

# Calgary Cares 2008 - Sweet 70's

By Sean McLennan

The best party in town is back this month: Calgary Cares, AIDS Calgary's annual fundraiser. This year's event is entitled "Sweet 70's: All in Good Taste!", a theme to which AIDS Calgary's director Susan Cress has personally been looking forward.



She notes that our current generation of young adults all grew up with HIV/AIDS and all of AIDS Calgary's education comes from a post-HIV perspective. However, gay culture was exciting in the 70's—it was a time of awakening and empowerment. Disco brought with it a tolerance of diversity and an exhortation to explore sensuality of all kinds. It's no surprise that disco and gay culture came to be tightly linked. "Sweet 70's" will be a glimpse of what came before: a chance to reflect on where we came from and—for those of us who remember the '70s—to share the joy with the young'uns.

Those familiar with Calgary Cares will know what to expect—sort of. You'll recognize the format and the venue: the show, the silent auction, the cocktails and mingling before hand, the dancing after—all at the Jack Singer. Of course, those familiar with Calgary Cares will also know that every event is unique; the format may be largely consistent over the years, but what content gets pumped into that format is the important factor and year after year, AIDS Calgary has managed to keep pushing the envelope, giving us something new and exciting.

It's easy to say what happens at Calgary Cares; it's much harder to put the impact into words. Many Calgary Cares virgins will initially balk at the \$150 price tag attached to the evening—but it's worth it. This is an event that garners national and international awards practically every year. There is an energy that arises as much from the attendees as anything else—it's social alchemy at its most sophisticated. Calgary Cares draws an incredibly diverse audience that you will see nowhere else. Gay, straight or otherwise, youth, seniors, doctors, servers, educators, executives, professionals and retail workers—a broad cross-section of the city's demographics come together with an attitude of acceptance and the intention to have a great time. I predict that the '70s theme will synergistically reinforce that atmosphere making this year one of the Calgary Cares' best.



What makes Calgary Cares that much more impressive is knowing that it is a largely volunteer run event. There is a core executive committee of about ten people and then another one hundred and twenty or so volunteers including about eighty performers that are responsible for putting on the event. The fact is,

these people are passionate about the cause and the work that AIDS Calgary does and that makes all the difference.

Sadly, HIV/AIDS is part of the daily lives of about 1200 Calgarians who know their HIV status—and an unknown number of people who don't. AIDS Calgary provides invaluable support to that population and comprehensive education geared at keeping it from growing further. In a city with a booming economy, the cost of providing those services only grows; everything costs more and there are more people to reach. Instead of recognizing the crucial function that organizations like AIDS Calgary serve within communities across Canada, the Harper government has recently cut funding to HIV/AIDS related organizations. According to Susan this has a direct impact on the number of counselors that are available to provide support; the number of educators in the schools, clubs, and chat rooms.

That means that Calgary Cares and the other fundraising initiatives that AIDS Calgary will be ramping up with this year are all that more important. They will be looking to raise \$235,000 at Calgary Cares this year—an increase of about \$50,000 over last year (a target that they were successful in meeting). Susan says that they've been having an easier time getting sponsorship this year; a fact that she says isn't just attributable to Calgary's economic boom. She believes that the success of the OutGames and OutRights last year has really raised the profile and reputation of AIDS Calgary within the city. Make no mistake, however, they still need more sponsorship! Along with the boom, come increased costs for the venue, more competition for the dates and with other fundraisers. The last thing they want to do is have to raise the ticket price, which would probably have a negative impact on the diversity of the audience.

The fundraising for "Sweet 70's" will be aligned specifically with the new Calgary Cares Centre which opened last fall as part of AIDS Calgary's move to its new location at 10th avenue and 16th street SW. The Calgary Cares Centre is an initiative focused on the human/community aspect of HIV/AIDS support and prevention. The goal was to create a physical space accessible to community groups and organizations of any sort—not just HIV/AIDS related—where people can connect with each other and maybe re-engage HIV/AIDS in a softer way. It is a response to a weakness AIDS Calgary identified in HIV/AIDS care that, these days, Sue Cress thinks emphasizes the professional and scientific. Clients will still get the same level of professional services they have in the past, but now, through the Calgary Cares Centre, they'll have access to other amenities. For example, there is a full kitchen which will now provide a hands on aspect to the nutritional programs, and clients without easy access to laundry facilities will be able to wash their clothes before, say going to a job interview or to meeting with a prospective landlord. (Actually, a washer and dryer is a missing piece the Centre is hoping to find through a generous donor in the community—if you have a lead on a washer and dryer get in contact with them!)

Susan notes that there is an additional side benefit to the Calgary Cares Centre—because it's a physical space she believes that it will make their work at AIDS Calgary more tangible to both the community and donors. That's part of the reason that they will be pairing Calgary Cares with the Calgary Cares Centre; the event will become a chance not only to raise money for the centre, but for AIDS Calgary to report on its successes and goals to the community that supports it.

"Sweet 70's" takes place on Saturday, March 29, 2008 at the EPCOR CENTRE'S Jack Singer Concert Hall. Doors open at 7 PM and the show starts at 9 PM. More information and tickets are available online at [calgarycares.ca](http://calgarycares.ca). ▼

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