



# NIGHT OF A THOUSAND GOWNS

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## GLAMOUR WITH A HEART OF GOLD:

The Story of the Imperial Court System of North America  
By Ron Bluestein

NEW YORK -- Jackie V and Jackie X of Reno. Sissy Spaceout of San Francisco. The Empress Chuchu of San Fernando Valley. What do these "royal" people have in common? Each is a member of one of the gay community's oldest and largest charity organizations -- The Imperial Court System of North America.

The Imperial Courts -- celebrating 25 years as a humanitarian foundation -- are located in 50 cities, mostly in the western United States and in Canada. But their focus on fundraising goes beyond the gay community. The San Diego Court sponsors a Children's Shoe Drive for needy children. When a person from Idaho was diagnosed as having AIDS, the Boise Court initiated the Idaho AIDS Foundation. For a fisherman's son in Bellingham, WA, it was a first glimpse at the gay world and coming out while dancing with Empress Spaceout during a local coronation.

Many national organizations have found the Court System to be effective fundraisers on the local level. For many

### HONORARY COMMITTEE

Charles Pierce  
Empress Nicole de San Diego  
René Rodriguez  
Laze Star, Miss Gay America 1987  
Darcelle of Portland  
Norma Kristie  
Jose I, The Widow Norton  
LaRey  
Bill Bernardo  
Craig Russell  
Micky Day  
Kenny Kerr  
Rollerarena  
Jim Flint  
Candy Andrews,  
Miss Continental USA 1987  
Jerry Bird  
Michael Andrews,  
Miss Gay USA 1986  
Committee In Formation

straight politicians the Courts have proven to be an important entrance to a considerable political voting block and, ironically, a source of embarrassment for some gay political clubs, for whom the Courts present the very stereotype they want voters to forget: men in dresses.

Today, however, the Courts are more than "men in dresses." Many women are now active members, including the Grand Duke of San Francisco, the Emperor of Vancouver and the Empress of Idaho. Women and men from all walks of life are attracted to the heart and 'haute' of the Imperial Courts. As the Courts proudly declare, "Everyone is welcome!"

Each Imperial Court holds Coronations for an Emperor and Empress -- which are actually elections for co-presidents. Although the coronations vary from elegant to high camp, the Courts take their missions seriously. Nicole Murray, the four-time Empress of San Diego, compares the Courts to "Shriners, the Elks or any such similar service organization. The money we raise goes directly back into the community."

The Courts are more than just a channel for money; they provide self-esteem and, in many cases, social and political clout. Whenever anti-gay manipulators have turned up -- from Anita Bryan to Lyndon LaRouche -- the Courts have raised thousands of dollars to help combat bigotry. When the Gay Games had financial troubles in its beginning, the Courts were there before any of the rest of the gay community. The Courts have raised funds for the M.C.C. churches and countless AIDS projects, as well as community causes -- the elderly, handicapped, hungry and homeless.

Above all, the Court System is women and men -- empresses and emperors, dukes and duchesses, and the leagues of courtiers -- who choose to make a commitment. Deena Jones, the 1985 Grand Duchess of San Francisco, perhaps speaks for all Court Royalty when he said, "The decision to run for a court office was a personal commitment. I knew that i would have to dedicate the next 12 months of my life to the men and women of San Francisco, and with the help of a great court, I did."

The Imperial Court System of North America will be honored at "Night of a Thousand Gowns," a tribute to the pioneering role of drag in the lesbian and gay communities, Saturday, March 27, in the Grand Ballroom of the Waldorf Astoria in New York City.

This first national charity ball will raise \$500,000 to be distributed evenly among five organizations concerned with AIDS funding: the AIDS Action Council, the March on Washington Committee, The Human Rights Campaign Fund, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the New York Gay and Lesbian Community Center, which is serving as the local sponsor.

Donations per person are \$250 for "Night of a Thousand Gowns." To receive a formal invitation and necessary information on hotels, air fare, etc., please write: Night of a Thousand Gowns, 106 1/4 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10016. Impersonators should make a note on their request to receive a special communication.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: This is the first of several stories on the history of drag and the gay/lesbian movement. All lesbian and gay publications may feel free to publish this and upcoming stories as long as reference to the upcoming "Night of a Thousand Gowns" and organizations benefiting from the National Charity Ball are included.

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