerrold Nadler, State Assemblymember Richard Gottfried, State Senator Tom Duane and City Comptroller William Thompson, have also written the mayor, asking him to reverse CAU's decision.

Meanwhile, HOP held an emergency meeting on Tuesday night and voted to cancel Pridefest rather than hold it in an unsafe location on Sunday, unless they hear from the mayor's office this week that their Chelsea permit will be honored.

We call on the mayor to overturn what appears to be an arbitrary application of the moratorium to Pridefest, and to reverse an 11th-hour decision by CAU that breaches the good-faith understanding under which a wide array of community groups, businesses and elected officials have been operating for months. We also urge the mayor and CAU to reconsider the moratorium and rethink the entire review and approval process for street fairs citywide, something numerous groups—including various councilmembers, C.B. 2 and 4, and other community organizations—have been requesting for the last few years. The city doesn't need a clumsy policy prohibiting new street fairs. It needs a well-thought-out approach that meets the needs of neighborhoods while allowing meritorious street fairs to thrive.

C LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Parking permits = traffic

To The Editor:

Re "Congestion pricing: A breath of fresh air," (editorial, April 27):

While the mayor's sudden interest in greening the city by reducing traffic through congestion pricing is commendable ("Congestion pricing: A breath of fresh air," editorial, April 25), I believe this is another example of the proverbial attempt to kill a fly with a cannon. Ultimately, congestion pricing amounts to a tax, which will be an onerous burden on those who can least afford it.

The mayor could easily solve traffic congestion tomorrow with zero cost to the general public. Just yank all the free parking permits that government employees use to park their commuter vehicles, and watch the traffic decline. The Schaller study, commissioned by Transportation Alternatives, clearly demonstrates that government workers commute by car at a much higher rate than employees of private firms.

Candidate Bloomberg, campaigning for his first term, had promised to move government offices out of Manhattan — a campaign pledge that he never fulfilled. That is indeed unfortunate, as our Lower Manhattan neighborhoods are saturated with commuter vehicles parked at fire hydrants, bus stops, curb cuts, crosswalks, on top of sidewalks and even in the bushes, all displaying placards stating the vehicle is "on official city business."

Likewise, if the mayor was really concerned with solving Lower Manhattan's traffic congestion and air pollution, he

would come out in support of changing the one-way toll system on the Verrazano Bridge back to two-way tolls, as proposed by Congressman Nadler. Currently, trucks can save as much as \$70 by diverting through Manhattan and skirting the Verrazano toll on their way into New Jersey.

John Ost

Big Brother is listening

To The Editor:

As I sit on my terrace, being periodically deafened by one passing vehicle after another, I came up with a potential solution for the blasting car music and roaring motorcycles. There are pole-mounted camera devices posted at several city intersections. If a vehicle is in the intersection and the light is red, a photo is taken and a fine mailed to the car's registered owner.

Why don't we mount several microphones in the intersection, as well? That way, we can triangulate the position of the noisy vehicle as it passes through the intersection, and then it can be photographed. This way, an image and recording of the perpetrator could be saved and even be available on the Net.

It would be a financial boost for the city, and hopefully entice the owners of noisy automobiles or motorcycles to behave, while not risking officers' lives or taking them away from more pressing responsibilities.

Gregory Gomez

An Edwardian death room

C NOTEBOOK

BY ANDREI CODRESCU

People report ghosts at the Colonial Burma Hotel and Spa in Eureka Springs, Ark. The lumbering rooming house served as a Civil War hospital, a miracle spa for dying cancer patients from Kansas, a tuberculosis sanatorium, an abandoned building, a losing investment for the St. Louis mafia and, in its present incarnation, a romantic destination for Arkansans and Missourians desirous of rekindling romance through the use of pedicures and herbal wraps.

The fourth-floor corner room we hired looked over verdant hills through painted-shut windows. A wasp was trying desperately to get out into those promising hills, but like a metaphor of previous residents, it kept hurling itself hopelessly against the glass. The walls were done in thick swirling rusty paint of flaked blood, bordered by baby-puke green. Embedded in the rusty blood was a sprinkling of gold blobs that may have been intended as stars but were in fact gobs of sputum hurled there by coughing moribunds. In 1937, Dr. Carr, who had been the most prominent dealer of snake-oil to the dying at the Colonial Burma, was eventually arrested for fraud and sent to Leavenworth, but not before giving this hoary Edwardian monument its permanent connection to agonizing death. There is a lovely lounge on the fourth floor bearing his name.

Judging by the ages and girth of the lobby-loungers hoping

for romance-rekindling, many of them were working with wet matches in a downpour and some sorry-looking twigs. Still, you can't underestimate the power of a peach bubble bath, or that of a pedicure, for that matter. A nurse-therapist smiled wanly as she went back into the spa after a soul-restoring Marlboro in the 85-degree humid sunshine outside. The smell of sweat and smoke wafted from her. She looked a bit like the woman in the print above the bed, an art-nouveau damsel gazing at a brightly flowering bush that distracted the casual viewer from noticing her elegant fingers buried candidly between her thighs twixt the flowing folds of her dress.

Surfeited by humanity, I turned on my computer. The Internet bars came on, indicating the presence of Wi-Fi, a good sign. The only thing is, the bars were purple, something I'd never seen. I Googled Dr. Carr, and my screen filled immediately with purplish e-mail addresses. Here are some of them: Asmith@death.com, Mprice@death.com, Earlyseth@death.com. There wasn't a Yahoo or Gmail or AOL address among them, and I had the feeling that death.com was a server that preceded all of them somehow. I had tapped into a whole other Internet, a secret intranet perhaps, that listed the e-mail addresses of dead people. Did you have to be dead to communicate with these people? I typed a brief message for Asmith@death.com, and I didn't have to wait long for the answer.

Next week I will reveal what Asmith wrote. Be prepared to get the willies.

MIKHAELA REID



Signs of New York Spring—Finally!