



### ECMC's 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Holiday Party & Toy Drive

Wow – what can I say? Thanks to our friends and family, the Holiday Party and Toy Drive was another smashing success! Our collection box for the gift cards for Leake & Watts was stuffed quite full! A testament to the generosity and kindness from the gay leather/biker community.

What's even more impressive is that Evil Ed's husband, Tony P made 95% of the hors d'oeuvres from scratch this year, even the vegan items (which were so tasty, we needed to guard from the meat-eaters as to save some for the real vegans!)



We couldn't have done it without everyone's support, GDI and club members alike. And speaking of clubs, we had representation from Excelsior MC, Iron Guard, Onyx, DCBC (the D.C. Bear Club), Pocono Warriors, Long Island Ravens, Spearhead of Toronto and various other similar groups, such as the New York Bear Den and of course all the folks from The Stonewall Inn! Thanks to everyone!

Remember to save the date for 2018's Holiday Party & Toy Drive, it will be on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2018 at The Stonewall Inn. It is delayed to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday due to Chanukah.

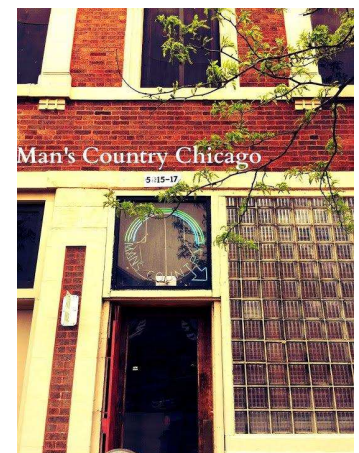
### Man's Country, Chicago's oldest gay bathhouse, closes after 44 years

Only six months after Chuck Renslow died, his famous bathhouse, Man's Country, closes its doors following New Year's Eve on 2018, only to be demolished to build (take a wild guess what...) condominiums. The new structure will be named "The Renslow", a far cry from the Chicago Eagle and Man's Country! The article below was written by Bill Daley of the Chicago Tribune:

Man's Country, the gay bathhouse in Uptown, is closing, capping 44 years of business with a 13-hour party that will begin New Year's Eve and extend into the morning after.

This private club has been open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 364 days a year, closing only on Christmas Eve, according to owner Ron Ehemann. It has served as a backdrop to some of the enormous achievements and challenges faced by Chicago's LGBTQ community over the decades.

The property on which Man's Country sits at 5015 N. Clark St. is being sold. Ehemann said much of the complex will be demolished to make way for condominiums in a new building to be called The Renslow, a reference to Chuck Renslow, the LGBTQ businessman and gay rights pioneer who started the bathhouse in a former fraternal lodge. (Ehemann said one part of the complex will remain: Full Kit Gear at 5021 N. Clark St.)



## Man's Country Closes (continued)

To Owen Keehnen, a Chicago author and historian, the loss of Man's Country is "a gay version of seeing the house you grew up in torn down. It was everything. A place of sexual liberation, social ease with being gay and community building."

The day after Christmas, I walked through Man's Country with Ehemann, who had been involved with the bathhouse some 35 years and was Renslow's business and life partner.

Rooms and spaces had been altered over the decades to meet the specific needs of the time. And some areas seemed unchanged.

The Chicago Eagle, a now-defunct leather bar, is gone, absorbed back into the bathhouse.

The locker room and showers looked ageless, but successive layers of paint applied over time had eroded on the steam room floor and a stairway banister, inadvertently creating random rainbow patterns of colour.

There's still steam in the steam room, but the grotto, designed to look like the sewers of Paris, has been roped off.

The mahogany elephant that stood in the lobby is gone, but fish still swim in a wall-mounted fish tank.

Much of the artwork has been taken out; one stairway shows the outlines of where paintings of customers were once displayed. The notable exception: A sexy poster-sized work of a muscular man with a tiny towel painted by the late Dom Orejudos, the ballet dancer and artist who signed his work, "Etienne." This work, Ehemann said, will be given to the Leather Archives and Museum in Rogers Park.

Upstairs in the performance space, a shower stall where strippers once performed still stands by the stage, and overhead giant disco mirror balls hang motionless. On the sound system, there was a driving electronic techno beat, but otherwise Man's Country was silent that morning. On one of the staircases sat a lone man.

I couldn't help comparing all this to the scene described in a 1975 Chicago Tribune article about the "hottest spa in town," written by Bruce Vilanch, who went on to fame as a comedy writer and actor.

"RUB-A-DUB-DUB. Four hundred men in a tub," Vilanch quipped, describing the bathhouse as "the most exotic nightspot for blocks and blocks — if not years and years — Man's Country boasts hot and cold running showers and patrons, bedrooms, lockers, a sauna, a glass-walled steam room, a mirrored shower that looks like something that got loose from a Stanley Kubrick set, a Jacuzzi, a multicolored parrot that views the proceedings with serene disinterest, and a gigantic disco-music hall with much of the ambiance of the Oriental Theater lobby, which it distinctly resembles on a muggy night."

