

**Gala-leujah!**

*By: Jason A. Heidemann*

At World of Chocolate, the sugar-laden fund-raiser held annually by the AIDS Foundation of Chicago, I invariably finish the evening like a glutton. The all-you-can-eat event for the cacao-obsessed ends with dark-chocolate truffle smeared across my pressed shirt and my pockets stuffed with mousse I'm idiotically trying to smuggle out behind the organizers' backs.

It's my favorite gala of the year, but at \$75 a throw, I thank my press pass that for me it's free (and this is one of the cheaper benefits in town). Tickets to top-tier galas can reach as high as \$300 per person, often excluding all but the top crust of gays. If that's what it takes to lend my dollars to causes, I simply can't do it. But increasingly, nonprofits like the AIDS Foundation of Chicago, Howard Brown and TPAN, among others, are finding ways to bridge that gap and bring young donors into the fold.

Patrick Marsden, 24, is the vice president of the AIDS Foundation of Chicago's Junior Board, a committee composed of gay and straight activists ages 22 to 35. According to Marsden, the Junior Board encourages young people to join the fight against HIV/AIDS as well as raise awareness about the infection rate among their cohort. And it does this without breaking the piggy banks of its targeted demographic.

This weekend, for example, Steven Rosengard of Bravo's Project Runway joins the Junior Board for "Make a Statement: Design for the Cure," a fashion show that also will feature an open bar, raffle and live entertainment at an affordable price. "For 50 bucks you can get as much alcohol as you can drink," Marsden says. "You get a wonderful fashion show, a goodie bag and you get exposed to other like-minded people in our community."

Scott LaBoda, 27, co-organizes Proud to Run, the annual Pride Weekend 5K/10K run and two-mile fun walk that benefits Gerber/Hart Library and Youth Pride. He agrees that fund-raisers should be creative and affordable, as illustrated by both the run (\$25-\$30) and a number of free preparties called "Drinks for Charity" happening around town, including one this weekend at Scot's bar (1829 W Montrose Ave, 773-528-3253). "I go to a lot of those galas," LaBoda says, "and I can say that the food is terrible, the alcohol is mostly fairly cheap and you sometimes have to sit through long speeches." Proud to Run offers a cheap and healthful alternative, he says. "These events are more accessible, especially to the young and to people of all different economic statuses. It's great to get out there and burn off a few of those many calories that are consumed that weekend."

Some parties offer a stake in the cause. Kristen Kaza, 23, cofounded Role Play, a now-retired monthly costume party. Each event was a fund-raiser for Fish Out of Water (fishoutofwaterfilm.com), a work-in-progress doc about the link between homosexuality and religion by local filmmaker Ky Dickens. For \$5, a mostly young crowd had the chance to schmooze with other queer culture vultures, preview parts of the film and generate funding for its postproduction. "For us it was a way to let

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the community be a part of this film," says Kaza. "We feel that Fish Out of Water has become something that has been built by the Chicago community."

All these events engage young queer people while encouraging them to become donors for life. "I certainly hope that earlier charitable interactions with the Junior Board will serve as a foundation for later giving," Marsden says. "But then I also hope we will have won our battle against HIV/AIDS by then, too."

At the very least, these innovative fund-raisers prove to the big nonprofits seeking funds and activists that young LGBT people both want to help and have the money to do so, albeit in lesser amounts. "Young people have money to give," LaBoda says. "They're willing to put it where their mouth is and support charities that they believe in."

Make A Statement: Design for the Cure walks the runway May 8 while Drinks for Charity happens May 10.

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