



EAT, DRINK AND BE GIVING AT THE FIRST FESTIVAL OF TREES SAN DIEGO

Celebrate the season on **Saturday, November 27** at insideOUT restaurant and lounge in Hillcrest. *The RAGE Monthly* caught up with Festival of Trees San Diego chair and co-host **Bobby Gordon** to learn more about this new holiday fundraising soiree.

Tell us a little about yourself and how you got involved with Festival of Trees San Diego?

I am a longtime LGBTQ community fundraiser and organizer. I personally love the holiday season, and after living here a few years in San Diego, I realized I could launch an annual Festival of Trees event to help Hillcrest and our LGBTQ community kick off the holidays in style while raising funds to support a local nonprofit organization.

To me, it was a no-brainer to combine a “few of my favorite things” into one event — supporting the local nonprofit community, hosting an event with music and cocktails. I’m so very happy and overwhelmed with how supportive and involved our local community has been for this new event idea and for our community! Plus, planning an event like this takes the better part of the year to organize, and you must absolutely love the holidays, even in July, to make this happen. Any one of my friends would easily tell you I’m the self-proclaimed “king of Christmas.”

Who else has been a part of the process?

I’ve been lucky enough to pull together who I call “local heroes” to help make this event a reality in its first year. The event will be co-hosted by **Moe Girton** (Mo’s Universe/insideOUT/Gossip Grill), the fabulous **Miriam T** and me. Our core committee members include **Benny Cartwright** (former Nicky Award winner/Man of the Year), **Jarrold Clever** (silent auction chair), **Mark Schmidt** (space designer), **Joshua Simmons** (The Eagle/volunteer coordinator), and **Joshua Yeagley** (design coordinator/Yeagley’s Designs). insideOUT, where the event will be held, their manager **Paris**, and all of MO’s Universe have been so very generous in supporting this event.

Where did the concept originate?

While I can’t take personal credit for the concept of auctioning off trees for charity, it was my personal idea and has become my personal passion and goal to establish and plan an annual event for our local LGBTQ community. I’ve attended other cities’ Festival of Trees (FOT) events, and even chaired Phoenix’s FOT one year. As the first Festival of Trees San Diego, we’ll be live auctioning artificial trees and delivering them to the winners’ homes following the event. The event will also feature a robust silent auction and a travel raffle. insideOUT was the natural and logical place to host, as we will display the trees the week leading up to the event, so potential bidders can

get an idea of which trees they may want to take home with them.

What else do you have planned for the event?

Festival of Trees is a cocktail-and-mingle event with no assigned seating, featuring signature- and holiday-themed drinks, charcuterie-style hors d’oeuvres and a unique soundtrack of remixed holiday music favorites provided by your very own DJ and event co-host, Bobby Gordon. All our expertly decorated and designed trees will be on display with signage explaining their titles, themes and sponsors. The robust silent auction will also be happening throughout the event. The travel raffle will be limited to 100 tickets sold at \$100 each and will have the grand prize drawn at the end of the event. Our special guests include San Diego Mayor **Todd Gloria**, City Council President Pro Tem **Stephen Whitburn** (District 3), *RuPaul’s Drag Race All-Stars* winner **Chad Michaels**, Santa, Mx. Claus and a few of Santa’s naughty elves. We’ll also have a few other surprises planned.

Being Alive was chosen as the beneficiary?

Yes, Being Alive was chosen unanimously by the planning committee as our beneficiary this year. We all agreed that their comprehensive, end-to-end HIV/AIDS-related services in our community was the right fit for our first Festival of Trees, and a rallying point of pride for our LGBTQ community. The HIV/AIDS epidemic still affects our community every day, and it’s my personal hope that this event can help support those locally in our community in need through Being Alive’s various initiatives, programs and services.

Anything else you’d like our readers to know?

There are so many reasons to not miss Festival of Trees this year. This is the first one, and it’s intended to be the biggest holiday kick-off party for Hillcrest and the LGBTQ community. With everyone dressed in their best holiday flair, everyone has the chance to support an amazing cause. Tickets are set at a lower price (\$25 general admission/\$50 VIP), so the event is accessible to everyone’s budget, while giving others an opportunity to support the silent auction, travel raffle and tree auctions. We all know that Miriam T is San Diego’s crankiest drag queen, but Moe and I will be there to spar with her while raising as much as we can to support Being Alive. Finally, without giving away any tree themes until the week of the festival, the themes picked by our generous tree sponsors are super creative, engaging, unique and over-the-top. You won’t want to miss seeing them in person. After dealing with a worldwide pandemic for nearly two years, it’s time for our community to come together to celebrate the holidays, celebrate each other and support a worthy cause. With so many local businesses being involved as sponsors, volunteers, donors, tree decorators and special guests, this will be the who’s-who holiday party to not miss. festivaloftreesd.org

pictured above are co-hosts moe girton, miriam t and bobby gordon
photo by kristofer reynolds