Fun could be had in a number of ways.

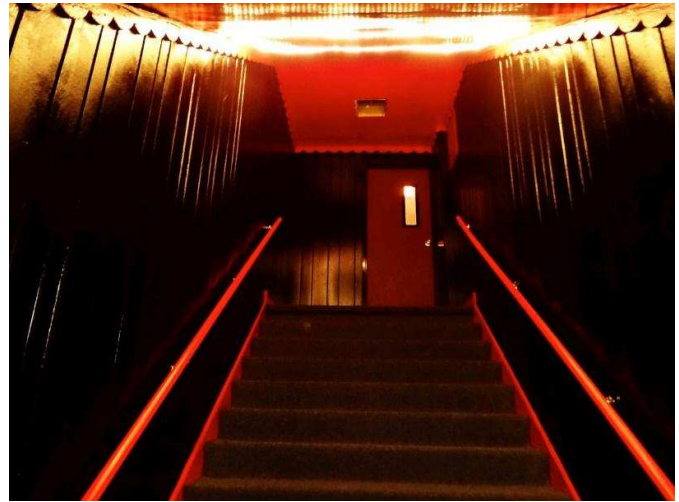
An undated Man's Country poster by Etienne of a leopard seated next to a handsome hunk in a jock strap described the place as "a total entertainment complex featuring three floors of activities." Man's Country offered a disco music hall, live DJ, dance videos, weight room, boutique, snack bar, live entertainment, the Midwest's large steam room, doubles and fantasy rooms — and free parking.

You also never knew who you might run into.

Celebrities such as ballet legend Rudolf Nureyev, actor Paul Lynde and puppeteer Wayland Flowers, who draped his puppet, Madame, in her own little bathhouse towel, were among the visitors, according to a 2016 Windy City Times report by Owen Keehnen.

Sally Rand, the famed fan dancer, performed in her own fashion.

"Actually, Chuck always said (it) was the best show," Ehemann said. "She didn't have that much, but what she did was sit down on the floor with all the guys gathered around. 'Boys, I'm going to tell you the story.' And tell them the story of her career, and



## Man's Country Closes (continued)

fan dancing, and why that was considered really, really risqué and the trouble she got into. I have to say they loved her, they really loved her. She basically just sat down and talked to them because you can only do so much fan dancing.”

When Man’s Country opened in 1973, the times were rapidly changing for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning community in Chicago and nationwide.

“From being classified as being mentally ill to being on the leading edge of the sexual liberation movement — that moment in history that was captured by Man’s Country was pivotal in our self-esteem, our belief that we deserved equality, and our quest to get them — our rights,” Keehnen wrote.

Then came the AIDS crisis in the early 1980s. Man’s Country, like bathhouses across the country, was hit hard. A 1986 Chicago Tribune story, “AIDS turns gays from bathhouses,” noted attendance at Man’s Country averaged 600 people whereas two years before more than 2,000 men would arrive on a Saturday night. Business overall was down 50 percent from the pre-AIDS era, according to the report.

Renslow and Ehemann responded to the changing business climate by converting some of the space into Bistro Too in 1987. This dance club, named for the famed Dugan’s Bistro of the 1970s, drew upward of a thousand people on weekend nights to watch such stars as Boy George, the Village People and Divine, in what would be his last performance. “All the disco divas,” including Thelma Houston and Pamala Stanley, performed as well, Ehemann added. But after six years, the business started to slip.

“Bistro was a really large bar. If we didn’t get 300 people, it looked empty. So, it’s hard to keep the numbers up,” Ehemann said. So, the decision was made to open the Chicago Eagle in one area of the complex as Bistro Too was closed, he said. Man’s Country took over the space again in 1993; male strippers and porn stars were the entertainment until about four years ago.

“We stopped the entertainment just for lack of business. Things were going down” Ehemann said. “As bathhouses go, it’s not that the age of bathhouses is over, but the age of these gigantic bathhouses is probably over. The building is just really, really large. The upkeep has gotten expensive. Real estate taxes is what really killed Man’s Country.”

Renslow announced in 2016 that Man’s Country was up for sale.

“The place is holding its own, but it is just getting to be too much for me,” Renslow said in the Windy City Times story. Eight months later, Renslow died at the age of 87.

The most recent change at Man’s Country has been extending membership to women. The idea had been debated in the bathhouse’s earliest days, with Vilanch in 1975 reporting that there were fears admitting women would change the atmosphere. Renslow had been working on the issue before his death, said Ehemann, who made the decision to admit women as members because of the parties that were being booked in the Man’s Country space. He had staff poll the members about the change.

