



Fraser

life

Saturday, November 20, 2010

Gay old time in the city

Maryborough's festival
that bends all the rules

foodwineinterviewgardeningbooksartmusicpeople

Life's not such a



BAR NONE: The original drag queen, Miss Marion D'Vorce.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

Jocelyn Watts traces the history of an iconic event on the Coast's social scene

THE SCENE is set for a massive night of campness, sequins and fun at Fraser Coast Diversity's 10th birthday bash at the Criterion Hotel in Maryborough tonight. Performers and supporters are flying in from Brisbane, north Queensland and even New South Wales for the party.

Fraser Coast Diversity was started in December 2000 by former Maryborough local Shawn Dern who could see a monthly night

needed for the local gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community.

The event would become not only a safe place for like-minded people one night a month but also a place where people could meet new friends and not feel alone in such a conservative area.

Shawn, who is returning from Sydney for tonight's party, said he organised the first night as a one-off social night.

"The first party was only attended by 35 people but the Criterion Hotel was so happy with the turnout and my enthusiasm that they allowed me to keep organising a party every month. This was the start of Fraser Coast Diversity."

Shawn said that in 2001, he was dared to do drag by a fellow performer and the character of Donna Frock emerged.

Donna Frock went on to host every month as well as being a

Longest running event of its kind in the state

FRASER Coast Diversity holds the record as the longest running monthly gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender event at the same Queensland venue.

"Diversity has gone from strength to strength since it began 10 years ago," Darren Williams of Maryborough said.

"There were just 35 at the start and now we have crowds of 120 to 150 at times."

Even more are expected at tonight's 10th birthday bash with about 250 already on the attendance list.

"I know this celebration will be popular. Shawn is coming from Sydney and there'll be people from other cities including Brisbane and Townsville.

"As well as local people it will also be a reunion of those from Maryborough who have moved away and those who have performed over the years. It'll be a chance to celebrate and party."

Darren said Clay Clayton from the Criterion Hotel had been a huge supporter of the monthly event over the past 10 years.

"He has been looking after us ever since and his support is very welcome - without it Diversity wouldn't be what it is today."

Diversity has been a place for same-sex couples, experimental singles and those who like to dress in drag to party the night away with like-minded people.

Clubbers of all different backgrounds are welcome and the evening is enjoyed just as much by heterosexual party-goers.

The event has become well-known across Queensland, particularly Hervey Bay, Tin Can Bay, Bundaberg, Gympie and Brisbane.

Tonight's party will be a massive celebration with old faces, new faces, some fabulous shows and a few beverages to be had.

● *Darren Williams is not his real name.*



Host Florence Fettuccini always adds some spice to Diversity nights.

drag with Diversity



MIXED BAG: Like its name suggests, Diversity always attracts an eclectic crowd of colours, personalities and sexualities.

regular performer at the Sportman Hotel and 3 Big Gay Days at the Wickham Hotel in Brisbane.

In 2006, Shawn moved on for a new life in Sydney and handed the Diversity reins to his good friends Lawrie Simons and Rod Watt.

Lawrie has been the Diversity host ever since under the guise of Florence Fettuccine and with Rod Watt's support, they have made Fraser Coast Diversity even bigger.

This pair has been an integral part of Diversity's success over the past four years and have helped the party reach this historic milestone.

There have been 65 different performers on the Diversity stage and more than 220 drag shows

'He explained that Maryborough was a tough town to be gay in and they had to hide this fact most of the time'

over the 10 years.

Along with Florence Fettuccine, some of Diversity's favourite performers will appear to-night.

Shawn's alter ego Donna Frock will be flying up from Sydney and returning to the stage for the first time in four-and-a-half years as well as his duet sidekick Miss AffeliaDic jetting in from Port Macquarie.

Taylor and Seena Mirage will also be heading up the highway from Brisbane to perform.

Three DJs will be mixing the music and keeping patrons on the dance floor. Resident Criterion DJ Brendan Heit will be on hand as well as the original Diversity DJ, Steve B, and all the way from Sydney, DJ Justin Scott.

Justin's DJ resume includes working the discs at Sydney Gay Mardi Gras, Sleazeball and being a regular DJ at some of the most famous gay venues on the Sydney scene including Midnight Shift, Imperial Hotel, Stonewall Hotel, ARQ and Taxi Club.

Doors open tonight at 8pm and close at 3am. Cover charge \$8.



Florence Fettuccini, NeNe Cherry and Trixie Onasis III.



Diversity founder Shawn Dern.
Photo: FraserGays

A place where everyone can be themselves

AFTER hosting the monthly Fraser Coast Diversity for the past 10 years, publican Clay Clayton thought he knew his guests well.

Behind the party atmosphere, however, strong emotions run deep.

Those feelings are rarely revealed but this week while pre-

paring for Diversity's 10th birthday party tonight, a Maryborough businessman shared his thoughts with Clay.

"The businessman told me Diversity has had a major impact on his life and many other gay locals," Clay said.

"He explained that Maryborough was a tough town to be

gay in and they had to hide this fact most of the time, especially while running his own business.

"There was never anywhere they could go and be open and honest about their lives.

"Diversity was a very significant event that opened a channel that allowed gay people to be comfortable with their sexuality

in a local public place.

"He believes that over the past 10 years Diversity has been the vehicle that has driven acceptance in Maryborough and it has instilled a positive change in the community's understanding of gay people.

"He was quite emotional about it, and it was very enlightening."