

Parade grand marshals and more at Pride Brunch

By Alex Madison
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The Pride Brunch features comments by San Francisco Pride grand marshals and usually sells out.
Photo: Rich Stadtmiller

Hundreds of people will gather in a couple weeks for Gary Virginia and Donna Sachet's annual Pride Brunch, a unique event that raises funds for the Positive Resource Center and is expected to sell out.

The Pride Brunch started 19 years ago at the old Stars Restaurant on Redwood Alley near San Francisco's City Hall. It raised about \$1,000. Today, thanks to co-creators Virginia and Sachet, the event has evolved into a spectacular fundraiser that raises nearly \$40,000 for PRC.

This year's brunch is especially important in that the money raised will also help clients of the AIDS Emergency Fund, which merged with PRC in 2016. PRC also merged with Baker Places, which provides residential treatment services for those with substance abuse, mental health, and HIV/AIDS issues.

The brunch – Saturday, June 24 at the Hotel Whitcomb – will bring together more than 300 people, including the community grand marshals of the 47th San Francisco LGBT Pride parade, politicians, celebrities, and community members.

"It's a beautiful mosaic of the community under one roof," said Brett Andrews, CEO of PRC, who will be honored at the event with the San Francisco LGBT Pride Celebration Committee's Heritage of Pride 10 Years of Service Award. "Although we've all had an interesting journey, we find ourselves here and the common denominator is: we made it."

The rainbow-colored carpet will be rolled out for the brunch, transforming the hotel ballroom into an explosion of LGBTQ pride. The eventful three-hour fundraiser will feature an all-you-can-eat buffet, live music from the Dixieland Dykes +3, a silent and live auction, and an open bar sponsored by Barefoot Winery and Tito's Handmade Vodka.

Guests expected to be on hand include Mayor Ed Lee, gay former state senator and now mayoral candidate Mark Leno, members of the Imperial Council of San Francisco, and the Castro Lions Club.

One of the highlights will be the grand marshals sharing their stories. This year's community grand marshals include Chris Carnes, a local activist and fundraiser; Danielle Castro, a trans community advocate; Amy Sueyoshi, a leading scholar in queer Asian-American history; Alex U. Inn, a drag king and activist; Marcy

Adelman, Ph.D., a pioneer in the field of lesbian and gay aging; and the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus, the organizational grand marshal.

"The honorees really speak from their heart about what the honor means to them," Virginia said. "It makes me want to cry of thinking of the stories shared."

Sachet, who's also the Bay Area Reporter's society columnist, talked about memories of past brunches, such as the year that gay actor Sir Ian McKellen told his story and how he humorously showed off his tattoos at the request of an audience member, and the time transgender teenager Jewlyes Gutierrez from Hercules, California, spoke about standing up to bullying.

"There are waves of emotions that go on. People are happy, crying, and relating their past to a particular speaker," Sachet said.

The brunch, although a fun and moving event, is of great importance to PRC, which has been around for nearly three decades and serves almost 5,000 people a year. The money raised at the brunch enables the agency to continue to provide services such as access to life-saving disability benefits, employment, and a baseline of financial and health care security for its clients.

"These funds are so important with the continuation of shrinking government funds and contracts, especially for HIV," Andrews said. "It's important in allowing us to maintain the high level of quality of our services."

PRC helped save Virginia's life back in the late 1990s, when he was diagnosed as HIV-positive. After a visit to AIDS Benefits Counselors, which later merged to form PRC, Virginia said he walked onto Castro Street feeling the weight of the world lifted from his shoulders. Because of PRC, Virginia could continue living in SF.

"I dedicated my life to paying back those two organizations," he said.

And that he and Sachet did.

The Pride Brunch takes place June 24 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Hotel Whitcomb, 1231 Market Street. Tickets, \$75 for balcony, \$100 general admission, and \$150 for VIP, can be purchased at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/19th-annual-pride-brunch-tickets-33103543590>.

<http://www.ebar.com/news/article.php?sec=news&article=72670>