

## CLAW 8 Press Release

May 2, 2009: After a long, cold snowy winter, temperatures soared into the upper 80's in Cleveland, just in time for CLAW 8, sponsored by Recon. This unique leather convention without a contest continues to get bigger and better every year. Over 900 badges were issued at CLAW registration, sponsored by Leather Werks, and hundreds more joined for the parties at the local gay bars and at the Recon-Flex warehouse.

Over 300 volunteers collaborated on a very full and diverse itinerary. Cleveland Rocks, the weekend's biggest party, was at the Hotel Friday night, sponsored by Square Peg Toys, and featured casino games, kinky booths of chance, a jock auction, human bowling, and much more. CLAW emcee Larry Golubski and DJ Jerry Szoka kept the party lively.

A fleet of trolleys circled between the hotels and several fetish themed parties at the local bars. Late night action was at the Reflex warehouse parties, sponsored by Recon. The skills workshops were moved to the FLEX facility this year as well, and featured some of the best educators on BDSM and related techniques. Other educational forums took place at the Hotel, including sessions on hypnotism, living in a leather family, interrogation scenes, being a leather titleholder, and a Recon profile workshop. IML Gary Iriza led a one hour work out in the hotel gym, and sat for a videotaped interview about his title year.

CLAW continued its focus on younger people into leather, including a special party for newbies. The CLAW 8 T-shirts, designed by artist Geno, came in three colors: blue for regular registrants, maroon for volunteers, and white for CLAW "virgins." It was amusing to see so many obviously sexual men walking around wearing shirts that said "Virgin" on the back.

The cigar deck outside the Vendor Mart at the Wyndham is always a big part of CLAW and this year the warm temperatures allowed the folks gathered to watch dozens of trees bloom before their eyes. The Leather Archives and Museum and the National Coalition for Sexual Freedom were on hand, and silent auctions, sponsored by Folsom Street Events, helped raise important funds for the CLAW charities.

Saturday night's dinner, sponsored by Leather Skills Certification Counsel was the beautiful culmination of a year's worth of hard work by all the people who contribute so generously to CLAW. Volunteer of the Year Awards were given to Dave Watt (Kalamazoo) and Donn Wolfe (Cleveland), and the Chicago Hellfire Club was recognized as the most represented club at CLAW. Twenty eight current titleholders served as table captains, most of whom will compete at IML this month.

The fourth annual BDSM Art Show was the best ever at CLAW, and featured the works of over twenty great artists from around the world. The Best in Show Award was given to Mike

Steinmeyer for his watercolor “The Hitchhiker,” and the People’s Choice Award was given to Robert Cottrell for his poly resin sculpture “On the Hunt.”

The Sunday brunch, sponsored by Mr. Michigan Leather, featured the inaugural induction ceremony of the Leather Hall of Fame, which will honor three individuals or organizations each year for important and lasting contributions to the leather community. The first inductees were Chuck Renslow, Tom of Finland and John Willie. LHOFF Board member Jeff Willoughby read biographical statements about each of the inductees to a slideshow about their lives and work. Renslow was on hand to accept his award and gave a moving speech about the past and the present. Durk Dehner, President of the Tom of Finland Foundation in Los Angeles, accepted the award for Tom and spoke of the importance of art in describing who we are. LA&M Board member Ed Mogul accepted for John Willie, who is far less well known to the people in the leather community. Willie was an artist of straight and lesbian fetish and bondage drawings from the thirties to the sixties, and was the publisher of Bizarre magazine. Mogul spoke eloquently about Willie’s life and times.

A wild game of burlesque bingo followed, where another \$1000 was raised for charity, and the weekend concluded with Leather Rock – a fantastic variety show of singers, dancers and comics in the leather community. This year’s show was at the historic Agora Ballroom and was the best one yet. A dance sponsored by ONYX followed.

CLAW 8 was also a chance to celebrate the success of CLAW Nation, a network of fundraising events in different cities around the country. With the help of Recon and CLAW, those parties have raised over \$44,000 for over 35 different charities. A motorcycle raffle held at the CLAW Nation booth at CLAW raised another \$1750 alone. Anyone interested in help with a fundraising effort in their town is encouraged to contact [clawnation@clawinfo.org](mailto:clawnation@clawinfo.org).

On Monday and Tuesday, volunteers packed everything up and said goodbye to another great CLAW. The final fundraising totals won’t be known for a few more weeks, but the early indications are very good. CLAW 9 will be back at the Wyndham on April 22-25, 2010. Volunteers of all sorts are encouraged to contact CLAW to be part of the planning.