



# The city of Cal-gay-ry?

By Sean McLennan

Despite some vestigial conservatism, as Calgary grows and matures it seems to be developing a positive international reputation. For the first time, in the Alberta's centennial year no less, the city of Calgary will play host to not one, but two large international gay organizations that have chosen to hold their annual events here on the strength of our own local resources and people.

The first, coming up in October (Thursday the 20th through Saturday the 23rd), is the International Gay Rodeo Association's (IGRA) annual convention, sponsored by the cowboys and cowgirls of the Alberta Rockies Gay Rodeo Association (ARGRA). Although it is an international organization, this is a first for IGRA—the convention has never been held outside the US since the organization's inception in 1985. And they couldn't have made a better choice than the home of the "greatest outdoor show on Earth". Of course, by "greatest outdoor show", we are referring to ARGRA's annual Canadian Rockies International Rodeo, part of the North American gay rodeo circuit and one of southern Alberta's most anticipated pre-Stampede events.

"We're quite excited about bringing the IGRA Convention to Calgary," says Convention Director Alan Frank. "There will be over 150 delegates from the U.S., plus our local delegates and all of their spouses, here in Calgary. We have full support from Tourism Calgary, Tourism Alberta and the City of Calgary, too."

Although much of the four full days of meetings and seminars will be just getting down to business, there will be no shortage of social events. Thursday is the "Heart of the New West Welcome Party" and Friday night, the "Maple Leaf Pub Crawl" will introduce our American friends to Calgary's club scene. If they aren't too tired from the early mornings after two nights of partying and three full days of conventioning, on Saturday night IGRA's International Dance Competition will coincide with ARGRA's monthly public dance. Competitive dancers from all over North America will vie for IGRA titles and perform for spectators in what is sure to be a world-class display of country and western skill. Finally, the aptly named "Survivor's Party" on Sunday will round out the convention's social calendar.

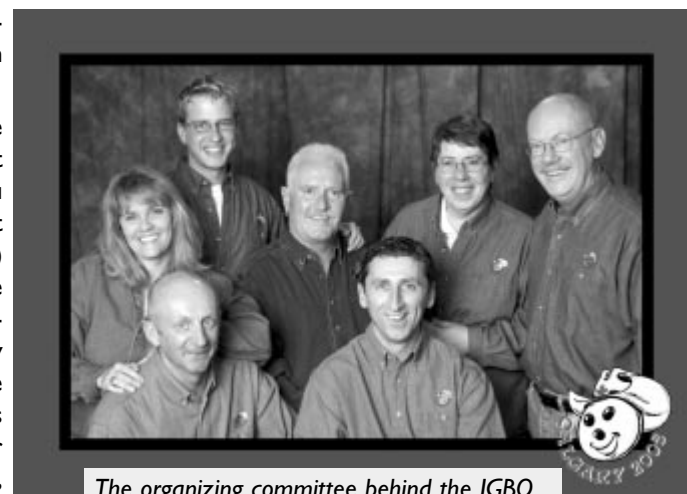
Big conventions like this are often a real drag for the partners of delegates who come along for the trip but are not necessarily involved in the official daytime agenda. They are usually left to their own devices, but ARGRA, showing off our western Canadian hospitality, has planned another first for the IGRA gathering—a special "partner programme" of events. Two days of excursions around Calgary and Banff will highlight the best of local attractions, so this year it looks like it will be the delegates, not their partners, who are getting the raw end of the deal!

Whether you would like to be a delegate, a volunteer or just join in some of the fun, ARGRA's website ([www.argra.org](http://www.argra.org)) is the place to get more info. Be sure to check out their full fall calendar—in addition to the IGRA convention and the Canadian Rockies International Rodeo, ARGRA also holds horsemanship clinics, country dance lessons and regular dances fall through spring.

