

# DULUTH

## A Wonderful Day in the Gayborhood



Duluth Mayor Herb Bergson

Home

**NESTLED ALONG THE EDGE OF LAKE Superior** in northeastern Minnesota, Duluth has stereotypically been best known for its snowstorms, ice fishing, and hockey. But for years, the shoreline city has also been making a name for itself as a GLBT-friendly community. In a town of nearly 85,000 people boasting a young, college-town feel from its three universities, a rich industrial history complete with several railroads and museums, and a bevy of majestic natural parks, diversity isn't hard to come by. And with ally Herb Bergson in charge as Mayor, this once fast-growing-mining-city-turned-charming-lake-town is slowly but surely becoming a hotspot for gay and lesbian pride.

Since his inauguration in 2003, Mayor Bergson has made it a priority to create a tolerant, diverse Duluth with an emphasis on a strong GLBT presence—and while he hasn't reached his goal of 100 percent tolerance yet, he's steadily working toward it. "One of two things is happening," he says with a chuckle, "based on the e-mails I'm getting. Either people are getting more accepting, or [if they don't agree with me] they've decided I'm a hopeless cause." To further bolster his efforts of educating the city, starting in 2005, the city's annual Pride celebration has featured a grand kickoff by the man-in-charge himself. Scheduled for August 30 this year, the aptly named Mayor's Reception is complete with free music and food, and marks just the beginning of the festivities.

A four-day affair, the Duluth-Superior GLBTAQI Pride Festival is an inviting draw to the city. Featuring musical acts such as Minneapolis-native hip-hop artist Desdemona and headliner Lady Kier, formerly of Deee-Lite, the event celebrates



Olcott house owners Jerry (left) and David.

its 20th year at Bayfront Park this year. Duluth-Superior Pride assures festival-goers will "have a blast"—a claim easily achieved with all the options for activities: Seeing a juried art show; studying GLBTAQI history through the lens of the Tretter Collection; attending a night of poetry; relaxing with an amateur film exhibit; or even sailing away on the fabulous Fruit Float, a three-hour cruise on the world's largest freshwater lake.

While the activities bring in crowds of thousands for the festival, the city doesn't need much help attracting visitors. Sitting

atop a 600-foot bluff and stretching for nearly 25 miles, Duluth has long brought visitors from all around. It's no wonder, then, that tourism surpassed mining and railroads as a top-ranked industry for the port city. Carla Blumberg, owner of Chester Creek

Café, a cozy hilltop restaurant converted from an old food market, credits Duluth's appearance as part of its appeal. She says it's the city's "natural beauty, ease of life, and definitely the lake," that make it a great place to live.

Aside from pleasing the eye, the landscape lends itself to the varied lifestyles of Duluthians, with areas perfect for hiking, skiing, sailing, biking, and rock-climbing, while the downtown businesses provide residents a lively nightlife. Members of the GLBT community can also find an endless array of resources right at their fingertips. Aside from the Duluth-Superior Pride and its festival, the city is home to organizations such

as the Northland Gay Men's Center, the Aurora Lesbian Center, and Together for Youth, a social and support group for GLBT teenagers, among countless others.

It's this diversity, says Blumberg, that has boosted the growth of Duluth's accepting community. That, and as she puts it, "Because it is a port, it has a history of all different kinds of people, and is a democratic town." Whatever the reason, Duluth is deservedly earning a spot as one of Minnesota's coolest—and prettiest—GLBT-friendly cities. ■