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## LOCAL FEATURE

### Pines Party fit for television

TV theme corny, but works despite classic music

By [Matt Kalkhoff](#)  
Friday, August 05, 2005

Now in its seventh year, the Pines Party has clearly reclaimed the respect and glory its predecessor once enjoyed while continuing to celebrate the diversity and vitality of the community it serves. Well aware of both parties' rich history, it was an honor and a long-overdue rite of passage to finally experience the phenomenon for myself.

Quick to fill the gap after the demise of the Morning Party in 1998, the Fire Island Pines Property Owners' Association (FIPPOA) retooled the event into the Pines Party, making it smaller and less notorious.

FIPPOA, which is responsible for protecting one of the country's few remaining (mostly) gay beach retreats from ever-threatening beach erosion, managing harbor issues and overseeing general improvements throughout the community, plans to use the proceeds from this year's July 30 event to split evenly between the Stonewall Foundation and the FIPPOA Charitable Foundation.

Joining the hordes of revelers (an estimated 2,500) making their way down the beach toward Coast Guard Walk into the massive array of green lasers that filled the misty sky, I couldn't help but embrace the sheer magnificence of this oceanfront miracle.

This year's television theme may have seemed weak at first, but as the elaborately decorated sponsor tents and clever costumes so clearly demonstrated, it was popular and broad enough to elicit some truly inspired visuals. The theme was most evident on the far side of the dance floor where two rows of cabanas (complete with personalized flat-screen TVs) created a communal alley — a social vortex, if you will — where friends new and old mingled and meandered throughout.

Patsy and Edina worked the popular "Absolutely Fabulous" tent while a stripper salaciously gyrated on a nearby lifeguard chair at the "Gaywatch" outpost. "Six Feet Under" and "Die Nasty" seemed a bit macabre, especially at an event whose ancestor was marred by drug ODs. But the crowd mostly kept it together and medical incidents were thankfully few and far between.

The overall production values were top notch all the way around. The FIPPOA Charitable Foundation and producer TIG (The Impression Group) deserve high marks for their planning and execution. (Some, however, were disappointed by how sparse the casino area was compared to years past and



An estimated 2,500 people attended the Pines Party at Fire Island last weekend, raising money for Fire Island Property Owners Association Charitable Foundation and the Stonewall Foundation. The theme this year was television, inspiring many party-goers to dress up like their favorite TV characters. The event was the final New York event for retiring DJ Julian Marsh.

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the stage shows were mostly dull.) But, as I soon realized, even the best décor, lighting and crowd are no match for inappropriate and uninspired music — especially when all you want to do is dance.

With all due respect to those who enjoyed soon-to-be-retiring DJ Julian Marsh's opening set, I'm not sure how anyone can justify trying to force about 20 years of Fire Island classics into a two-to three-hour peak set. Sure, I enjoyed some of the songs he played — like Sarah Washington's "Heaven," a couple of Donna Summer tracks, "If You Could Read My Mind" — but it all sounded so incredibly dated played one after the other, particularly since what could have been an enjoyable morning music set was being crammed down our ears several hours too early.

As we contemplated leaving for the Pavilion, Tracy Young finally took over (about 45 minutes late, but this was quickly forgiven). The music improved dramatically, but I can't really say the difference was night and day since Young mostly played what Marsh seems to think only an old-school, non-drug-addicted, self-proclaimed victim/DJ like himself plays: vocal, happy, uplifting tunes.

Well, Tracy did exactly that, only with more style, creativity, edge, and, perhaps most importantly, relevance. This other DJ may blame Junior Vasquez, crystal and all the other scapegoats du jour for ruining dance music and the gay party scene. But then how does he explain Vasquez's superbly uplifting production of Vernessa Mitchell's "Higher," Mariah's "We Belong Together," Tracy's encore/closing song, Cyndi Lauper's "Shine," or any number of other great records she so masterfully and beautifully presented?

Despite the disappointing opening set, my Pines Party debut was quite a memorable one. The perfect weather helped, of course, as did the awesome group of friends, acquaintances and yes, strangers, who kept me smiling from beginning to end.

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