The second big happening coming to Calgary this fall (November 8th through 14th) is the IGBO Mid-Year 2005, one of the organization's two yearly bowling tournaments. According to Co-Chair Dick Cooper, the Directors of the Calgary organizational committee were required to make a formal presentation to the IGBO membership demonstrating Calgary had the resources and skills to host a successful event, almost like a mini Olympic bid. This year is particularly special for IGBO, as it marks their twenty-fifth anniversary. Perhaps it is apropos that their

first Calgary event corresponds with our own province's centennial.

"Bowling" may not be the first activity that jumps to mind when you hear "gay" (for that matter does "rodeo"?) but IGBO is one more example of how the real-life diversity of the gay community defies the stereotypes. IGBO has almost 200 member leagues across the U.S., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. That equates to around 17,000 bowlers! This year's Calgary Mid-Year is expected to draw around 400 participants—a sizable event by any standard.



The organizing committee behind the IGBO 2005 Mid-Year. Back row (from left) Ellie, Matt, Richard, Jane and Bill. Front row (also from left) Dick and Kevin

Dick Cooper says, "Calgary is very well known and respected in the IGBO Community, with several of our members having received special recognition for their contributions to IGBO and the local community." Calgary, especially, has distinguished itself for having founded, in 1990, the IGBO Names Quilt—twenty-two 12'x12' quilted panels bearing the names of IGBO members that have been lost to AIDS and AIDS-related illnesses. Calgary bowlers remain responsible for the maintenance and caretaking of the quilt and all twenty-two panels will be on display the Sunday of the event.

For the first time, the tournament will feature a "Black & White Circuit Party" dance (Saturday night of the event), an idea incorporated from Calgary's annual Western Cup tournament. Two tours to Banff are planned for out-of-towners who would like to see a bit of the Rockies, and there will be a Friday night Casino (women admitted free!) in addition to hospitality suites hosted in the evenings for everyone to just kick back, relax and mingle.

After the awards banquet on Sunday, participants will be treated to IGBABE, the traditional IGBO Mid-Year amateur drag competition (OK, so some stereotypical events had to work themselves into the schedule). The evening's MC will be Calgary's own "MeLoDee" and all the contestants have been invited to give it their all at an encore performance at Metro-Boyztown later the same evening.

All in all, IGBO Mid-Year 2005 is going to be a jam-packed week. For a detailed schedule and to register, visit the official website at [www.calgary2005.com](http://www.calgary2005.com). There are both "participant" and "non-participant" rates, so if you are not much of a bowler, you can still get in on some of the social action.

It is worthwhile to point out that both the IGRA Convention and IGBO Mid-Year 2005 have been approved as centennial community events and are listed on the Alberta government's official list (check out [www.albertacentennial.com](http://www.albertacentennial.com) to see it with your own eyes). Even though Alberta has a reputation as being the one of the most conservative and gay-unfriendly parts of Canada, we can still garner official recognition, perhaps indicating that the real-life diversity of Alberta's community defies the stereotypes, too. It will be interesting for local participants in these events to see Calgary through our guests' eyes.

It's hard to over-estimate the impact that high-profile organizations like these can have on the Calgary community. If for no other reason than Albertans have a healthy respect for the bottom line—a not-insignificant amount of American dollars will be injected into the Calgary economy and money has a way of garnering tolerance.

More importantly, all indications are that our local committees have planned first-rate—even innovative—events, the success of which will surely improve how other gay North Americans view Alberta. Furthermore, both gatherings are large enough to draw some visibility from the Calgary community at large, perhaps allowing some of our more conservative neighbours to see GLBT Calgarians in a slightly different light, building a groundwork for greater social change.

Fortunately, we don't really need to get that deep into the socio-politics of it; all we have to do is get out and have a good time. Isn't it great when social activism is more about play than work? Thanks to the IGRA Convention 2005 and the IGBO Mid-Year 2005 committees for all their effort—we truly appreciate it!

For more information: [www.albertacentennial.ca](http://www.albertacentennial.ca) [www.argra.org](http://www.argra.org)  
[www.igra.org](http://www.igra.org) [www.calgary2005.com](http://www.calgary2005.com) [www.igbo.org](http://www.igbo.org) ▼

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