

**Speech for the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Official Season Guide
11am Friday 16 December 2005
Slide Bar and Restaurant, 41 Oxford St Darlinghurst**

Acknowledgements:

Marcus Bourget, Diane Minnis and the rest of the board, Courtney Act, Sexy Galaxy

I would like to acknowledge that we gather here on the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. I pay respects to elders past and present and to other aboriginal people present here today.

Thank you to New Mardi Gras for inviting me here today.

Where would we be without Mardi Gras in Sydney, in February.

It's hot, it's sticky. Anything seems possible.

As the rest of Sydney goes back to work after holidays the gay, lesbian, transgender and queer communities of Sydney keep the party going through summer.

The month long party is important but Mardi Gras is far more than just a party.

The 100 events over the month of the Mardi Gras Festival brings 6000 visitors from overseas and interstate to come and share our city with us.

As our guests pack into our hotels, our restaurants, our bars and our spare rooms we also join in the fun.

As we gather the kids for the launch, catch a movie at Queer Screen, check out the bears harbour cruise, decide on the music for our parade float and agonise about what to wear to the party, Mardi Gras contributes \$46million to the NSW economy.

That's the economic importance of New Mardi Gras to Sydney.

For the gay, lesbian, transgender and queer communities of Sydney New Mardi Gras provides one month a year where we are more visible than any other.

The diversity of the festival celebrates the diversity of our community.

Over 100,000 people will attend one or more of the New Mardi Gras events.

No matter what your passion be it sport, art, political debate, flirting, partying or simply sunning yourself at Coogee women's baths there is something for everyone.

For some it will mean new love, new friends and new opportunities.

For some it may bring new challenges.

Mardi Gras allows all of us to reach out to one another and enjoy the things that unite our community in a festival that is just for us.

It is the diversity, the visibility and the acceptance that allows all the tribes to come together and celebrate the gains we have made and reflect on how far we still have to go to be able to live our lives freely, equally and without fear.

In 1978 the gay and lesbian community forced Sydney and New South Wales to confront the homophobia in our society.

In 1978 our community stood up and demanded for a fair go.

In the last decade there has been real and important progress but we are still not fully equal before the law.

Mardi Gras gives us the opportunity to keep demanding that it is not over until we are equal.

When we pack our guests off the couch and send them back to their ordinary non Sydney lives we also take away good memories and hopefully a renewed commitment to work together for change.

We should never forget how important Mardi Gras is for individuals.

For some the end of Mardi Gras is really the start of a new life.

Mardi Gras is often the final catalyst for those individuals who are on the cusp of the final realisation yes they are in fact gay.

For kids in country towns or deep in the suburbs, for married men and women who know that something is not right, for those who will suffer violence, rejection and homelessness as a result of coming to that realisation, Mardi Gras matters.

For someone in a small corner of NSW it is often Mardi Gras and the media that follows that allows individuals to see that there are people just like them.

For others it is the first visit to Mardi Gras "to just see what is happening" that leads them into their new life.

All of us have our first Mardi Gras story. Don't worry I am not going to bore you with mine here today suffice to say that for many of us our first Mardi Gras is the first time that we feel true acceptance for who we really are.

Mardi Gras creates a public space that makes it ok to be gay.

For those of us lucky enough to live in Newtown or in Darlinghurst this concept is a little passé but for those that live in Wagga or Minto or Bega or Castle Hill Mardi Gras provides visibility that does not exist for the rest of the year.

Mardi Gras allows individuals to contemplate that it is possible to find a community that will accept them.

In closing, I have the official duty of launching the 2006 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Official Season Guide.

As the mother of two small children I love the Mardi Gras Guide because it is often the closest I get to seeing that new film or hanging out with the cute surfer girls at Maroubra.

But I always go to Fair Day.

The guide tells you everything you need to know about where, when and how much it will all cost.

100 events over the month of February, 2000 volunteers, thousands of gorgeous visitors.

The festival is put together by a bunch of dedicated people whom we all owe a great deal of thanks.

This years art work done by the very talented Richard Ellard is simply beautiful and brings us back to our roots, using the emblem of the butterfly to reflect unity, diversity and celebration.

It is my great pleasure to formally launch the 2006 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Official Season Guide.