“They were very supportive,” Ehemann said.

The final New Year’s Eve bash, called “Loose Ends: The Man’s Country Chicago Closing Party,” is open to “all genders and gender non-conformists,” according to its Eventbrite page. This 13-hour “disco rave” begins at 11 p.m. Sunday and is slated to end at noon Monday. General admission tickets are \$30. Ticket packages that include the use of lockers or various rooms are sold out; however, there is a waiting list for the \$80 admission and single-room package.

See the video tour at <http://bit.ly/MansCountry>

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## Gay social networking in the ‘80s (Part II)

Gay leather clubs motorcycle clubs really ramped up in the 70s, being a member gave you “street cred” and opened the doors to many exciting and fun events like club runs and after-hours parties; however, we didn’t see what was coming right after The Village People’s hit song, “I’m Ready for the 80s” – we were anything but ready for the 80s. The AIDS epidemic hit fast and hard. The clubs of the 70s were now performing new functions: helping people stay alive and taking care of our dead and dying.

Still, the gay bars and leather/social/motorcycle clubs remained the conduits for our communication. It was where we talked about what was happening, AIDS

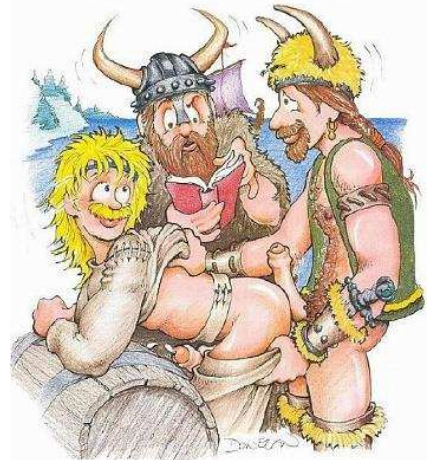


prevention, what new medications might be on the horizon and who needed our help. Sadly, it also let us know who had died or was close to dying.

In the 80's, the first forms of digital communications began to appear in the mainstream – Bulletin Board Systems! BBSs for short were many people's first exposure to modems, e-mail and the like. BBSs facilitated hook-ups much faster than the newspapers and magazines, but it also had a cost curve – your average home computer in 1980 was \$1,500 (\$4,700 in 2018 money) and a modem was about \$300 (\$944 in 2018 dollars). Of course, the price came down over time as more and more people came online. Multi-user chat rooms started up on some of the fancy BBSs, and many BBSs had special themes from GLBT to Ham Radio to Antiquing and Stamp Collecting! Some famous GLBT systems like GLIB, All-My-Modems, The Fountains of Pleasure, Multicom-4 and Heartbeat were very successful until AOL ramped up in the mid-90s. But we were online and the rest is history!

**The Last-Last Word**

This truly is my last "last word" as ECMC's elections were held seven days ago and we will be installing a new board of directors:



OFFICE	NOMINEE	MOTIONED BY	NOTES
Treasurer	Mike M	Mark W	
	Scot L	Joe M	
Secretary	Earl D	Joe M	
	Steve G	Eddie M	
	Mario L	Aaron G	
Road Captain	Brian V	Eddie M	
	Joe M	Aaron G	
Vice President	Aaron G	Mark W	declined/withdrew
	Joe M	Eddie M	
President	Aaron G	Eddie M	
	Joe M	Eddie M	declined/withdrew
		<-- Indicates incumbent	
		<-- Indicates winner	

*Chay*

**UPCOMING EVENTS & RIDES**

**Sun 28<sup>th</sup> January 18:00 – 21:00:** ECMC 2018 Installation Dinner (\$39.95 per person), ask any ECMC member to be added to the guest list should you like to come along!

**Wed 7<sup>th</sup> February 20:00 – 21:00:** Empire City MC's Open General Meeting, held 8pm-9pm on the first Wednesday of each month at "The Centre" 208 W 13th St, New York, NY 10011. All interested men and prospective members are welcome to attend. Always check with the front desk/schedule to see which room we're booked into.

**Wed 14<sup>th</sup> February 20:00 – 21:00:** Empire City MC's "V.D." Barnight – more information forthcoming! (Yeah, V.D. is Valentine's Day, you silly people!!)

**REMEMBER:** There are plenty of other events and rides added to our official calendar on a regular basis, especially day rides! Bookmark our official calendar at [calendar.EmpireCityMC.com](http://calendar.EmpireCityMC.com) and come along with us on some great rides!

Our physical mailing address is:

**Empire City MC**  
 10 W 15<sup>th</sup> St, Suite 609  
 New York, NY 10011-6821



Empire City MC is a proud member of the Atlantic Motorcycle Coordinating Council. For more information about membership with Empire City MC, [click here](#) to view/download our constitution, bylaws and membership application.



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