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LOCAL LIFE

The business of Pride

From hotel discounts to Post's new coverage, corporations are discovering appeal of Capital Pride

ZACK ROSEN

Friday, May 30, 2008

Gay Pride is no longer just a party. These days, it's a business, which can be seen in the corporate sponsorships and business tie-ins related to Capital Pride, and this year several more local companies have stepped in to provide Pride-based services to local and visiting gays.

The Kimpton Hotel & Restaurant Group owns 10 hotels in the area, and each of them will feature a special Pride discount of 15 percent off the best available room rate between Memorial Day and Labor Day. This allows gay visitors to come in for Capital Pride, but also to enjoy the best of gay D.C. for an entire summer.

"We didn't want it to just be Pride weekends, we wanted it to be something that's great for our guests all summer long," says Sarah Crocker, Kimpton's director of public relations for D.C. and Virginia.

"Right now people are looking for affordable travel. It's nice to get some great rates when you're traveling. We did this last year and it was very popular across the country. The Kimpton Group has always had special promotions and packages for our LGBT community, this is just us continuing to offer great rates and deals."

Seven of the Kimpton hotels are within the District, and include the Hotel Monaco, Hotel George, Hotel Helix and Hotel Rouge. Rouge is especially notable for its Thomas Circle location, which is convenient to both Dupont and Logan Circle, and for its especially hip hotel bar.

THE CAPITOL HILL SUITES hotel also offers a "D.C. Pride Weekend Package," which extends through Dec. 28. The combination includes continental breakfast for two, two all-day Metro passes, complimentary DVD rental, a \$10 Starbucks gift certificate, Aveda spa and bath products in the room, a free copy of the Washington Blade and a Pride welcome bag canvas tote with a surprise gift inside. The hotel has been newly renovated and its promoters say the hotel's location will allow visitors to get a comprehensive D.C. experience.

"The cool thing about Washington is once you get here there's so many things to do that are free or low cost, it's a cool weekend trip to take," says Katie Wassmer, an account executive for the hotel's public relations company. "Our hotel is in the middle of everything, whatever you're here for. You're across the



Hotel Rouge is one of several local hotels offering Pride discount packages.

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street from the Library of Congress and other tourist stops, and if you're in town for business, you're near the Senate and [congressional] representatives' offices."

The expanding appeal of Pride is evident even in local media coverage. Although the event has garnered extensive coverage in the area's gay publications, this year the Washington Post is publishing a preview feature in its Weekend section. The paper's advertising division has already distributed promotional fliers, touting the section as a venue for advertising that will reach readers who are affluent, educated and young.

Mark Gross, the Post's national accounts manager, who is gay, says the gay community's diversity makes it more than just a minority group when it comes to advertising.

"The gay community is a population, it's a demographic, it's a lifestyle," he says. "As it blends with the mainstream it becomes a hybrid of an important market. It's kind of like looking at the niche market through mainstream eyes. There is no specific consumer in the gay population, it's a microcosm of a larger consumer."

Washington Blade publisher Lynne Brown took issue with Gross' description of the gay market.

"The Post gets it but they don't get it," Brown said. "Sweeping generalizations about gay people, gay identity and gay community based on mainstream criteria is lazy in the 21st century. LGBT people are not a 'hybrid of an important market,' rather they are, in and of themselves an important market — vibrant, responsive, loyal.

"With this one-time focus on dollars and markets, the Washington Post not only dismisses the importance of the LGBT community's distinctive contributions to local life, but misses the most important themes of the June Pride season — pride, empowerment. It's Gay Pride day every day at the Blade. Our readers know that and reward the advertisers who help bring them the news."

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